



CSM Column
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Last month, I discussed the recent report, Army Health Promotion, Risk Reduction, Suicide Prevention 2010 and the unacceptable loss of Soldiers due to high risk behavior and suicide. This month I'll discuss the differences between 'good leaders' and 'elite leaders' with some of the back-to-basics leadership techniques that have helped us become the "Strength of the Nation – Army Strong."

Recently, I heard about sports commentators talking on the radio about the difference between elite coaches and good coaches. They mentioned that good coaches are super guys that anyone would love to hang out with, but just don't win the close ones. The commentators went on to explain that while good coaches got their teams ready to play, they rarely enforced standards and discipline during practice. They would choose to ease up during off-weeks instead of push the players. Invariably, during the game discipline breaks down, penalties start to accumulate, passes are dropped, and those teams end up on the short-end of a close game. Bottom line: the commentators stated that good coaches were technicians who had a superb grasp of the game of football, but were like jellyfish when it came to discipline.

The commentators then went on to describe how elite coaches pay attention to the little details, hold their players' actions accountable, who know how to motivate others and instill and maintain discipline in practice. Elite coaches understand that disciplined teams gain that extra yard on 'third and short.' The result: there are fewer mental errors or penalties, and most of the time elite coaches come out on the winning end of a close game.

Let me borrow from the commentators' football discussion about good coaches and elite coaches and put it into the context of 'good leaders' and 'elite leaders' within the Army. I submit that the Army has a similar stable of 'good leaders' and 'elite leaders' and we've all seen examples of both.

First, let's discuss 'good leaders'. 'Good leaders' have the best of intentions. They have hearts of gold, but sometimes choose being popular to making the hard choices. 'Good leaders' tend to train to time and not to standard in order not to anger anyone for working too hard or too long. 'Good leaders' don't inspect enough and sometimes rely too much on trust without verifying. 'Good leaders' reward everyone equally regardless of effort. In the end, good leaders are probably very nice people, love Soldiers, but just don't make the hard decisions needed to build disciplined units.

On the other hand, 'elite leaders' may have hearts of gold, but it's sometimes hard to determine what beats beneath their crusty exteriors. I do know that 'elite leaders' hold Soldiers accountable for their actions. They check the barracks in the evenings and on weekends even as their subordinates grumble about being disturbed. 'Elite leaders' can be found where the Soldiers are located whether it's hot and dusty, or cold and wet – you can't check morale with an email message. 'Elite leaders' also know that practice doesn't make perfect"; only "perfect practice makes perfect;" which means training until you get it right and then repeating it until it becomes routine. 'Elite leaders' lead by example and instill discipline in their units. 'Elite leaders' never stop learning and are never satisfied with minimum standards.

It's easy to spot units with 'elite leaders.' Those are the units with fewer accidents, fewer DUI's, higher re-enlistment rates, and reduced chances for suicides. Being an 'elite leader' takes hard work, long hours, and an unflinching commitment to doing what's right. As FM 6-22, **Army Leadership**, states, "Doing the right thing is good. Doing the right thing for the right reason and with the right goal is better."

Take a hard look in the mirror – are you a good leader or an elite leader? Do you have what it takes to step up to elite status? We have plenty of good leaders, we need more elite leaders.

Secure the High Ground