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A Guide for Effective Platoon Leader – Platoon Sergeant Co-Leadership

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The platoon leader (PL) – platoon sergeant (PSG) leadership team is a unique and influential pair of roles that exist in the Army. In order for a platoon to succeed, an effective partnership must exist between the PL and PSG. Current Army training, however, does not focus on teaching leaders how to effectively partner together. Accordingly, this research product contains a guide to help leaders achieve a common understanding of their platoon and their partnership as leaders. The intent is for this guide to be used when a new PL or PSG enters the platoon. The guide contains a discussion exercise, exemplars from PLs and PSGs, a list of Army doctrine resources, and helpful tips grounded in scientific evidence. The guide is designed to help PLs and PSGs set the foundation for an effective working relationship, resulting in an efficient and effective platoon.

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A GUIDE FOR EFFECTIVE PLATOON LEADER - PLATOON SERGEANT CO-LEADERSHIP

CONTENTS

Page

INTRODUCTION …… 1

DISCUSSION GUIDE ……. 2

Guide Purpose …… 2

Guide Audience …….. 2

Guide Instructions …….. 2

Guide Supplement ……. 2

Army Doctrine Quick Reference …….. 2

REFERENCES ……. 3

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: DISCUSSION GUIDE …… A-1

APPENDIX B: DISCUSSION GUIDE SUPPLEMENT …….. B-1

APPENDIX C: ARMY DOCTRINE QUICK REFERENCE …… C-1

APPENDIX D: RESEARCH PRODUCT POCKET FLIP BOOK VERSION PROOFS …. D-1

APPENDIX E: RESEARCH PRODUCT TRIFOLD VERSION ……. E-1

A GUIDE FOR EFFECTIVE PLATOON LEADER - PLATOON SERGEANT CO-LEADERSHIP

Introduction

The platoon leader (PL) – platoon sergeant (PSG) leadership team is a unique and influential pair of roles that exist in the Army. The working relationship between the PL and PSG can have large effects on the platoon (e.g., climate). It impacts the development of officers throughout the remainder of their careers and can influence NCO development, as well. Army doctrine makes it clear that the relationship between officers and NCOs is critical to the success of the U.S. Army (ADRP 6-22, U.S. Department of the Army, 2012; TC 7-22.7, U.S. Department of the Army, 2015). It is not uncommon for relationships to encounter difficulties, though, and certain partnerships, or aspects of partnerships, may prove challenging for those in leadership roles. Improving the relationship between a PL and their PSG improves the success of the unit, and the effectiveness of the U.S. Army.

Many of the tools and trainings currently available to officers and NCOs focus on learning tasks necessary for performing their duties or managing relationships with superiors and subordinates. Less focus is placed on developing working relationships that ultimately enhance unit effectiveness. One PSG interviewed in this research emphasized the need for tools designed for PLs and PSGs:

> *"I think it's super critical. It is the most critical relationship in the Army. It is the one that ultimately makes decisions that affect the platoon in the next 20 minutes… It is the most important relationship and there [are] not enough development classes. Not enough guidance."*

To fill this gap, the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences has developed a guide to assist in building a professional relationship between two leaders. The intent is for this guide to be used when a new PL or PSG enters the platoon, enabling the two leaders to arrive at a shared understanding of their partnership and their platoon. The questions in the guide were developed from discussions with PLs and PSGs and are based upon their experiences and recommendations. The focus of the guide is on getting to know your counterpart better, setting and managing expectations, and general communication. The discussion guide is meant to set a foundation for continual communication between the PL and PSG which will benefit the platoon. As a PL emphasized:

> *"I would say a successful relationship is a constant dialogue. Never a day you shouldn't be texting or face to face talking 30 times a day. If you aren't doing that something is wrong… If you are communicating well you have half the battle done."*

This document provides a summary description of the Discussion Guide product and associated supplemental material. The Discussion Guide is provided in Appendix A. The Discussion Guide Supplement, including exemplars from PLs and PSGs, specific Army doctrine relevant to the topic, and helpful tips, is provided in Appendix B. Appendix C contains a compiled list of relevant Army doctrine for quick reference.

Discussion Guide

Guide Purpose

The Discussion Guide was developed to help Army leaders set a foundation for effective communication and leadership as members of a leader team. It is meant to apply concepts from both Army doctrine and scientific research in an accessible format based on conversational questions. Leader teams who talk through the questions in the guide should have a greater awareness of themselves, their counterpart, and their unit. The result should be a unit that is more cohesive, effective, and efficient.

Guide Audience

The concepts associated with building effective working relationships between joint leaders could be used at all leadership levels. However, junior officers and their NCOs were identified as the target training audience. As stated in TC 7-22.7, "The officer/NCO relationship benefits officers at all levels, but especially junior officers" (p.5-5). The platoon is the first level of leadership where an officer and NCO are paired together as a leader team. Therefore, junior officers and their NCOs are best poised to benefit from learning how to work effectively with a counterpart, whomever that counterpart may be. A group of company commanders and first sergeants interviewed in this research emphasized that the PL and PSG positions were an early opportunity to learn how to work effectively with any individual.

Guide Instructions

The guide focuses on areas that PLs and PSGs identified as important aspects for leader teams to discuss. Topics include communication, unit goals, making decisions as a team, and managing conflict. The guide is designed to facilitate a conversation that can occur over one or many time points whenever the PL and PSG have some time to spare (see Appendix A). As noted in the guide, the product is not meant to be used for formal counseling. It is meant to be one tool in a leader's larger toolkit.

Guide Supplement. The supplement (Appendix B) provides additional information for each of the questions posed in the conversational guide found in Appendix A. It includes general takeaways for each topic, quotes from PLs and PSGs, Army doctrine specific to the topic, and tips for leaders if they are struggling with that specific aspect in their partnership.

Army Doctrine Quick Reference. The product ends with a compiled list of Army doctrine publications (Appendix C) that are relevant to PLs and PSGs. References relate to officers and NCOs generally, as well as the key topics in the guide, such as roles and responsibilities, communication, managing conflict, and decision making. The Quick Reference provides additional reading and resources for those who seek it.

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U.S. Department of the Army (2012). Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-22 (ADRP 6-22) *Army Leadership*. Retrieved from http://cape.army.mil/repository/doctrine/adrp6-22.pdf

U.S. Department of the Army (2015). Training Circular 7-22.7 (TC 7-22.7). *Noncommissioned Officer Guide*. Retrieved from http://www.apd.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/tc7_22x7.pdf

APPENDIX A

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Discussion Guide

This guide is designed to facilitate a conversation between a platoon leader and a platoon sergeant and aid in setting the foundation for an effective leadership team. The questions provide a starting point for you and your counterpart to learn about each other and the platoon, as well as talk about expectations and a way forward for your unit. Take some time to talk through the different questions and get to know each other better. This guide can be used in one sitting or can be used over multiple conversations when you have some extra time. It is not meant to replace formal counselings, nor is it meant to be a check-the-box task. Using it is voluntary, but could be helpful to you and your platoon.

1. What are your expectations for your role?
    a. What do you see as your primary responsibilities?

2. What are your expectations for my role?
    a. What do you see as my primary responsibilities?
    b. What does your ideal platoon leader/platoon sergeant partner look like?

3. What are your expectations for our joint leadership role?
    a. What boundaries do you view for each role? What is my lane and what is your lane?

4. What do you hope to gain from this relationship?
    a. How can we help each other reach our long-term personal and professional goals?

5. What is your preference for communication? Ideally, how often do you see us communicating about tasks or issues facing the platoon?

6. How do you see us making decisions about the platoon?
    a. What decisions do you see us making together? What decisions do you see us making independently?

7. How do you see us best managing conflict or resolving disagreements?
    a. What do we do if we are having issues coming to consensus or resolving problems?
    b. Are there preferences you have or things that work well for you?
    c. Are there things I should avoid that are more difficult or problematic?

8. What do you feel are your strengths and weaknesses?
    a. How can we best use our strengths and help each other develop our weaknesses?

9. How can we help to empower or support each other as leaders of the platoon? What do you need from me?

    a. How can I help you better lead our platoon?

10. What is your vision for the platoon?
    a. What goals do you have for the platoon?
    b. What does success look like to you?
    c. How do you think we should track progress towards these goals?

11. What do you think is currently working well with the platoon? What do you think can be improved?
    a. What are the main issues you feel the platoon is currently facing?
        i. How do you see us addressing these issues?

12. What has the company commander or first sergeant identified as working well or needing improvement within the platoon?

APPENDIX B

DISCUSSION GUIDE SUPPLEMENT

Discussion Guide Supplement

The Discussion Guide Supplement contains additional information for each of the topics found in the Discussion Guide. Each section starts with Leader Experiences, which includes both a general synopsis and individual quotes collected during research conversations with platoon leaders and platoon sergeants. The next piece, "Army Doctrine," contains a quick reference list of where you can find doctrine specific to the topic. Each section ends with "Helpful Tips" grounded in science.

ROLE EXPECTATIONS

Guide Questions:

1. What are your expectations for your role?
    - What do you see as your primary responsibilities?
2. What are your expectations for my role?
    - What do you see as my primary responsibilities?
    - What does your ideal platoon leader/platoon sergeant partner look like?
3. What are your expectations for our joint leadership role?
    - What boundaries do you view for each role? What is my lane and what is your lane?

Leader Experiences:

Many leaders expressed frustration in their lack of knowledge about each role, despite having some training. Leaders agreed on the importance of knowing their role, knowing their partner's role, and clarifying with their counterpart about roles and expectations to make sure both leaders were on the same page. In addition to understanding each partner's individual roles, leaders also expressed the need to have a shared understanding of how the independent roles work together to lead an effective platoon. Many leaders noted that problems occur when one partner doesn't stay in his or her lane.

"[I] think it starts with sitting down and doing an initial talk… where you talk about what do you want to get done, how do you see things going forwards, what are the duties and responsibilities between the two of you. Could be as simple as 'hey I want you to be around when writing up [a] training plan but I'll actually submit slides but need your input for this. Or when this comes up.' But having that dividing or that main hash out of where the lines are, who is responsible for what. Once you have that conversation it gets the ball rolling in the right direction of communication going forward."

-First Lieutenant, 5 months of experience as a platoon leader

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"Articulate your expectations and be reasonable if you are talking about expectations. Learn and adapt your thought process at the same time."
-Sergeant First Class, 9 months of experience as a platoon sergeant

"It's more important to just be able to talk to them about what a good or ideal PL is. Your ideal PL, build me a picture of that. Pick their brain on that. How do you go about resolving disagreements?"
-Second Lieutenant, 7 months of experience as a platoon leader

"There needs to be clearly established boundaries on what roles belong to what individuals. Shared understanding of when you can step over the bounds if there is comfort and understanding. A PL should be able to rely on his PSG. Really, really important for them to understand they are the be-all-end-all, but we are their advisors. Our job is to make them successful. A PL has to rely on his PSG and the PSG needs to be open and tell [the] PL when he is right and wrong or deviating off track."
-Sergeant First Class, 2 years of experience as a platoon sergeant

"Really trying to stay true to your word and trying to make sure you have an understanding of the overall direction or what the decision is, sometimes it is a matter of communication. Other one might [say], 'Hey before you say yes/no maybe check in with me.' Or only give [a] tentative 'Hey yes possibly but let me verify with the PL/ let me verify with the PSG before calling orders.'"
-First Lieutenant, 5 months of experience as a platoon leader

Army Doctrine:

- ADP 6-0 (2014). Mission Command. Sections 10-12.
- ADP 7-0 (2012). Training Units and Developing Leaders. Section 24.
- ATP 3-21.8 2016. Infantry Platoon and Squad. Sections 1-46 to 1-48.
- FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development. Sections 1-5, 1-21.
- TC 7-22.7 (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide. Sections 4.18, 5.1-5.2, 8.1.

Helpful Tips:

1. Make sure to take the time to understand your role and responsibilities. Being aware of each role will help you and your partner stay in your lane, which can increase overall effectiveness and efficiency of your unit[1].
2. Discuss your view of your role and your counterpart's role to make sure you have a shared understanding of your respective responsibilities and how they work together to efficiently lead the platoon.
    - Having a shared understanding of your purpose and supporting each other can lead to improved team effectiveness[1].
3. The four best ways to avoid role ambiguity are understanding[2]:

- The scope of your (and your counterpart's) responsibilities.
- The necessary behaviors to carry out your (and your counterpart's) responsibilities.
- How your (and your counterpart's) role responsibilities are evaluated.
- The consequences of not fulfilling role responsibilities.

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COMMUNICATION

Guide Questions:

4. What is your preference for communication? Ideally, how often do you see us communicating about tasks or issues facing the platoon?

Leader Experiences:

Frequent and high-quality communication is a major contributor to high quality relationships and was one of the most prevalent discussion points that emerged from conversations with leaders. Communication between the leaders of the platoon impacts how and what information the Soldiers receive, and many leaders explained how poor communication led to confusion among the Soldiers and poor unit effectiveness.

"Come together; what do we need to do to prepare for tomorrow. With my PSG once or twice a week we will look at the calendar, we will see where we can squeeze in SGT time training and do small Army training on the side to make sure platoon is ready and effective when we deploy. An effective team uses those sync meetings to effectively manage their time."

-Second Lieutenant, 5 months of experience as a platoon leader

"He does a morning sync and afternoon sync and compares notes about the daily agenda and how to meet that. Synchronization is where they get on the same page. What is my agenda for the day, what is your agenda for the day, set out PL will do planning, property management. Go to meetings, he will go to his meetings make sure Soldiers will do what they need to do. Come back at the end of the day and have another sync."

-Second Lieutenant, 9 months of experience as a platoon leader

"Communication is very important. Even if you come from two totally different places in life, two different walks of life, you came to the same profession, same goal ultimately. Others like to do it a different way, others do it their own way. Communicate back and forth to each other to achieve [a] common goal without low morale and bickering and arguing. That is how you foster a good climate in your platoon amongst your men."

-Staff Sergeant, 2.5 years of experience as a platoon sergeant

"Definitely open discussions tend to help sometimes…Maybe have a good heart-to-heart, can even include [the] section sergeant or senior ones."

-Staff Sergeant, 1 year of experience as a platoon sergeant

"Constant interaction and having good knowledge of [the] platoon itself, just going over the events of the day. If you can start off with that every morning it makes it a lot better."

-Sergeant First Class, 1 year of experience as a platoon sergeant

Army Doctrine:

- ADP 6-0 (2014). Mission Command. Sections 9, 24, 36-37.
- FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development. Sections 1-8, 3-11, 3-35, 3-36, 3-22.

Helpful Tips:

- Although it may seem inconsequential, small talk can have huge impacts on a relationship[1, 2]. Frequent small talk can help you and your counterpart get to know each other and strengthen interpersonal relationships by showing you value that team member.
    - Often, informal and relaxed communication reduces tension between communicators[1, 3, 4, 5].
- When discussing issues or actions to be taken in the platoon, make sure your comments are focused on behaviors or events, rather than the person[1, 6].
    - Focusing on issues with a person rather than behaviors or characteristics of a problem can make that person feel personally targeted, which can elicit negative feelings and defensive reactions. Instead, try and be supportive and validate their contribution to the team[1].
    - Make sure to show your counterpart that you are open to his or her ideas and willing to consider his or her perspective.
    - Allow your counterpart equal opportunity to speak and try to stay on topic[1, 7].
    - Avoid being overly rigid and inflexible in your opinion, or indifferent towards your counterpart when having a conversation. Try not to give the impression that you are superior to whomever you are speaking, regardless of rank[1, 8].
- Another key component of good communication is active listening. This can decrease the likelihood that the message will be distorted or misunderstood[1, 9].
    - When listening, be sure to withhold initial judgments and probe your partner to elaborate, provide more information, or clarify vague or confusing statements[1].
    - Repeating the information back to the speaker can help ensure you understand the message and shows him or her you are attentive and value their opinion[1, 10].
- Nonverbal communication, such as body language (e.g., rolling your eyes), can send conflicting signals that can undermine your message[1, 11, 12, 13].
    - For example, if you tell your counterpart you understand and value their opinion but demonstrate body language inconsistent with that sentiment[1, 14], he or she may feel your words are inauthentic, which can lower the quality of communication and in turn, damage your relationship.

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DECISION-MAKING

Guide Questions:

5. How do you see us making decisions about the platoon?
    - What decisions do you see us making together? What decisions do you see us making independently?

Leader Experiences:

Many leaders suggested making joint decisions and moving forward as a united front when implementing decisions within the platoon. They noted the importance of checking in with each other before decisions were made. For time sensitive decisions, leaders expressed the importance of letting your partner know as soon as possible about decisions made when they weren't present.

"[Both leaders] are in charge of the household and have their own jobs and together we make decisions. [We] have different things to do but we work together on it…Neither [leader] should just make a decision. If it's any decision that is truly affecting the platoon or a Soldier they should talk to each other. It's a reality check back and forth with each other."

-First Lieutenant, 1 month experience as a platoon leader

"[I was] told to not make any major changes to platoon for 1-2 months and try to get a feel for the platoon. After that you can make changes as you see fit. Not trying to be there like 'Hey I'm the one in charge. I'm going to change all this.' Give him the respect that he knows what is going on and is smart in a lot of different ways. Giving that off the bat shows you value his opinion. Even from then not trying to boss him around just ask…everything is a discussion, not 'This is because I said so.' Unless time sensitive, but if not time sensitive there is no reason to be bossy, no reason not to have a discussion."

-First Lieutenant, 7 months experience as a platoon leader

"Not always going to agree, but need to be able to listen to ideas and come up with [a] mutual decision that benefits [the] whole platoon, [the] whole organization."

-Sergeant First Class

"It should be joint power. Both [leaders] should have a voice in the decision-making process."

-First Sergeant, 6 years of experience as a platoon sergeant

Army Doctrine:

- ADP 6-0 (2014). Mission Command. Sections 36-37.

Helpful Tips:

- It is important to allow each individual to have a voice in the decision making process. This can lead to more constructive discussions, debate, and better participation in the decision process[1].
    - Ultimately, this will lead to better outcomes for the platoon[1].
    - Allowing both parties to participate in the decision making process can also improve trust[2].
- When making decisions, it can be helpful to maintain awareness of outside influences and demands to remind both leaders that the decision should be met with external approval[3].
- When making decisions, try to stay level-headed and keep emotions to a minimum. Keep personal criticisms out of the discussion. Getting too emotional or personal can decrease decision-making quality and performance[3, 4]. When discussing ideas and opinions, sometimes challenges to an idea can improve the decision quality[5]. A "devil's advocate" can be useful if the challenges are objective and constructive.
- Try to integrate both PL and PSG knowledge and perspectives when reaching agreement for a decision.
    - Reaching agreement when making a decision is often necessary for successfully implementing the decision.
    - Integrating both perspectives has additional benefits of gaining a better understanding of the problem and why some alternatives may be better than others[3].

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MANAGING CONFLICT

Guide Questions:

6. How do you see us best managing conflict or resolving disagreements?
    - What do we do if we are having issues coming to consensus or resolving problems?
    - Are there preferences you have or things that work well for you?
    - Are there things I should avoid that are more difficult or problematic?

Leader Experiences:

One of the most pressing issues leaders mentioned was arguing in front of your Soldiers which can cause conflict to trickle down to the platoon, lowering morale and creating a divide in loyalty among the Soldiers. Many leaders noted the importance of managing conflict behind closed doors and presenting a united front to the platoon. Many leaders also offered advice to "leave your ego at the door" when managing conflict with your counterpart. If the conflict can't be solved at your level, some leaders suggested approaching the company commander and first sergeant when necessary.

"[A] healthy [relationship is] one where [leaders] can openly, and especially behind closed doors, openly discuss plans and what needs to be done…then fully understand the line of when the discussion is done and the decision has been made…then in front of the Soldiers be able to show a united force and united line for executing what needs to be done. Don't always have to agree but need to do that in front of everyone else to go forward with the plan and execute it in front of the Soldiers."

-First Lieutenant, 5 months of experience as a platoon leader

"It's not our first day in the Army. [We] should be able to take a step back, before I do something stupid, try to see his side, see my side. Try to do this, or we can do this. Take a second before being too high strung or letting your emotion get the best of you. 'Alright sir, let's do this. Alright, cool.'"

-Sergeant First Class, 1 year of experience as a platoon sergeant

"We would get into it and had our arguments, but we were able to compromise, we accomplished the missions, talked about who had responsibilities, were just totally successful. We were able to separate work and personality. I was allowed to voice my opinion without repercussion."

-First Lieutenant, 1 year of experience as a platoon leader

"If you can have closed door arguments or disagreements but work through it between yourselves and come up with something positive once you go out and talk to everyone and have the same mind for the plan that is going to affect everyone positively…they will see you are both in it for the same objectives. If you go at it with two different ideas they will be split as well, but if you have [a] united front they will work with you better."

-First Lieutenant, 6 months of experience as a platoon leader

Army Doctrine:

- ADP 6-0 (2014). Mission Command. Sections 8-37.
- FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development. Table 7-13.

Helpful Tips:

- All relationships and teams inevitably encounter conflict; however, not all conflict is inherently bad. It can be healthy to team functioning if handled well[1].
- Conflict can arise from many sources, such as differing goals or objectives, interests, values, and miscommunications or misunderstandings[1, 2]. It can signal the need for change or a problem that needs to be addressed[1].
- The key to managing conflict is to confront it rather than avoid it, and approach the issue constructively, civilly, and without personal attacks or threats[1].
- Constructive conflict can decrease stress, communicate dissatisfaction with the current state of the team, foster innovation, and ultimately create more stable relationships[1, 3].
    - Alternately, avoiding conflict can create a hostile environment and reduce team effectiveness[1, 4, 5].
- Productive conflict management behaviors include[1]:
    - Active listening – this can decrease conflict arising from miscommunications.
    - Generating alternative solutions, finding common goals, and effectively communicating your perspective – this can decrease conflict arising from joint decision-making issues.
    - Remaining open to ideas and perspectives different from your own – this can decrease conflict arising from different opinions, attitudes, values, interests etc.
- One of the most important things to remember is to not personally attack others when disagreeing and managing conflict. Personal attacks on others can create negative feelings of self-worth, increase defensive reactions, and damage interpersonal relationships[1].

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LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

Guide Questions:

7. What do you hope to gain from this relationship?
    - How can we help each other reach our long-term personal and professional goals?
8. What do you feel are your strengths and weaknesses?
    - How can we best use our strengths and help each other develop our weaknesses?

Leader Experiences:

Leaders who viewed this joint partnership as a positive experience noted the importance of being willing to learn from each other, as each leader has unique experiences, knowledge, and skills to contribute to the platoon and the partnership. Many noted that both the PL and PSG are necessary for an effective unit, and that the leaders can complement each other's strengths to benefit the platoon. Importantly, many PLs expressed a desire for their more experienced PSG to be willing to mentor, advise, and help them develop as leaders.

"Eventually that PL can go away and if he can take that knowledge away from [the] PSG I would imagine that would probably help him down the road. Same for [the] PSG, [it] would make it easy for [a] new PL if [the] PSG knew some of what PL has to do so he can help. They should both be involved with everything that goes on a daily basis to teach [each other]. You will never know everything you need to know. Never … Can't be too proud to ask for help so to speak. If [the] PL is saying his thing and I don't understand what he is saying I would like to think I've never been too proud to ask what he is saying. [If] he doesn't understand, he has to be willing to set his ego aside and ask me to explain it a little bit better."

-Staff Sergeant

"Ideally [the] PSG shouldn't have any problem that this young, inexperienced leader is in charge. They should look at it as someone they can mentor to be a better leader. They need that mentorship. [The] PL should look at [the] PSG as [a] mentor to go to when they have questions and ask how they should do things right and then tweak it to make it their own. I am responsible for plan, but go to [the] PSG and say 'You have done this a million times. Show me to do this right.'"

-Second Lieutenant, 6 months of experience as a platoon leader

"Humility is a huge thing. I don't know how many times in [the] first 6 months I said 'I don't know.' It doesn't subordinate yourself to your PSG, but it brings you down to a more humble approach of how do I learn from my NCO. Help me learn. That is their job to help you learn and be better. Don't say 'I know everything, I learned it at school.'"

-Second Lieutenant, 8 months of experience as a platoon leader

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"It's more about adapting to each other and adapt to strength and weakness and [having] communication to build that team. As long as you have communication and trust, I have found it beneficial to have many NCOs and learn from many SMEs and their experiences. It's an opportunity to be randomly assigned and adjust to different people, it shows your capability as a leader."

-First Lieutenant, 2 years and 9 months experience as a platoon leader

"Complementary skills. You both have knowledge in different realms…so you balance each other out and execute as a team."

-Second Lieutenant, 7 months of experience as a platoon leader

"It shouldn't be one is greater than the other. You both need [the other] to make it run effectively. You don't have one or the other there's no point. If you only need one power why do you need the other? What's the point? You need both."

-Staff Sergeant, 1.5 years of experience as a platoon sergeant

Army Doctrine:

- ADP 6.0 (2014). Mission Command. Section 12.
- FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development. Section 1-6.
- TC 7-22.7 (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide. Sections 4.18, 5.1-5.2.

Helpful Tips:

- Approach this relationship with an openness to learning from your counterpart.
    - Individuals who are more focused on learning and mastering skills, as opposed to focusing solely on performing, are more likely to seek out challenges, learn from these experiences, acquire more skills and knowledge, and ultimately outperform those who do not have this learning focus[1].
        - Focusing solely on performance rather than learning is associated with an increased fear of failure and lower self-efficacy when failures occur. This can hinder the ability to learn from failures and challenging experiences[2].
- Learning from someone with more experience is important to personal and professional development.
    - Learning from more experienced members of the organization (such as mentors) can result in higher performance and long-term career outcomes[3, 4].
- Demonstrate your willingness to learn from your partner. Showing your openness to his or her advice and knowledge can improve the relationship between leadership partners[5].
    - If the more experienced partner feels as if their counterpart is unwilling to learn, he or she is likely to have more negative feelings about the relationship, resulting in less support for the less experienced partner[5].
    - Overall, these negative feelings can result in negative outcomes for both leaders[5].

- Be proactive about seeking information. Proactive behaviors (especially from newcomers to the unit) such as information seeking improves individual and unit performance, as well as satisfaction within the unit[4].
- It is important to both seek and provide constructive feedback from/to your partner.
    - Learning to take constructive feedback is a vital component of a healthy working relationship[5].
    - Exchanging feedback can increase your performance as individuals and as a leadership team by helping each other to learn and adjust your actions and strategies[6, 7, 8, 9].

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SUPPORT AND EMPOWER EACH OTHER

Guide Questions:

9. How can we help to empower or support each other as leaders of the platoon? What do you need from me?
    - How can I help you better lead our platoon?

Leader Experiences:

Leaders noted how important it is to not undermine their counterpart. Undermining one leader can lead to insubordination by Soldiers; if one leader does not have the loyalty and respect of the platoon, they cannot effectively guide the Soldiers within the platoon. Ultimately, this can impact the platoon's mission. Success requires both leaders.

"If the PSG doesn't support his PL whole heartedly, it can really easily lead to a situation where the loyalty is split. The platoon is more willing to follow [the] PSG than [the] PL. [The PSG] needs to do his part not to create insubordination, needs to show he supports [the] PL. Depending on [the] time [the PL] arrives, the Joes and NCOs are more familiar and [the] PL is new. Don't know if they can trust him, if he deserves their loyalty. In [the] intervening time they will follow [the] PSG's lead and [the] PSG needs to give [the] PL [the] benefit of the doubt."

-First Lieutenant, 1 year of experience as a platoon leader

"In my relationship we try to empower each other. I try to give him info to run it without having to interrupt and he lets Soldiers know what I do behind the scenes. They don't see my face or what I do. He creates [a] face for me and I give him the power to run the platoon without me having to interrupt. We build each other up rather than saying one or the other has the power. Unfortunately [the] PSG puts out news about staying late or weekend work. So when I get good news I give it to him so he can be the good news fairy as well. Ways to empower each other."

-First Lieutenant, 2 years and 9 months of experience as a platoon leader

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Army Doctrine:

- TC 7-22.7 (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide. Sections 3.7, 5.1-5.2, 8.1.

Helpful Tips:

- Make sure to demonstrate support for your counterpart at all times, especially in front of the troops. In order for the platoon to be effective, Soldiers need to view their leaders as united and capable in their roles.
- Providing support can include both work- and role-related support as well as emotional support.

- Work-related support includes providing information and feedback to your counterpart. This can be extremely useful for new leaders as they learn and adjust to the role[1].
- Emotional support includes demonstrating empathy, caring, and encouragement, which can be vital to reducing stress and increasing commitment to the unit and the Army[1, 2].

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PLATOON VISION AND GOALS

Guide Questions:

10. What is your vision for the platoon?
    - What goals do you have for the platoon?
    - What does success look like to you?
    - How do you think we should track progress towards these goals?
11. What do you think is currently working well with the platoon? What do you think can be improved?
    - What are the main issues you feel the platoon is currently facing?
        - How do you see us addressing these issues?

Leader Experiences:

One of the most agreed on themes throughout the discussions with leaders was the importance of understanding and agreeing on a shared vision for the platoon, including having shared goals. Leaders said that having a common understanding of what the unit needs to improve upon was important to developing an effective platoon. Similarly, leaders discussed the importance of being on the same page when resolving issues and problems within the unit. Many suggested having open conversations about what's going right and wrong in the unit and then working together to resolve any shortcomings.

"Set goals and what is our vision for the platoon.… You don't know much but you can set goals with PSG, your PSG can set goals and you can use those to measure success as platoon leadership. Provide a vision and a path for your platoon to follow. I have seen this in coaching teams, in leading my platoon anytime we have a clear direct vision or a goal to meet we are pretty effective in doing it. We have been really good at doing it with PT. Identifying shortfalls and getting our platoon where we want it to be in the realm of physical fitness."

-Second Lieutenant, 9 months of experience as a platoon leader

"He comes in do a little meet me, talk about goals and intents. Talks about platoon, what is going on, and then PL talks about goals and what he wants from SGT, section SGT, team, whatever. If they understand they move on and talk about what they want to do with goals they created together."

-Staff Sergeant, 1 year of experience as a platoon sergeant

"We need to talk to each other if no one else does and figure out what is going on with [the] company. Be on same page, support each other, have same goal, and having everyone know you are on the same team. Not just supporting each other is important."

-First Lieutenant, 1 year of experience as a platoon leader

"All about being a team and working together to solve issues rather that one person trying to spearhead."
-Staff Sergeant, 10 months of experience as platoon sergeant

"Platoon Sergeant and Platoon Leader have to discuss issues. If we do have Soldier issues, we want to keep [it at] its lowest level within ethics and protecting [the] Soldier."
-Sergeant First Class, 7 years of experience as a platoon sergeant

Army Doctrine:

- FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development. Section 1-22, 3-106; Table 1-2.
- TC 7-22.7. (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide. Section 8.1.

Helpful Tips:

- Tips for shared goals
  - Make sure to be on the same page as your counterpart when setting goals and sharing your vision for the platoon.
  - Sometimes when working in pairs or teams, individual members may have personal goals that are not consistent with team goals[1].
    - Having shared goals and a shared purpose among team members is crucial for team success[2] as it results in increased perceptions that your teammates have similar values and objectives[3, 4], which can result in higher quality communication, social integration, group affiliation, and cohesion[1].
    - Shared goals can also increase beliefs among team members that the team will support you when striving to attain these valued outcomes which can increase satisfaction with your partner or team[1].
  - The impact of shared goals between you and your partner likely will trickle down to your subordinates[3, 5]. Unit goals help Soldiers determine on which activities they should focus their effort[6]. This becomes even clearer when the two unit leaders have and express the same vision and goal for the team.
    - If each leader has a different vision and set of goals for the unit, Soldiers may be confused about which goals to focus on, which may hinder team performance.
  - The key to creating unity in shared goals is to set goals together. This helps increase overlap between each leader's personal goals and goals set for the team[2, 7, 8], as well as increase the quality of the goals that are set[2, 9].

- Tips for overall goal-setting
    - Simply having shared goals may not be effective if the goals that are set are not appropriate for platoon success. Below are some general tips for effective goal setting:
        - Use SMART goals[10]. Goals are related to performance when they are specific and difficult (but attainable) as long as the person (or team) is committed to the goal, does not have conflicting goals, and has the necessary knowledge and skills to attain it[6].
            - **S**pecific – goals should be specific (e.g., target PT standards) as opposed to vague "do your best" goals.
            - **M**easurable – if possible, set goals in which overall performance or progress can be measured. This can help with monitoring performance and adjusting efforts when necessary.
            - **A**ttainable – setting goals that are not reasonably attainable can impact unit morale and satisfaction.
            - **R**elevant – goals that are more relevant to the platoon are more likely to be viewed as important and meaningful, thus increasing effort towards attainment.
            - **T**ime-bound – goals should have a specific timeline to guide effort and monitor performance.
    - Phases of goal setting[11] – These general phases are a good framework for setting and monitoring goals and should be conducted together with your counterpart.

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USING YOUR LEADERSHIP AS A RESOURCE

Guide Questions:

12. What has the company commander or first sergeant identified as working well or needing improvement within the platoon?

Leader Experiences:

Leaders noted how company commanders and their first sergeants can help get a new platoon leader and platoon sergeant on the right footing. By communicating expectations and what works well, or doesn't work well, within the platoon, they can assist in setting a common understanding of where the platoon stands. They can also assist in helping PLs and PSGs figure out what their roles are and manage conflict if it arises.

"…both [the commander and first sergeant] together sitting down with both of us. There could be some cross-referenced information or talking about different things. If [we are] in the same room we understand what they are trying to say. Boss is there you say 'Roger sir' [and] actually absorb it. [I] think it should be done in a group setting."
-Sergeant First Class, 1 year of experience as a platoon sergeant

"They would help us work together, do our jobs better. Created a lot of cohesion not just within the troop, but [the] platoon itself."
-Staff sergeant, 1 year of experience as a platoon sergeant

"We sit down and talk about both of our intent, commander and first sergeant's intent, mold them together."
-Second Lieutenant, 6 months of experience as a platoon leader

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Army Doctrine:

- ADP 6.0 (2014). Mission Command.
- TC 7-22.7 (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide. Sections 5.1-5.2.

Helpful Tips:

- Learning from someone with more experience is important to personal and professional development.
    - Learning from more experienced members of the organization (such as mentors) can result in higher performance and long-term career outcomes[1, 2].
- Be proactive about seeking information. Proactive behaviors (especially from newcomers to the unit) such as information seeking improves individual performance and satisfaction with the unit[2].

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APPENDIX C

ARMY DOCTRINE QUICK REFERENCE

Army Doctrine Quick Reference

General Sources:

- ADP 6-22 (2012). Army Leadership.
- ADRP 6-22 (2012) Army Leadership.
- ATP 3-21.8 2016. Infantry Platoon and Squad. Sections 1-46 to 1-48.
- FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development.
- TC 7-22.7 (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide.

Role Expectations:

- ADP 6-0 (2014). Mission Command. Sections 10-12.
- ADP 7-0 (2012). Training Units and Developing Leaders. Section 24.
- ATP 3-21.8 2016. Infantry Platoon and Squad. Sections 1-46 to 1-48.
- FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development. Sections 1-5, 1-21.
- TC 7-22.7 (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide. Sections 4.18, 5.1-5.2, 8.1.

Decision-Making:

- ADP 6-0 (2014). Mission Command. Sections 36-37.

Platoon Vision and Goals:

- FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development. Section 1-22, 3-106; Table 1-2.
- TC 7-22.7. (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide. Section 8.1.

Communication:

- ADP 6-0 (2014). Mission Command. Sections 9, 24, 36-37.
- FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development. Sections 1-8, 3-11, 3-35, 3-22.

Managing Conflict:

- ADP 6-0 (2014). Mission Command. Sections 8-37.
- FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development. Table 7-13.

Learning from Each Other:

- ADP 6.0 (2014). Mission Command. Section 12.
- FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development. Section 1-6.
- TC 7-22.7 (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide. Sections 4.18, 5.1-5.2.

Support and Empower Each Other:

- TC 7-22.7 (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide. Sections 3.7, 5.1-5.2, 8.1.

Using Your Leadership as a Resource:

- ADP 6.0 (2014). Mission Command.
- TC 7-22.7 (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide. Sections 5.1-5.2.

APPENDIX D

RESEARCH PRODUCT POCKET FLIP BOOK VERSION PROOFS

A GUIDE FOR

EFFECTIVE PLATOON LEADER-PLATOON SERGEANT CO-LEADERSHIP

Discussion Topics and Helpful Tips

Product of the
U.S. Army Research Institute

INFORMATION INCLUDED IN THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE

CONTENTS

Intro & Purpose
p. 1-2

Discussion Questions
p. 3-4

Tips by Topic
p. 5-29

Role Expectations
p. 5-6

Communication
p. 7-10

Decision-Making
p. 11-12

Managing Conflict
p. 13-14

INTRODUCTION

The platoon leader (PL) – platoon sergeant (PSG) leadership team is a unique and influential pair of roles that exist in the Army. The working relationship between the PL and PSG can have large effects on the platoon. It impacts the development of officers throughout the remainder of their careers and can influence NCO development, as well. Army doctrine makes it clear that the relationship between officers and NCOs is critical to the success of the U.S. Army (ADRP 6-22, U.S. Department of the Army, 2012; TC 7-22.7, U.S. Department of the Army, 2015). It is not uncommon for relationships to encounter difficulties, though, and certain partnerships, or aspects of partnerships, may prove challenging for those in leadership roles. Improving the relationship between a PL and their PSG improves the success of the unit, and the effectiveness of the U.S. Army.

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to facilitate a conversation between a PL and a PSG and aid in setting the foundation for an effective leadership team. The questions provide a starting point for you and your counterpart to learn about each other and the platoon as well as talk about expectations and a way forward for your unit. Leader teams who talk through the questions in the guide should have a greater awareness of themselves, their counterpart, and their unit. The result should be a unit that is more cohesive, effective, and efficient.

Learning from Each Other
p. 15-18

Support and Empower Each Other
p. 19-20

Platoon Vision and Goals
p. 21-24

Using Your Leadership as a Resource
p. 25-26

Army Doctrine Quick Reference
p. 27-28

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The guide focuses on areas that PLs and PSGs have identified as important aspects for leader teams to discuss. Topics include your roles, your partnership, and your vision for your unit. The guide is designed to facilitate a conversation that can occur over one or many time points whenever the PL and PSG have some time to spare. The product is not meant to be used for formal counseling. It is meant to be one informal tool in a leader's larger toolkit.

TIPS BY TOPIC

Each tab provides additional information for the questions posed in the conversational guide. It includes general takeaways for each topic, quotes from PLs and PSGs, tips for leaders, and Army doctrine specific to the topic if they are struggling with that specific aspect in their partnership.

ARMY DOCTRINE QUICK REFERENCE

This guide ends with a completed list of Army doctrine publications that are relevant to PLs and PSGs. References relate to officers and NCOs generally, as well as the key topics in the guide, such as roles and responsibilities, communication, managing conflict, and decision-making. The Quick Reference provides additional reading and resources for those who seek it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What are your expectations for your role?

- What do you see as your primary responsibilities?

What are your expectations for my role?

- What do you see as my primary responsibilities?
- What does your ideal platoon leader/platoon sergeant partner look like?

What are your expectations for our joint leadership role?

- What boundaries do you view for each role? What is my lane and what is your lane?

What do you hope to gain from this relationship?

- How can we help each other reach our long-term personal and professional goals?

What is your preference for communication? Ideally, how often do you see us communicating about tasks or issues facing the platoon?

How do you see us making decisions about the platoon?

- What decisions do you see us making together? What decisions do you see us making independently?

How do you see us best managing conflict or resolving disagreements?

- What do we do if we are having issues coming to consensus or resolving problems?
- Are there preferences you have or things that work well for you?
- Are there things I should avoid that are more difficult or problematic?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What do you feel are your strengths and weaknesses?

- How can we best use our strengths and help each other develop our weaknesses?

How can we help to empower or support each other as leaders of the platoon? What do you need from me?

- How can I help you better lead our platoon?

What is your vision for the platoon?

- What goals do you have for the platoon?
- What does success look like to you?
- How do you think we should track progress towards these goals?

What do you think is currently working well with the platoon? What do you think can be improved?

- What are the main issues you feel the platoon is currently facing?
- How do you see us addressing these issues?

What has the company commander or first sergeant identified as working well or needing improvement within the platoon?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What are your expectations for your role?

What do you see as your primary responsibilities?

What are your expectations for my role?

What do you see as my primary responsibilities?

What does your ideal platoon-leader/platoon sergeant partner look like?

What are your expectations for our joint leadership role?

What boundaries do you view for each role? What is my lane and what is your lane?

ROLE EXPECTATIONS

LEADER EXPERIENCES Many leaders expressed frustration in their lack of knowledge about each role, despite having some training. Leaders agreed on the importance of knowing their role, knowing their partner's role, and clarifying with their counterpart about roles and expectations to make sure both leaders were on the same page. In addition to understanding each partner's individual roles, leaders also expressed the need to have a shared understanding of how the independent roles work together to lead an effective platoon. Many leaders noted that problems occur when one partner doesn't stay in his or her lane.

"There needs to be clearly established boundaries on what roles belong to what individuals. Shared understanding of when you can step over the bounds if there is comfort and understanding...A PL has to rely on his PSG and the PSG needs to be open and tell [the] PL when he is right and wrong or deviating off track."

-SFC, 2 years as a PSG

"It's more important to just be able to talk to them about what a good or ideal PL is. Your ideal PL, build me a picture of that. Pick their brain on that. How do you go about resolving disagreements"

-2LT, 7 months as a PL

"Articulate your expectations and be reasonable if you are talking about expectations. Learn and adapt your thought process at the same time."

-SFC, 9 months as a PSG

HELPFUL TIPS

Make sure to take the time to understand your role and responsibilities. Being aware of each role will help you and your partner stay in your lane, which can increase overall effectiveness and efficiency of your unit.

Discuss your view of your role and your counterpart's role to make sure you have a shared understanding of your respective responsibilities and how they work together to efficiently lead the platoon.

- Having a shared understanding of your purpose and supporting each other can lead to improved team effectiveness.

The four best ways to avoid role ambiguity are understanding:

- The scope of your (and your counterpart's) responsibilities.
- The necessary behaviors to carry out your (and your counterpart's responsibilities.
- How your (and your counterpart's) role responsibilities are evaluated.
- The consequences of not fulfilling role responsibilities.

Role Expectations

ARMY DOCTRINE

- **ADP 6-0 (2014). Mission Command. Sections 10-12.**
- **ADP 7-0 (2012). Training Units and Developing Leaders. Section 24.**
- **ATP 3-21.8 (2016). Infantry Platoon and Squad. Sections 1-46 to 1-48.**
- **FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development. Sections 1-5, 1-21.**
- **TC 7-22.7 (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide. Sections 4.18, 5.1-5.2, 8.1.**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What is your preference for communication?

Ideally, how often do you see us communicating about tasks or issues facing the platoon?

COMMUNICATION

LEADER EXPERIENCES Frequent and high-quality communication is a major contributor to high quality relationships and was one of the most prevalent discussion points that emerged from conversations with leaders. Communication between the leaders of the platoon impacts how and what information the Soldiers receive, and many leaders explained how poor communication led to confusion among the Soldiers and poor unit effectiveness.

"He does a morning sync and afternoon sync and compares notes about the daily agenda and how to meet that. Synchronization is where they get on the same page. What is my agenda for the day, what is your agenda for the day, set out PL will do planning, property management. Go to meetings, he will go to his meetings make sure Soldiers will do what they need to do. Come back at the end of the day and have another sync."
-2LT, 9 months as a PL

"Communication is very important. Even if you come from two totally different places in life, two different walks of life, you came to the same profession, same goal ultimately. Others like to do it a different way, others do it their own way. Communicate back and forth to each other to achieve [a] common goal without low morale and bickering and arguing. That is how you foster a good climate in your platoon amongst your men."
-SSG, 2.5 years as a PSG

HELPFUL TIPS

Although it may seem inconsequential, small talk can have huge impacts on a relationship. Frequent small talk can help you and your counterpart get to know each other and strengthen interpersonal relationships by showing you value that team member.

- Often, informal and relaxed communication reduces tension between communicators.

When discussing issues or actions to be taken in the platoon, make sure your comments are focused on behaviors or events, rather than the person.

- Focusing on issues with a person rather than behaviors or characteristics of a problem can make that person feel personally targeted, which can elicit negative feelings and defensive reactions. Instead, try and be supportive and validate their contribution to the team.
- Make sure to show your counterpart that you are open to his or her ideas and willing to consider his or her perspective.
- Allow your counterpart equal opportunity to speak and try to stay on topic.
- Avoid being overly rigid and inflexible in your opinion, or indifferent towards your counterpart when having a conversation. Try not to give the impression that you are superior to whomever you are speaking, regardless of rank.

HELPFUL TIPS

Another key component of good communication is active listening. This can decrease the likelihood that the message will be distorted or misunderstood.

- When listening, be sure to withhold initial judgments and probe your partner to elaborate, provide more information, or clarify vague or confusing statements.
- Repeating the information back to the speaker can help ensure you understand the message and shows him or her you are attentive and value their opinion.

Nonverbal communication, such as body language (e.g., rolling your eyes), can send conflicting signals that can undermine your message.

- Ex: If you tell your counterpart you understand and value their opinion but demonstrate body language inconsistent with that sentiment, he or she may feel your words are inauthentic, which can lower the quality of communication and in turn, damage your relationship.

Communication

ARMY DOCTRINE

- **ADP 6-0 (2014). Mission Command. Sections 9, 24, 36-37.**
- **FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development. Sections 1-8, 3-11, 3-35, 3-36, 3-22.**

P.9

MORE LEADER EXPERIENCES

"Come together; what do we need to do to prepare for tomorrow. With my PSG once or twice a week we will look at the calendar, we will see where we can squeeze in SGT time training and do small Army training on the side to make sure [the] platoon is ready and effective when we deploy. An effective team uses those sync meetings to effectively manage their time."

-2LT, 5 months as a PL

"Definitely open discussions tend to help sometimes...Maybe have a good heart-to-heart, can even include [the] section sergeant or senior ones."

-SSG, 1 year as a PSG

"Constant interaction and having good knowledge of [the] platoon itself, just going over the events of the day. If you can start off with that every morning it makes it a lot better."

-SFC, 1 year as a PSG

Communication

P. 10

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How do you see us making decisions about the platoon?

What decisions do you see us making together?

What decisions do you see us making independently?

DECISION-MAKING

LEADER EXPERIENCES Many leaders suggested making joint decisions and moving forward as a united front when implementing decisions within the platoon. They noted the importance of checking in with each other before decisions were made. For time sensitive decisions, leaders expressed the importance of letting your partner know as soon as possible about decisions made when they weren't present.

"It should be joint power. Both [leaders] should have a voice in the decision-making process."
-1SG, 5 years as a PSG

"[Both leaders] are in charge of the household and have their own jobs and together we make decisions. [We] have different things to do but we work together on it… Neither [leader] should just make a decision. If it's any decision that is truly affecting the platoon or a Soldier they should talk to each other. It's a reality check back and forth with each other."
-1LT, 1 month as a PL

"Not always going to agree, but need to be able to listen to ideas and come up with [a] mutual decision that benefits [the] whole platoon, [the] whole organization."
-SFC, years of experience unknown

"...Give him the respect that he knows what is going on and is smart in a lot of different ways...shows you value his opinion...if [it isn't] time sensitive there is no reason to be bossy, no reason not to have a discussion."
-1LT, 7 months as a PL

Decision-Making

HELPFUL TIPS

It is important to allow each individual to have a voice in the decision making process. This can lead to more constructive discussions, debate, and better participation in the decision process.

- Ultimately, this will lead to better outcomes for the platoon.
- Allowing both parties to participate in the decision making process can also improve trust.

When making decisions, it can be helpful to maintain awareness of outside influences and demands to remind both leaders that the decision should be met with external approval.

When making decisions, try to stay level-headed and keep emotions to a minimum. Keep personal criticisms out of the discussion. Getting too emotional or personal can decrease decision-making quality and performance.

When discussing ideas and opinions, sometimes challenges to an idea can improve the decision quality. A "devil's advocate" can be useful if the challenges are objective and constructive.

Try to integrate both PL and PSG knowledge and perspectives when reaching agreement for a decision.

- Reaching agreement when making a decision is often necessary for successfully implementing the decision.
- Integrating both perspectives has additional benefits of gaining a better understanding of the problem and why some alternatives may be better than others.

ARMY DOCTRINE

- **ADP 6-0 (2014). Mission Command. Sections 10-12.**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How do you see us best managing conflict or resolving disagreements?

What do we do if we are having issues coming to consensus or resolving problems?

Are there Preferences you have or things that work well for you?

Are there things I should avoid that are more difficult/ problematic?

MANAGING CONFLICT

LEADER EXPERIENCES One of the most pressing issues leaders mentioned was arguing in front of your Soldiers which can cause conflict to trickle down to the platoon, lowering morale and creating a divide in loyalty among the Soldiers. Many leaders noted the importance of managing conflict behind closed doors and presenting a united front to the platoon. Many leaders also offered advice to "leave your ego at the door" when managing conflict with your counterpart. If the conflict can't be solved at your level, some leaders suggested approaching the company commander and first sergeant when necessary.

"If you can have closed door arguments or disagreements but work through it between yourselves and come up with something positive once you go out and talk to everyone and have the same mind for the plan that is going to affect everyone positively…they will see you are both in it for the same objectives. If you go at it with two different ideas they will be split as well, but if you have [a] united front they will work with you better."

-1LT, 6 months as a PL

"It's not our first day in the Army. [We] should be able to take a step back, before I do something stupid, try to see his side, see my side. Try to do this, or we can do this. Take a second before being too high strung or letting your emotion get the best of you. 'Alright sir, let's do this. Alright, cool.'"

-SFC, 1 year as a PSG

HELPFUL TIPS

All relationships and teams inevitably encounter conflict; however, not all conflict is inherently bad. It can be healthy to team functioning if handled well.

Conflict can arise from many sources, such as differing goals or objectives, interests, values, and miscommunications or misunderstandings. It can signal the need for change or a problem that needs to be addressed.

The key to managing conflict is to confront it rather than avoid it, and approach the issue constructively, civilly, and without personal attacks or threats.

Constructive conflict can decrease stress, communicate dissatisfaction with the current state of the team, foster innovation, and ultimately create more stable relationships.

- Alternately, avoiding conflict can create a hostile environment and reduce team effectiveness.

Productive conflict management behaviors include:

- Active listening – this can decrease conflict arising from miscommunications.
- Generating alternative solutions, finding common goals, and effectively communicating your perspective – this can decrease conflict arising from joint decision-making issues.
- Remaining open to ideas and perspectives different from your own – this can decrease conflict arising from different opinions, attitudes, values, interests etc.

One of the most important things to remember is to not personally attack others when disagreeing and managing conflict. Personal attacks on others can create negative feelings of self-worth, increase defensive reactions, and damage interpersonal relationships.

Managing Conflict

ARMY DOCTRINE

- **ADP 6-0 (2014). Mission Command. Sections 8-37.**
- **FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development. Table 7-13.**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What do you hope to gain from this relationship?

How can we help each other reach our long-term personal and professional goals?

What do you feel are your strengths and weaknesses?

How can we best use our strengths and help each other develop our weaknesses?

LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

LEADER EXPERIENCES Leaders who viewed this joint partnership as a positive experience noted the importance of being willing to learn from each other, as each leader has unique experiences, knowledge, and skills to contribute to the platoon and the partnership. Many noted that both the PL and PSG are necessary for an effective unit, and that the leaders can complement each other's strengths to benefit the platoon. Importantly, many PLs expressed a desire for their more experienced PSG to be willing to mentor, advise, and help them develop as leaders.

"They should both be involved with everything that goes on a daily basis to teach [each other]. You will never know everything you need to know…Can't be too proud to ask for help so to speak. If [the] PL is saying his thing and I don't understand what he is saying I would like to think I've never been too proud to ask what he is saying. [If] he doesn't understand, he has to be willing to set his ego aside and ask me to explain it a little bit better."
-SSG, years of experience unknown

"Ideally [the] PSG shouldn't have any problem that this young, inexperienced leader is in charge. They should look at it as someone they can mentor to be a better leader...[The] PL should look at [the] PSG as [a] mentor to go to when they have questions and ask how they should do things right and then tweak it to make it their own. I am responsible for plan, but go to [the] PSG and say 'You have done this a million times. Show me to do this right.'"
-2LT, 6 months as a PL

HELPFUL TIPS

Approach this relationship with an openness to learning from your counterpart.

- Individuals who are more focused on learning and mastering skills, as opposed to focusing solely on performing, are more likely to seek out challenges, learn from these experiences, acquire more skills and knowledge, and ultimately outperform those who do not have this learning focus.
- Focusing solely on performance rather than learning is associated with an increased fear of failure and lower self-efficacy when failures occur. This can hinder the ability to learn from failures and challenging experiences.

Learning from someone with more experience is important to personal and professional development.

- Learning from more experienced members of the organization (such as mentors) can result in higher performance and long-term career outcomes.

HELPFUL TIPS

Demonstrate your willingness to learn from your partner. Showing your openness to his or her advice and knowledge can improve the relationship between leadership partners.

- If the more experienced partner feels as if their counterpart is unwilling to learn, he or she is likely to have more negative feelings about the relationship, resulting in less support for the less experienced partner.
- Overall, these negative feelings can result in negative outcomes for both leaders.

Be proactive about seeking information. Proactive behaviors (especially from newcomers to the unit) such as information seeking improves individual and unit performance, as well as satisfaction within the unit.

It is important to both seek and provide constructive feedback from/to your partner.

- Learning to take constructive feedback is a vital component of a healthy working relationship.
- Exchanging feedback can increase your performance as individuals and as a leadership team by helping each other to learn and adjust your actions and strategies.

ARMY DOCTRINE

- **ADP 6-0 (2014). Mission Command. Section 12.**
- **FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development. Sections 1-6.**
- **TC 7-22.7 (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide. Sections 4.18, 5.1-5.2.**

MORE LEADER EXPERIENCES

"Humility is a huge thing. I don't know how many times in [the] first 6 months I said 'I don't know.' It doesn't subordinate yourself to your PSG, but it brings you down to a more humble approach of how do I learn from my NCO. Help me learn. That is their job to help you learn and be better. Don't say, 'I know everything, I learned it at school.'"

-2LT, 8 months as a PL

"It shouldn't be one is greater than the other. You both need [the other] to make it run effectively. You don't have one or the other there's no point. If you only need one power why do you need the other? What's the point? You need both."

-SSG, 1 year and 6 months as a PSG

"It's more about adapting to each other and adapt to strength and weakness and [having] communication to build that team. As long as you have communication and trust, I have found it beneficial to have many NCOs and learn from many SMEs and their experiences. It's an opportunity to be randomly assigned and adjust to different people, it shows your capability as a leader."

-1LT, 2 years and 9 months as a PL

"Complementary skills. You both have knowledge in different realms...so you balance each other out and execute as a team."

-2LT, 7 months as a PL

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How can we help to empower or support each other as leaders of the platoon?

What do you need from me?

How can I help you better lead our platoon?

SUPPORT & EMPOWER EACH OTHER

LEADER EXPERIENCES Leaders noted how important it is to not undermine their counterpart. Undermining one leader can lead to insubordination by Soldiers; if one leader does not have the loyalty and respect of the platoon, they cannot effectively guide the Soldiers within the platoon. Ultimately, this can impact the platoon's mission. Success requires both leaders.

"If the PSG doesn't support his PL whole heartedly, it can really easily lead to a situation where the loyalty is split. The platoon is more willing to follow [the] PSG than [the] PL. [The PSG] needs to do his part not to create insubordination, needs to show he supports [the] PL."
-1LT, 1 year as a PL

"In my relationship we try to empower each other. I try to give him info to run it without having to interrupt and he lets Soldiers know what I do behind the scenes. They don't see my face or what I do. He creates [a] face for me and I give him the power to run the platoon without me having to interrupt. We build each other up rather than saying one or the other has the power. Unfortunately [the] PSG puts out news about staying late or weekend work. So when I get good news I give it to him so he can be the good news fairy as well. Ways to empower each other."
-1LT, 2 years & 9 months as a PSG

Support & Empower

HELPFUL TIPS

Make sure to demonstrate support for your counterpart at all times, especially in front of the troops. In order for the platoon to be effective, Soldiers need to view their leaders as united and capable in their roles.

Providing support can include both work- and role-related support as well as emotional support.

- Work-related support includes providing information and feedback to your counterpart. This can be extremely useful for new leaders as they learn and adjust to the role.
- Emotional support includes demonstrating empathy, caring, and encouragement, which can be vital to reducing stress and increasing commitment to the unit and the Army.

Support & Empower

ARMY DOCTRINE

- **TC 7-22.7 (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide. Sections 3.7, 5.1-5.2, 8.1.**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What is your vision for the platoon?

What goals do you have for the platoon?

What does success look like to you?

How do you think we should track progress towards these goals?

What do you think is currently working well with the platoon?

What do you think can be improved?

What are the main issues you feel the platoon is currently facing?

How do you see us addressing these issues?

PLATOON VISION & GOALS

LEADER EXPERIENCES One of the most agreed on themes throughout the discussions with leaders was the importance of understanding and agreeing on a shared vision for the platoon, including having shared goals. Leaders said that having a common understanding of what the unit needs to improve upon was important to developing an effective platoon. Similarly, leaders discussed the importance of being on the same page when resolving issues and problems within the unit. Many suggested having open conversations about what's going right and wrong in the unit and then working together to resolve any shortcomings.

"Set goals and what is our vision for the platoon….you can set goals with PSG, your PSG can set goals and you can use those to measure success as platoon leadership. Provide a vision and a path for your platoon to follow…in leading my platoon anytime we have a clear direct vision or a goal to meet we are pretty effective in doing it...Identifying shortfalls and getting our platoon where we want it to be in the realm of physical fitness."

-2LT, 9 months as a PL

"He comes in do a little meet me, talk about goals and intents. Talks about platoon, what is going on, and then PL talks about goals and what he wants from SGT, section SGT, team, whatever. If they understand they move on and talk about what they want to do with goals they created together."

-SSG, 1 year as a PSG

HELPFUL TIPS

Tips for shared goals:

Make sure to be on the same page as your counterpart when setting goals and sharing your vision for the platoon.

Sometimes when working in pairs or teams, individual members may have personal goals that are not consistent with team goals.

- Having shared goals and a shared purpose among team members is crucial for team success as it results in increased perceptions that your teammates have similar values and objectives, which can result in higher quality communication, social integration, group affiliation, and cohesion.
- Shared goals can also increase beliefs among team members that the team will support you when striving to attain these valued outcomes which can increase satisfaction with your partner or team.

The impact of shared goals between you and your partner likely will trickle down to your subordinates. Unit goals help Soldiers determine on which activities they should focus their effort. This becomes even clearer when the two unit leaders have and express the same vision and goal for the team.

- If each leader has a different vision and set of goals for the unit, Soldier may be confused about which goals to focus on, which may hinder team performance.

The key to creating unity in shared goals is to set goals together. This helps increase overlap between each leader's personal goals and goals set for the team, as well as increase the quality of the goals that are set.

HELPFUL TIPS

Tips for overall goal-setting:

Simply having shared goals may not be effective if the goals that are set are not appropriate for platoon success. Below are some general tips for effective goal setting:

Use **SMART** goals. Goals are related to performance when they are specific and difficult (but attainable) as long as the person (or team) is committed to the goal, does not have conflicting goals, and has the necessary knowledge and skills to attain it.

Specific – goals should be specific (e.g., target PT standards) as opposed to vague "do your best" goals.

Measurable – if possible, set goals in which overall performance or progress can be measured. This can help with monitoring performance and adjusting efforts when necessary.

Attainable – setting goals that are not reasonably attainable can impact unit morale and satisfaction.

Relevant – goals that are more relevant to the platoon are more likely to be viewed as important and meaningful, thus increasing effort towards attainment.

Time-bound – goals should have a specific timeline to guide effort and monitor performance.

Phases of goal setting – These general phases are a good framework for setting and monitoring goals and should be conducted together with your counterpart.

ARMY DOCTRINE

- **FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development. Section 1-22, 3-106; Table 1-2.**
- **TC 7-22.7. (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide. Section 8.1.**

MORE LEADER EXPERIENCES

"We need to talk to each other if no one else does and figure out what is going on with [the] company. Be on same page, support each other, have same goal, and having everyone know you are on the same team. Not just supporting each other is important."

-1LT, 1 year as a PL

"All about being a team and working together to solve issues rather that one person trying to spearhead."

-SSG, 10 months as a PSG

"Platoon Sergeant and Platoon Leader have to discuss issues. If we do have Soldier issues, we want to keep [it at] its lowest level within ethics and protecting [the] Soldier."

-SFC, 7 years as a PSG

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What has the commander or first sergeant identified as working well or needing improvement within the platoon?

USING YOUR LEADERSHIP AS A RESOURCE

LEADER EXPERIENCES Leaders noted how company commanders and their first sergeants can help get a new platoon leader and platoon sergeant on the right footing. By communicating expectations and what works well, or doesn't work well, within the platoon, they can assist in setting a common understanding of where the platoon stands. They can also assist in helping PLs and PSGs figure out what their roles are and manage conflict if it arises.

"…both [the commander and first sergeant] together sitting down with both of us. There could be some cross-referenced information or talking about different things. If [we are] in the same room we understand what they are trying to say. Boss is there you say 'Roger sir' [and] actually absorb it. [I] think it should be done in a group setting."
-SFC, 1 year as a PSG

"They would help us work together, do our jobs better. Created a lot of cohesion not just within the troop, but [the] platoon itself."
-SSG, 1 year as a PSG

"We sit down and talk about both of our intent, commander and first sergeant's intent, mold them together."
-2LT, 6 months as a PL

HELPFUL TIPS

Learning from someone with more experience is important to personal and professional development.

- Learning from more experienced members of the organization (such as mentors) can result in higher performance and long-term career outcomes.

Be proactive about seeking information. Proactive behaviors (especially from newcomers to the unit) such as information seeking improves individual performance and satisfaction with the unit.

ARMY DOCTRINE

- **ADP 6.0 (2014). Mission Command.**
- **TC 7-22.7 (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide. Sections 5.1-5.2.**

ARMY DOCTRINE—QUICK REFERENCE

GENERAL SOURCES:

- ADP 6-22 (2012). Army Leadership.
- ADRP 6-22 (2012) Army Leadership.
- ATP 3-21.8 (2016). Infantry Platoon and Squad. Sections 1-46 to 1-48.
- FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development.
- TC 7-22.7 (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide.

ROLE EXPECTATIONS:

- ADP 6-0 (2014). Mission Command. Sections 10-12.
- ADP 7-0 (2012). Training Units and Developing Leaders. Section 24.
- ATP 3-21.8 (2016). Infantry Platoon and Squad. Sections 1-46 to 1-48.
- FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development. Sections 1-5, 1-21.
- TC 7-22.7 (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide. Sections 4.18, 5.1-5.2, 8.1.

COMMUNICATION:

- ADP 6-0 (2014). Mission Command. Sections 9, 24, 36-37.
- FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development. Sections 1-8, 3-11, 3-35, 3-22.

DECISION-MAKING:

- ADP 6-0 (2014). Mission Command. Sections 36-37.

ARMY DOCTRINE—QUICK REFERENCE

MANAGING CONFLICT:

- ADP 6-0 (2014). Mission Command. Sections 8-37.
- FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development. Table 7-13.

LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER:

- ADP 6.0 (2014). Mission Command. Section 12.
- FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development. Section 1-6.
- TC 7-22.7 (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide. Sections 4.18, 5.1-5.2.

SUPPORT AND EMPOWER EACH OTHER:

- TC 7-22.7 (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide. Sections 3.7, 5.1-5.2, 8.1.

PLATOON VISION AND GOALS:

- FM 6-22 (2015). Leader Development. Section 1-22, 3-106; Table 1-2.
- TC 7-22.7. (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide. Section 8.1.

USING YOUR LEADERSHIP AS A RESOURCE:

- ADP 6.0 (2014). Mission Command.
- TC 7-22.7 (2015). Noncommissioned Officer Guide. Sections 5.1-5.2.

Army Doctrine

P. 28

NOTES

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NOTES

A GUIDE FOR
EFFECTIVE PLATOON LEADER-
PLATOON SERGEANT
CO-LEADERSHIP

Product of the
U.S. Army Research Institute

The current discussion guide should be considered a draft and is being employed for further validation research. It is not meant for reproduction and/or distribution unless approved by the contacts listed.

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APPENDIX E

RESEARCH PRODUCT TRIFOLD VERSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE

What are your expectations for your role?

- What do you see as your primary responsibilities?

What are your expectations for my role?

- What do you see as my primary responsibilities?
- What does your ideal platoon leader/platoon sergeant partner look like?

What are your expectations for our joint leadership role?

- What boundaries do you view for each role? What is my lane and what is your lane?

What do you hope to gain from this relationship?

- How can we help each other reach our long-term personal and professional goals?

What is your preference for communication? Ideally, how often do you see us communicating about tasks or issues facing the platoon?

How do you see us making decisions about the platoon?

- What decisions do you see us making together? What decisions do you see us making independently?

How do you see us best managing conflict or resolving disagreements?

- What do we do if we are having issues coming to consensus or resolving problems?
- Are there preferences you have or things that work well for you?
- Are there things I should avoid that are more difficult or problematic?

What do you feel are your strengths and weaknesses?

- How can we best use our strengths and help each other develop our weaknesses?

How can we help to empower or support each other as leaders of the platoon? What do you need from me?

- How can I help you better lead our platoon?

What is your vision for the platoon?

- What goals do you have for the platoon?
- What does success look like to you?
- How do you think we should track progress towards these goals?

What do you think is currently working well with the platoon? What do you think can be improved?

- What are the main issues you feel the platoon is currently facing?
- How do you see us addressing these issues?

What has the company commander or first sergeant identified as working well or needing improvement within the platoon?

WHY USE THIS GUIDE

The platoon leader (PL) – platoon sergeant (PSG) leadership team is a unique and influential pair of roles that exist in the Army. The working relationship between the PL and PSG can have large effects on the platoon. It impacts the development of officers throughout the remainder of their careers and can influence NCO development, as well. Army doctrine makes it clear that the relationship between officers and NCOs is critical to the success of the U.S. Army (ADRP 6-22, U.S. Department of the Army, 2012; TC 7-22.7, U.S. Department of the Army, 2015). It is not uncommon for relationships to encounter difficulties, though, and certain partnerships, or aspects of partnerships, may prove challenging for those in leadership roles. Improving the relationship between a PL and their PSG improves the success of the unit, and the effectiveness of the U.S. Army.

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to facilitate a conversation between a PL and a PSG and aid in setting the foundation for an effective leadership team. The questions provide a starting point for you and your counterpart to learn about each other and the platoon as well as talk about expectations and a way forward for your unit. Leader teams who talk through the questions in the guide should have a greater awareness of themselves, their counterpart, and their unit. The result should be a unit that is more cohesive, effective, and efficient.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The guide focuses on areas that PLs and PSGs have identified as important aspects for leader teams to discuss. Topics include your roles, your partnership, and your vision for your unit. The guide is designed to facilitate a conversation that can occur over one or many time points whenever the PL and PSG have some time to spare. The product is not meant to be used for formal counseling. It is meant to be one informal tool in a leader's larger toolkit.

TIPS BY TOPIC

Helpful tips for each topic can be found in the centerfold, providing additional information for the questions posed in the "discussion guide" section.

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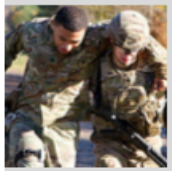
A GUIDE FOR

EFFECTIVE PLATOON LEADER-PLATOON SERGEANT CO-LEADERSHIP

Discussion Topics and Helpful Tips



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HELPFUL TIPS

ROLE EXPECTATIONS

Make sure to take the time to understand your role and responsibilities. Being aware of each role will help you and your partner stay in your lane, which can increase overall effectiveness and efficiency of your unit.

Discuss your view of your role and your counterpart's role to make sure you have a shared understanding of your respective responsibilities and how they work together to efficiently lead the platoon.

Having a shared understanding of your purpose and supporting each other can lead to improved team effectiveness.

COMMUNICATION

Although it may seem inconsequential, small talk can have huge impacts on a relationship. Frequent small talk can help you and your counterpart get to know each other and strengthen interpersonal relationships by showing you value that team member.

When discussing issues or actions to be taken in the platoon, make sure your comments are focused on behaviors or events.

Allow your counterpart equal opportunity to speak and try to stay on topic. Avoid being overly rigid and inflexible in your opinion, or indifferent towards your counterpart when having a conversation. Try not to give the impression that you are superior to whomever you are speaking, regardless of rank.

Another key component of good communication is active listening. This can decrease the likelihood that the message will be distorted or misunderstood.

Nonverbal communication, such as body language (e.g., rolling your eyes), can send conflicting signals that can undermine your message.

SUPPORT & EMPOWER EACH OTHER

Make sure to demonstrate support for your counterpart at all times, especially in front of the troops. In order for the platoon to be effective, Soldiers need to view their leaders as united and capable in their roles.

Providing support can include both work- and role-related support as well as emotional support.

Work-related support includes providing information and feedback to your counterpart. This can be extremely useful for new leaders as they learn and adjust to the role.

Emotional support includes demonstrating empathy, caring, and encouragement, which can be vital to reducing stress and increasing commitment to the unit and the Army.

DECISION-MAKING

It is important to allow each individual to have a voice in the decision making process. This can lead to more constructive discussions, debate, and better participation in the decision process. Ultimately, this will lead to better outcomes for the platoon.

Allowing both parties to participate in the decision making process can improve trust.

When making decisions, it can be helpful to maintain awareness of outside influences and demands to remind both leaders that the decision should be met with external approval.

When making decisions, try to stay level-headed and keep emotions to a minimum. Keep personal criticisms out of the discussion. Getting too emotional or personal can decrease decision-making quality and performance.

When discussing ideas and opinions, sometimes challenges to an idea can improve the decision quality. A "devil's advocate" can be useful if the challenges are objective and constructive.

Try to integrate both PL and PSG knowledge and perspectives when reaching agreement for a decision.

MANAGING CONFLICT

All relationships and teams inevitably encounter conflict; however, not all conflict is inherently bad. It can be healthy to team functioning if handled well.

Conflict can arise from many sources, such as differing goals or objectives, interests, values, and miscommunications or misunderstandings. It can signal the need for change or a problem that needs to be addressed.

The key to managing conflict is to confront it rather than avoid it, and approach the issue constructively, civilly, and without personal attacks or threats.

Productive conflict management behaviors include:

- Active listening.
- Generating alternative solutions, finding common goals, and effectively communicating your perspective.
- Remaining open to ideas and perspectives different from your own.

One of the most important things to remember is to not personally attack others when disagreeing and managing conflict. Personal attacks on others can create negative feelings of self-worth, increase defensive reactions, and damage interpersonal relationships.

LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

Approach this relationship with an openness to learning from your counterpart. Learning from someone with more experience is important to personal and professional development.

Demonstrate your willingness to learn from your partner. Showing your openness to his or her advice and knowledge can improve the relationship between leadership partners.

Be proactive about seeking information. Proactive behaviors (especially from newcomers to the unit) such as information seeking improves individual and unit performance, as well as satisfaction within the unit.

It is important to both seek and provide constructive feedback from/to your partner. Learning to take constructive feedback is a vital component of a healthy working relationship.

Exchanging feedback can increase your performance as individuals and as a leadership team by helping each other to learn and adjust your actions and strategies.

PLATOON VISION & GOALS

The impact of shared goals between you and your partner likely will trickle down to your subordinates. Unit goals help Soldiers determine on which activities they should focus their effort. This becomes even clearer when the two unit leaders have and express the same vision and goal for the team.

The key to creating unity in shared goals is to set goals together. This helps increase overlap between each leader's personal goals and goals set for the team, as well as increase the quality of the goals that are set.

If each leader has a different vision and set of goals for the unit, Soldier may be confused about which goals to focus on, which may hinder team performance.

Use **SMART** goals. Goals are related to performance when they are **S**pecific, **M**easureable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-bound. Goals should be specific and difficult (but attainable) as long as the person (or team) is committed to the goal, does not have conflicting goals, and has the necessary knowledge and skills to attain it.

USING YOUR LEADERSHIP AS A RESOURCE

Learning from someone with more experience is important to personal and professional development.

- Learning from more experienced members of the organization (such as mentors) can result in higher performance and long-term career outcomes.