

The Citadel – Training the Cadre

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This was my fourth year observing leadership and team-building exercises for The Citadel Training Cadre ... the Cadets who will train the incoming class of Cadets (think: entry level).

To be very clear, this training is about teaching positive leadership skills, building teamwork and encouraging constant improvement in self as well as within their team, training your replacement to build a legacy of success, all of which is rewarded by retention, not attrition.

Exposure to this professional training will benefit these young college students while at The Citadel and way beyond graduation. Indeed, we can all benefit from these tenets in our own lives and our respective organizations.

Every year may be a little different, a little more challenging and perhaps a little less predictable. While normally held on campus, this year, the training was held at Parris Island, the US Marine Corps Recruiting Depot where Basic Training is held ... as the signs proclaimed, this is where "We Make Marines."

Most of the cadets were very engaged and asked very good questions, especially while participating in various exercises on a very hot day. It was over 100 degrees and the heat index was a bit higher. *It was damn hot!* Still, they all held up remarkably very well!

The Cadets formed up around 4am on campus, enjoyed a hearty breakfast and then boarded busses to Parris Island, arriving a little after 8am. As they arrived, the sun was coming up and the bugs were hungry.

While the summary below may be directed to Citadel Alumni, there are others who may benefit.

Background:

Captain Geno Paluso is a Citadel graduate (Class of 1989), a retired US Navy SEAL (25 years). He is entering his 6th year as Commandant of Cadets. Several years ago, he implemented a professional leadership experiential training element for the selected cadet leaders of all classes (referred to as the "Training Cadre") who will be tasked to train the new incoming freshmen cadets. This training is in conjunction with the academic classes taught through The Krause Center for Leadership and Ethics during the academic year.

The first year, this training included a pilot group of about 100 cadet leaders and has steadily been expanded each year since. The instruction, events and locations have been modified and the program improved in the intervening years.

The Knobs who entered The Citadel four years ago are now seniors. At each step of their journey they have benefited from this leadership training (academic and experiential) and built upon it.

In the year before Captain Paluso started as Commandant and instituted the current more professional leadership training programs, The Citadel had 60-some odd 4th Class violations to review and deal with. In each of the past three years there have been less than five cases.

Bottom line: Hazing is NOT a 'rite of passage' and it is definitely NOT an effective leadership technique. There are much more productive and positive ways to enforce rules, regulations, policies and provide consequences for poor performance.

Academic Representatives:

Dr. Sally Selden, our new college Provost and Dean of the College, Dr. Michael Weeks, Dean of the School of Business, and two others from the faculty (didn't catch their names?) drove from Charleston on Saturday morning to observe this training.

Alumni Representatives:

There were representatives from the Classes of 1970, 1971 and 1990 who observed this training and most importantly, have set-up and are funding endowments for this leadership training well into the future:

- **Class of 1970** – Funding an Endowment to support the Training of the Cadre each summer.
- **Class of 1971** – Funding an Endowment to support the Knob Leadership Reaction Course (2nd Semester).
- **Class of 1990** – Funding an Endowment to support the Sophomore Leadership Reaction Course.

Participating Cadets:

There were 525 cadets participating in this training. They were divided into 5 groups of 105 each, mostly by battalion. There were young men and women, sophomores, juniors and seniors. Each large group was broken down into smaller squads of maybe 18 people each.

One of the instructors commented that less than 25% of today's youth qualify for military service due to health issues, mental or physical issues, IQ, criminal backgrounds, etc. The Citadel and the military branches vigorously compete to recruit properly qualified candidates.

The Instructors:

The professional leadership training was again guided by Scott Biscotti's team. Scott is also a Citadel graduate (Class of 1988) and a retired Army Colonel, who owns Command Post Technologies (CPT). Scott started CPT after he retired from the Army and saw a void to fill with professional leadership training for corporations, government agencies and other groups, which led him to approach his alma mater about training cadets. *It has made a significant impact!*

CPT Instructors included veterans, male and female, from all branches of military service, and all from the special operations community (SEALs, Marines, Army Rangers, etc.). All were Non-commissioned officers (think: middle management).

A few were new to this training exercise with Citadel Cadets, but most had helped conduct this training in past years. They are always thrilled with the opportunity to come work with our young people!

Selected TAC officers from The Citadel Commandant's Staff (again, representing all branches of service) further enhanced the instruction and helped manage the various stations.

Marine Corps Drill Sergeants based at Parris Island also contributed meaningfully to the leadership reaction instruction ... in their own special way.

Leadership Instructional Goals:

- 1) Teach how to train leadership and build teamwork in positive ways.
- 2) Teach how to take care of your people and encourage the weak to get better.
- 3) Teach how to train your replacement and create a legacy of success.
- 4) Encourage retention, not attrition.

Approaches:

The guiding elements of this professional leadership training included:

- 1) *Show them* what 'right' looks like.
- 2) *Show them* how to build teamwork and problem-solving skills.
- 3) *Offer guidance* on leadership and teambuilding from professional experience.
- 4) *Provide examples* of building a legacy of success.

There were basically five stations for instruction and activity. Each group moved through each of the stations every 90 minutes. The stations included:

- **Obstacle Course Stations** ... which involved moving your small team alternatively over and under various obstacles with tight time constraints, and yes, there were consequences for not following the guidelines ... they had to start over and do it again.



- **Climbing Tower** ... taught helping team members up the tower and then back down ... overcoming fear of heights and working together.

- **“The Octagon”** ... Cadets were put into the pit with helmets, protective gear and pugil sticks and fought it out for a few seconds. In many cases, this was the first time anyone had ever experienced being in a fight, which was a major stressor. One of the instructors suggested it took “great individual courage just to get in the pit.” Still, everyone participated.
- **Rappel Tower** ... where the Cadets learned to rappel down from about 70 feet off the ground. This experience included rappelling down a wall and a free drop (no wall to bounce off) ... which stretched quite a few comfort zones!



- **Trusting your Team**



Hopefully, you can imagine these different stations, and conjure up the difficulty posed by the assigned tasks to navigate the obstacles, plus the added stress of being timed to resolve the challenge.

Leadership Lecture:

This element was conducted under a shed with fans, which proved to be quite a godsend and allowed the Cadets to catch their breaths. Instructors, with considerable leadership experiences in incredibly difficult situations, shared their personal insights on the importance of developing personal core values. They also shared 'best practice' leadership approaches and suggestions on how to improve personally and develop better teamwork.

While you may not need to go break a sweat on Parris Island, you may choose to consider your own personal development and teambuilding within your own organization with the following bullet points that were offered:

Always Strive to Improve Self ... then Your Team:

- 1) Find value in everything you do!
- 2) Look for value and ask questions to learn more!
- 3) Listen and learn from those who have been down the path before you!
- 4) Develop a plan to get better, more productive ... then stick to it ... be disciplined to follow your plan ... planning and adjusting to continue the improvement process.



As you develop personally, you will develop those around you and you need to ask yourself ... **“What is my future potential?”**

As you build a team, you need to ask ... **“What is their future potential?”**

In both cases, you will then need to ask:

- **“What do I / they need to do to realize that potential?”**
- **“What preparation or training is required to attain that potential?”**
- **“What ‘attitude adjustments’ might be required?”**

You must believe that all training is a potential learning opportunity!

Establish Your Own Personal Core Values: While you can certainly develop your own, these were some that were suggested by the instructors:

- Love your Life every day!
- Look for ways to add value every day, personally and professionally!
- Do the right thing because it is the right thing to do!
- ACT! ... Step up and Step out! ... show initiative!
- Don’t react ... “followers roll on someone else’s wheel” ... “steer your own ship”!
- Be honest with yourself ... face your demons and make course corrections.
- Learn from your mistakes ... get better ... improve your skills!
- Help others develop their own core values that align with you and your organization!
- Ego can feed hate ... hate corrupts your character!
- Giving forgiveness is the first proactive step toward a positive attitude

Example: Do you ask yourself where all your money goes? OR, do you tell your money where to go?

Who is on your bus? (The “bus” being your family, close friends or your working team.)

- Do they know and support your core values?
- Who has your best interests at heart?
- Who makes you better?
- Will they step up and step out with you in supportive ways for rightful purposes?
- Do they need to be on your bus ... or do you need to off-load a few?
- Look for character and commitment from those on your bus!

Three Critical Bones of Attitude:

- **Wishbone** ... includes all your hopes and dreams, as well as your empathy for others
- **Backbone** ... includes what you stand for and where you hold the line ... speaks to your character, which leads to your enduring reputation (what others think of you)
- **Funny Bone** ... includes use of humor to face your fears and difficulties, and will encourage a positive attitude

Levels of Leadership Within Your Team:

You start with #1, and climb progressively, but can always slide backward to start over:

- 1) **Position** ... you're the boss because you have the rank or the title ... most basic level
- 2) **Permission** ... you're beginning to build relationships with your team, which builds respect and your team responds based on their respect of you
- 3) **Production** ... you are beginning to produce results in your own development, AND your team is producing results to benefit your organization ... building a solid reputation
- 4) **Personnel Development** ... you are beginning to develop others ... you are 'training your replacement'
- 5) **Formed a Legacy of Leadership** ... your reputation precedes your presence, you are easily and quickly recognized as a leader, even after you leave your organization, yet the organization continues to prosper under the leaders you have developed.

Most Powerful Leadership Trait is LOVE!

- **Love Yourself!**
- **Love your Team!**
- **Love your Organization!**

True Love does not dishonor those we love!

Humility follows learning from failure!

The Cadets asked amazing questions which truly illustrated their understanding of the issues and challenges of leadership, both within the confines of The Citadel but also anticipating their post-graduation pursuits.



At The Citadel, we are truly teaching leadership and developing principled leaders!

When we look around our society and our country, we can readily see the desperate need for effective principled leaders!

Although it was an incredibly hot day in August, observing this training and listening to the experienced instructors' offer advice to these young people was wonderfully motivating and inspiring. It tracks so well with a line in our college alma mater ... "In the paths our fathers showed us, follow without fear ...".

Many may read this message and think these are all common-sense approaches, but they should also be reminded of the great merit in their wisdom. Perhaps we should really look ourselves in the mirror and reflect upon these 'pearls of wisdom' offered from proven leaders to improve our own leadership and team building skills, which leads toward our own legacy of success.

Just like the Cadets, you may want to write down your daily plan of "to do's" and what you wish to improve upon, then stick to the plan ... hold the line! At the end of each day, conduct a brief "after action" review ... where did you improve? ... where did you fail? ... what have you learned? Then, note what personal improvements you will make tomorrow. You don't need to keep a long journal or diary but slowly you will realize you will be growing, getting better, more efficient and productive, and those around you will be getting better too.

Truly a terrific experience for all!

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