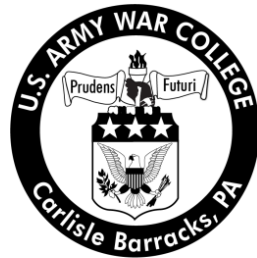


Strategy Research Project

Negative Leadership

by

Colonel David M. Oberlander
United States Army



United States Army War College
Class of 2013

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT: A

Approved for Public Release
Distribution is Unlimited

This manuscript is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

*Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188*

The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. **PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) xx-03-2013		2. REPORT TYPE STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Negative Leadership				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Colonel David M. Oberlander United States Army				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Dr. Richard C. Bullis Department of Command Leadership, and Management				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution A: Approved for Public Release. Distribution is Unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Word Count: 5728					
14. ABSTRACT Senior leaders must have the moral courage to modify the behavior or eliminate negative leadership in the Army. If action is not taken immediately, negative leaders and their toxic leadership style will be taught to their subordinates, the future leaders of the Army. The perpetual cycle of negative leadership has the potential to continually affect the climate of units, culture of the Army, and our profession. This paper is comprised of three sections. The first section takes a look at the available definitions and provides a comparison between the military and civilian definitions. The second section provides the different forms or levels of negative leadership and discusses whether the Army has the correct definition. It reviews how negative leaders affect the Army culture and provides recent examples of negative leadership. The final section takes a look at what the Army is doing to combat negative leadership and proposes actions the senior leaders must take now, before this style of leadership changes the Army culture and our profession.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Senior Leaders, Toxic Leadership, Culture					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UU	b. ABSTRACT UU	c. THIS PAGE UU			UU

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

Negative Leadership

by

Colonel David M. Oberlander
United States Army

Dr. Richard C. Bullis
Department of Command Leadership, and Management
Project Adviser

This manuscript is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

Abstract

Title: Negative Leadership
Report Date: March 2013
Page Count: 30
Word Count: 5728
Key Terms: Senior Leaders, Toxic Leadership, Culture
Classification: Unclassified

Senior leaders must have the moral courage to modify the behavior or eliminate negative leadership in the Army. If action is not taken immediately, negative leaders and their toxic leadership style will be taught to their subordinates, the future leaders of the Army. The perpetual cycle of negative leadership has the potential to continually affect the climate of units, culture of the Army, and our profession. This paper is comprised of three sections. The first section takes a look at the available definitions and provides a comparison between the military and civilian definitions. The second section provides the different forms or levels of negative leadership and discusses whether the Army has the correct definition. It reviews how negative leaders affect the Army culture and provides recent examples of negative leadership. The final section takes a look at what the Army is doing to combat negative leadership and proposes actions the senior leaders must take now, before this style of leadership changes the Army culture and our profession.

Negative Leadership

Toxic leaders are commanders who put their own needs first, micro-managed subordinates, behaved in a mean spirited manner, or displayed poor decision making.¹

—General Martin E. Dempsey
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Our senior leaders must have the moral courage to modify the behavior or eliminate negative leadership in the Army before these negative leaders and their toxic leadership style is perceived to be acceptable to their subordinates, the future leaders of the Army. The perpetual cycle of negative leadership has the potential to continually affect the climate of units, the culture of the Army, and the military profession. Stories abound about units that are affected by negative leaders. Consider the following example. The unit's Quarterly Training Brief (QTB) and Unit Status Report (USR) data is impeccable. The data shows that 100% are qualified on their assigned weapons and on all mandatory training. Training exercises and ranges are conducted to near perfection. In fact, the unit has the best numbers in the Division and has earned many accolades from the senior leadership. Then something catches your eye on a reenlistment report, the unit's reenlistment numbers are excellent, but there are a high number of reenlistments for a new duty station. The data is not overwhelming, but it makes you wonder why so many soldiers are opting out of what seems to be a very good unit. A month later, you receive a copy of the units annual Command Climate Survey and your attention is drawn to a number of individual responses that seem to represent low morale and unit discord in the report. You decide to talk to the Inspector General's (IG) office to see if any complaints have been submitted, and to the Staff Judge Advocates (SJA) office to see if there are any patterns to the Uniform Code of Military Justice

(UCMJ) actions. A trend begins to become apparent. You and your Command Sergeants Major (CSM) decide to conduct informal sensing sessions with the unit. As a result you find out that although the unit is performing well, the attitude of the unit members indicate a negative command climate and leadership. Leaders, especially senior leaders, who can recognize the difference between “high standards” and malicious behavior, are initially hesitant, but ultimately report serious concerns about the senior commander. This scenario could happen in any work place, a battalion, brigade, or staff section. Senior leaders must pay attention not only to mission accomplishment, but also to the nuances of how a unit is achieving the results. Senior leaders must have the moral courage and exhibit their own leadership skills by recognizing the need for an investigation, conducting an investigation, and making changes necessary to address the negative leadership and improve the environment. Taking the easy way out to avoid waves may appear to solve issues in short run, but does not address issues in the long term. In the meantime negative leadership may continue and may be taught to the junior leaders.

The term “toxic leadership” has been a topic of discussion with the Army leadership, military academics, and practitioners since it was first coined in 1996 by Dr. Marcia Whicker in her book *Toxic Leaders*.² Recent media articles about senior leaders being removed from command for demonstrating a negative leadership style have brought this topic to the forefront.³ What was normally discarded as a tough leader exercising appropriate “discipline” in the unit is now viewed differently. This paper is comprised of three sections. The first section takes a look at the available toxic leadership definitions and provides a comparison between the military and civilian

definitions. The second section identifies the different forms of negative leadership and discusses whether the Army applies the correct definition. It also reviews how negative leaders affect the Army culture and provides recent examples of negative leadership. The final section takes a look at what the Army is doing to combat negative leadership and proposes actions the senior leaders must take now, before this style of leadership changes the Army culture and our profession.

Identifying the very best leaders to lead future formations might be the most important task that our senior leaders perform. Consequently, removing negative leaders is also a requirement. Senior leaders must have the moral courage to remove negative leaders (Lieutenant Colonel and above) from positions of command and authority. This first step in the identification and removal of these leaders is to be clear about the nuances of negative leadership, explicitly articulate what is acceptable (and expected) leadership, and finally what crosses the line into the negative realm. Such articulation begins with the proper awareness and education in the Army's Professional Military Education System.

Negative Leadership Definition

The Army defines Toxic Leadership in Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22, *Army Leadership*, as a component of negative leadership:

One form of negative leadership is toxic leadership. Toxic leadership is a combination of self-centered attitudes, motivations, and behaviors that have adverse effects on subordinates, the organization, and mission performance. This leader lacks concern for others and the climate of the organization, which leads to short- and long-term negative effects. The toxic leader operates with an inflated sense of self-worth and from acute self-interest. Toxic leaders consistently use dysfunctional behaviors to deceive, intimidate, coerce, or unfairly punish others to get what they want for themselves. Prolonged use of negative leadership to influence followers undermines the followers' will, initiative, and potential and destroys unit morale.⁴

Although the Army definition says toxic leadership is one form of negative leadership, in practice, negative leadership equates to toxic leadership, which is a problem that must be corrected. Toxic leadership is a subset of negative leadership and is not interchangeable. The Army has allowed the term “toxic leadership” to be used for every instance of negative leadership, which has confused leaders and subordinates alike. As the definition states, toxic leadership is only one form, of many, in the definition of a negative leader. Not all forms of negative leadership should be consolidated into one form, toxic leadership. All of the forms of negative leadership must be defined and taught; otherwise the definition allows an individual to claim that their leadership is toxic instead of the correct form, which will have an impact on Army culture and a unit’s command climate surveys.

Lieutenant General Walter F. Ulmer, Jr. (Retired) in his article *Toxic Leadership*, proposes the following definition, “Toxic leaders are individuals whose behavior appears driven by self-centered careerism at the expense of their subordinates and unit, and whose style is characterized by abusive and dictatorial behavior that promotes an unhealthy organizational climate.”⁵ He also surmises that because there is no standard definition, it leads subordinates to make a subjective estimate of a superiors’ behavior. However, the data on toxic leadership becomes less subjective when you assess the impact it has on the climate of an organization.

To gain a better understanding of the term “Toxic Leadership,” let us review what civilian practitioners have written. Although a relatively new term, a number of books and articles have been written on Toxic Leadership. The term was originally used by Dr. Whicker in 1996. She defined three types of organizational leaders: trustworthy,

transitional, and toxic. The “trustworthy” leaders were described as ones who put the goals of the organization and its workers ahead of their own self-interest (green light type of leader). “Transitional” leaders are those concerned with the approval of others and their self-image as a leader (yellow light type of leader). “Toxic” leaders were described as being maladjusted, malcontent, and often malevolent, even malicious. They succeed by tearing others down. They glory in turf protection, fighting, and controlling rather than uplifting followers. The Toxic leader will accomplish the mission, but at the cost of the organization (red light type of leader).”⁶

Jean Lipman-Blumen who has written a number of books and articles on toxic leadership, defines a toxic leader as:

...leaders who engage in numerous *destructive behaviors* and who exhibit certain *dysfunctional personal characteristics*. To count as toxic, these behaviors and qualities of character must inflict some reasonably serious and enduring harm on their followers and their organizations. The intent to harm others or to enhance the self at the expense of others distinguishes seriously toxic leaders from the careless or unintentional toxic leaders, who also cause negative effects.⁷

She says that the worst toxic leaders are the ones that combine several negative attributes and behaviors like deliberately undermining, demeaning, intimidating, misleading subordinates, and maliciously setting peers against each other.⁸

Another expert, Professor Sutton in his book, takes the discussion of toxic leaders further by applying two elements to delineate a toxic leader: 1) After talking to an alleged negative leader, does the “target” feel oppressed, humiliated, de-energized or belittled by the person? In particular, does the target feel worse about him or herself? 2) Does the alleged negative leaders aim his or her venom at people who are *less powerful* rather than at those who are more powerful?⁹ The first element recognizes that negative leadership will manifest itself in the people under the command of this leader.

Obtaining this type of information (as described in the earlier scenario), allows a leader to assess both the end results and what affects the negative leader had on others. This is important as we develop ways to understand negative leadership. Then we can teach junior leaders to recognize toxicity in others and the behavior they do not want to adopt themselves. The second element reflects Professor Sutton's "kiss up" and "kick down" concept where a negative leader will perform in a way to make themselves or the unit present a positive image in the eyes of their boss.¹⁰ They will then use their position and power to control subordinates and build a toxic environment in the organization.

The Army's definition of a toxic leader seems to be in line with civilian practitioners, but more work needs to be done to eliminate the perception that all negative leaders are toxic. Toxic leadership is one form of negative leadership, but there are other forms or levels of leadership that are negative and harmful to an organization that are not toxic in the true sense. The following table provides a way to think about and identify the different negative leadership styles of a negative leader. The column on the left lists negative leadership forms and the top row lists classifications of personnel who either observe or are impacted by the leadership.

Each cell in the table contains characteristics for each type of negative leadership from the perspective of each classification of personnel. The table does not discuss self-identification. If a leader is comfortable with whom they are (attitude and behavior); how the organization is performing; and sees their treatment of subordinates as appropriate to ensure mission success, which reflects positively on them. They see them self as behaving appropriately, otherwise they would change. The characteristics for a toxic leader are based on the Army's current definition a toxic leadership, "Toxic

leadership is a combination of self-centered attitudes, motivations, and behaviors that have adverse effects on subordinates, the organization, and mission performance...”¹¹

Table.1 Forms of Negative Leadership

Negative Leadership Forms	Subordinates	Peers	Superiors
Toxic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belittles subordinates in front of their subordinates and peers. • Arrogant. • Self-serving. • Conversations focus on personal accomplishments and not subordinate performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything is about this leader. • Uses external excuses when something goes wrong. • Rarely takes blame. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes everything personal. • Very” tough” leader in all circumstances. • Uses external excuses when something goes wrong. • Few compliments of subordinates. • Officers resign, especially junior officers.
Aggressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insensitive to personal needs and requirements. • Cares only about themselves. • Micro-manager. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undercuts peers. • Focuses only on their unit and refuses to assist others. • Poor interaction with peers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always ask for more – more missions, training time, funding.
Hard to work for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always at work. • No balance in life. • Lacks empathy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reputation/Stories from other peers. • Limited peer observation – rumors of dissatisfaction from your subordinates who have talked to their subordinates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Can Do” attitude. • Needs balance in life. • Officers requesting change of duty or duty station.
Unpredictable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extreme variances in behavior. • Always changing their mind. • Limits initiative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extreme variances in behavior. • Does things at the last minute. • Late decision affects my unit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extreme variances in behavior. • (input provided by staff) • Lots of “last minute” crises

An aggressive leader is organizationally-oriented and determined to accomplish the mission the best way they see fit. They are seen as insensitive /uncaring to their subordinates, because they speak their mind and do not use politically correct terms. They understand that different styles of leadership should be used for different people,

but often see that as a waste of time when they could be direct and make their point up front. Aggressive leaders see themselves as the single leader of the organization, so they should be sought after for counsel and guidance on every decision, especially those decisions that will be sent to their superiors or outside of the organization. They may also be characterized as a micro-manager providing approval for every action.

The “hard to work for” leadership style is a leader whose work ethic is unforgiving. This leader will do just about anything for their country, even if it costs them their family, friends, and the trust and respect of subordinates. The expectation of this leader is that if they are at work, then their subordinates should be at work. This is a leader that either does not have or cannot find balance in their lives, balance between work, family, and fun. They live and breathe “Army” and unit performance to the detriment of other aspects of their life – single minded in every action. Families (or other activities) are “distractions” from work and, consequently, aren’t considered to be useful in enhancing organizational performance. They don’t care that there are more Soldiers that are married – “If the Army wanted you to have a wife, they would have issued you one.”

The unpredictable leadership style is a leader that does not provide the proper guidance a subordinate needs to complete a task and then belittles the subordinate for not “reading the mind” of the leader. It is human nature to want predictability in one’s life and having a leader that does not provide that makes the subordinate miserable. They feel like they are wasting their time on every task, because no matter what they provide, it will be changed by the unpredictable leader. For example, a brigade commander that yells at a battalion commander for their poor operational readiness rate on their

vehicles, and then yells at the company commander for having their Soldiers in the motor pool fixing vehicles past 1700 on Friday. Another example is when the unpredictable leader has the staff complete a staff analysis on a future operation without providing appropriate guidance, and then spends an hour yelling at the staff for the poor analysis.

The list of negative leadership styles is not all inclusive, other definitions like destructive or incompetent could be added based on the situation to assist in determining the style of leader. Individuals willing to provide realistic feedback, or a senior leader that was paying attention to the nuances of a unit, by reviewing external tools like the Army's Command Climate Survey and/or pattern of performance in the leaders Officer Evaluation Reports (OERs), may find the table useful to determine if a leader is negative and what type of negative leadership style that a leader may possess. When a style has been determined, the senior leader can decide on the correct action to be taken.

Does the Army culture encourage behavior traits that are toxic? George Reed and Richard Olsen have suggested that "Toxic people thrive only in a toxic system."¹² This paper is not suggesting that Army culture has changed to become a toxic culture, but many senior leaders would say it is hard to contest when, based on the 2010 Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL) published in May of 2011, 1 in 5 (20%) (sampling error +/- 3) of superiors are viewed as demonstrating patterns of negative or toxic behavior.¹³ "Eighty three percent of Army leaders indicate that they have observed one or more leaders demonstrate negative leadership types of behavior (e.g., over-controlling, narcissistic, self-promoting) in the past year."¹⁴

The survey reflects a negative environment for three reasons: First, it goes back to the “kiss up” and “kick down” concept described by Sutton, and to the fact that in the CASAL published in May of 2011 “toxic leaders accomplish their goals (66%) to a greater extent than constructive leaders (64%).”¹⁵ Negative leaders are excellent at making themselves look good in front of the boss and are very good at accomplishing the mission, albeit at the expense of subordinates and units. At times, from a senior leader’s perspective, mission accomplishment is more important, because they have a senior leader whom they are trying to impress, which may lead to the moral courage point. Unlike private companies where senior leaders may be hired into an organization, the Army promotes from within, which make it very competitive and may breed a negative culture. Since only senior leaders of a negative leader, not peers or subordinates, write their evaluations, and the Army boards promote and select command opportunities based on those evaluations, a negative leaders may continue to be promoted and selected for command positions. Some subordinates see this type of behavior, see that it works, but internally know that it is wrong. This may be one reason some subordinates responded negatively in the CASAL survey.

The second reason is the fact that the Army has provided the wrong definition to junior leaders. The term “toxic” has been misused and attached to any form of negative or poor leadership. Any time a subordinate feels that they were unjustly criticized, then their leadership is toxic. It is a stigma that needs to be corrected in order to prevent leaders from being characterized as toxic when in fact it may be a leadership style that the superior selected to motivate the subordinate. A recent study on ethical behavior by the Army Center of Excellence for the Professional Military Ethic, *ACPME Technical*

Report 2010-01: MNF-I Excellence in Character and Ethical Leadership (EXCEL) Study, stated, “The Army should develop leaders who understand the line between being firm ... and being abusive; and identify and separate those found to be abusive.”¹⁶ This report demonstrates there are still senior leaders in need of education on the differences and that there are alternatives to a negative leadership style.

The third reason is the impact that negative senior leaders have on the sub-cultures of the Army culture. As related in the article, “Organizational Culture: Applying A Hybrid Model to the U.S. Army,” Stephan Gerras, Leonard Wong, and, Charles Allen imply that because the Army is a mature culture, it would make changing the culture “extremely hard.”¹⁷ With so few negative leadership incidents, although one is too many, the chances of changing the culture of the Army are unlikely. However, negative leaders have an impact on the sub-culture in the military, especially in some of the smaller branches where the number of senior leaders is small. If a senior colonel or general officer is toxic and you as the reader accept the premise that subordinates will emulate their leader, then those subordinate leaders will follow the traits of their leadership and have a significant impact on future leaders. Subordinates see what works and if they are part of the “inner-circle” all the better. To help explain this last statement, an article written by Dr. Stephen Gerras, 2004 Division Commander Study and Leader-Member Exchange (LMX), talks about how the LMX theory defines the “in-group” and “out-group” of senior leaders. The in-group are the, “small number of trusted subordinates,”¹⁸ referred to as the inner-circle, while everyone else is considered the “out-group” or this paper calls the outer-circle. Those in the outer-circle may perceive that those in the inner-circle have an exceptional work relationship with the senior leader. Those in the

outer-circle may see the senior leader as biased and toxic. As stated by Gary Yukl in *Leadership in Organizations*, “The primary source of leader influence is legitimate authority along with coercive power and to some extent, reward power.”¹⁹ Following his premise, then a senior leader who has the legitimate authority, mainly uses coercive power to influence his/her subordinates, and if you are not part of the inner-circle, then you will see that coercive power as negative. This theory provides another example of how much we still have to learn in this field in order to understand and make better recommendations on the solutions to change a negative leader’s behavior.

There are headlines in the media about senior leaders under investigation or found guilty of bullying their staffs and not providing an effective working environment. The one thing all of these leaders have in common is that they have given all of their adult lives for their country and for an organization that they truly believe in. Ego had a lot to do with how they were perceived, but were they toxic or just aggressive, hard to work for, or unpredictable?

A three-star general was investigated by the Department of Defense Inspector General’s office for having, “mismanaged his office, harassed and bullied his senior staff, and overall failed in his leadership of the Pentagon’s largest program, according to a previously undisclosed internal report.”²⁰ Witnesses in the Inspector General’s reports stated that the three-star general, “could go from being a charming person, when around officials senior to him, to ‘reaming people out’ in a matter of minutes.” Another witness described him, “as a ‘terrific actor’ who could be gracious and complimentary in front of external stakeholders, but who would quickly turn around and treat his staff badly.”²¹

Last year, two brigade commanders and a number of senior military officers were relieved of their commands for creating a toxic environment. One was a Nebraska National Guard Colonel and brigade commander in Iraq who was reported to have publicly belittled, berated or disrespected his subordinates.²² He “created an overall environment of anxiety and degradation in which open communication and professional discussion were nearly impossible and members of his command lived in abject fear.”²³

The second was a colonel and brigade commander stationed in Germany, “Life in the Brigade, by most accounts, was hell.”²⁴ “Senior officers said the Brigade Commander threatened their careers and dressed them down when they could not follow his confusing guidance. Before a one-star general arrived to investigate the withering command climate, the Brigade Commander gathered his command staff to bully them into silence, several subordinates said.”²⁵ Has ten years of war created a culture in the Army that makes it acceptable for leaders to be more aggressive?

These recent examples would indicate a rise in negative leadership, but media awareness is requiring Army’s senior leadership to apply more emphasis on negative leadership. The Army now recognizes that not all leadership is positive or good for the organization and is trying to address this through surveys, training, and evaluation tools. Recent incidents show how negative leadership (toxic) has existed and is now showing itself in recent examples of senior leadership. More needs to be done to prevent this from occurring with the future leadership. The Army must accurately define and identify various types of negative leadership in order to effectively address conduct. The Army must educate both senior leaders and future leaders in recognizing and correctly labeling negative conduct.

Current Strategy

The Army acknowledges that there is an issue with negative leadership as stated in the 2010 Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey. This survey concluded, “There is no indication that the toxic leadership issue will correct itself.”²⁶ Since this survey, a number of initiatives have been implemented to identify and mentor, teach, or eliminate the current toxic leaders. These initiatives include the Commander’s Assessment tool, Army’s Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback (MSAF), and enhancing leader development. Leadership lessons and senior leader visits that talk about negative leadership styles have also been added to all of the Army Professional Military Education courses. However, more needs to be done. Although the Army has taken initiatives to prevent negative leadership and to reduce the number of negative leaders who rise up through the ranks, positions of greater responsibility (command) are still based solely on their ability to complete the mission and make the unit look good and not on their ability to effectively lead Soldiers and make the organization even more effective.

More also need to be done to refine/improve, develop/enhance these tools and training. Soldiers at any level must trust that leaders at every level believe that holding superiors accountable is just as important as holding subordinates accountable.

The Army’s Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback (MSAF) program, or as it is sometimes called the 360-degree assessment, is a tool that “provides individual feedback to leaders related to the eight leadership competencies as described in FM 6-22, *Army Leadership*. Assessments are anonymous (protect the identity of the assessor) and results are confidential.”²⁷ It allows a leader to focus on self-development, but similar processes have the capability to be used as an evaluative tool for career

progression. Commanders may be provided with a roll-up analysis identifying strengths and weaknesses of the leaders in their organization, while individual assessments remain confidential. The assessment also gives insight to a leader, helping them understand how their conduct is perceived by others and how it creates a negative climate. The tool has the potential to show senior leaders more than just a leader's job performance and their ability to "Kiss up," it must show their leadership style and the way they treat their subordinates. As discussed with Dr. Stephen Gerras at the United States Army War College, the MSAF is a tool that could be used by senior leaders, not as a roll-up of the organization, but as an individual assessment to indicate nuances in the climates and leadership style of a subordinate. If warranted, with additional indicators, the MSAF may justify a Commander's Inquiry or investigation. The tool would have to be used wisely by superiors in order to retain the trust, respect, loyalty of the subordinates.

United States Army Climate Assessment Program is defined in Army Command Policy, Army Regulation 600–20, and "requires commanders of company-size units to conduct the "Command Climate Survey" as a tool for reviewing the climate factors (for example, leadership, cohesion, morale) that affect their unit's effectiveness."²⁸ The survey gives a leader the effectiveness in 21 different climate areas that can be used for self-development and/or reviewed by senior leaders to determine climate of a unit. The problem with this program is that it is only required at the company size units and voluntary at higher levels. With only minor modifications, this program could be expanded to battalion, brigade, and division level organizations to assess their climate and effectiveness.

Officer Evaluations Reports (OER) are an important tool in determining a pattern of behavior in a leader, but is only as good as the write-up in the evaluation. Even with the new revisions to the OER, unless subordinates are allowed input (like the MSAF), a senior rater is not reviewing the complete picture. If the rater and senior rater do not perceive a negative environment or determine that the leader may be a “tough leader,” but not toxic, the individual will continue to get promoted based on work performance and future potential. Subordinates must have input into a leader’s evaluation, even if it is only input from 360-degree assessment or similar assessment. The changes to the evaluations system, like the rest of the tools, must include the “complete picture” of a leader.

These initiatives follow what is written in Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 7-0, Training Units and Developing Leaders, in that we learn through our own experiences, our own mistakes, and through candid and honest feedback from superiors, peers, and subordinates:

In operational assignments, leaders learn to adapt to new situations and develop on the job through training and education. More significantly, they develop through challenging, unfamiliar experiences that require them to adapt theory to reality. They learn through regular and as-needed feedback. They learn from their mistakes. They learn to take risks and experiment with non-textbook solutions to problems. They learn what they do not know and fill the gaps through self-development. Operational assignments are the crucible of leader development.²⁹

The current initiatives, with some minor modifications, work towards improving the assessment tools. To do this, we must first identify and define the different forms of negative leadership (toxic, aggressive, hard to work for, unpredictable, etc.), provide training, mentoring, and candid counseling to help correct the behavior before it

becomes a problem, and thereby negatively affecting the climate and effectiveness of the organization.

A great example of starting at the junior level is the program at the United States Army Military Police School, where *Toxic Leadership* by Colonel George Reed and *Toxic Leadership: Part Deux*, by Colonel George Reed and Lieutenant Colonel Richard Olsen are mandatory reading in both the Military Police Basic Officer Leader Course and Military Police Captains Career Course and are referenced throughout each course by instructors and guest speakers. However, as with the MSAF, Climate Assessment, and OER, implementation of this program has raised some questions. Although a great initiative, two points can be raised: the first is, do Second Lieutenants and Captains really understand the concept of negative or toxic leadership (assuming they are using the correct definition), or do they, based on the social environment they grew up in, feel that if someone is tough on them or a very demanding leader that they are "toxic"? In talking with instructors at the Military Police School, they seem to spend a lot of time ensuring they do not spread the "toxic" stigma unless the actions are truly toxic, because the definitions and forms of negative leadership have not been defined. The second point is that this is an internal initiative and not all inclusive in the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, or the total Army force.

Then we must provide more than just recognition of the different leadership forms, we must put a greater emphasis on developing the communication skills of our future leaders. We can no longer afford to put a Band-aid on the problem; we must start from the beginning of a leader's lifelong learning process. If we expect leaders to understand the different levels of negative leadership, then we must begin to teach

them not only the definitions, but also what is acceptable, differences between the forms of negative behavior and real-life examples early in their careers.

The first courses that offer insight to negative leadership are offered during the Command and General Staff Officers' Course (CGSOC) in the common core called, "Developing Organizations and Leaders," which focuses on the challenges that field grade officers face as they develop and lead organizations within the 21st century. The course's goal is to expand their context of leadership and what it means to influence the development of organizations and leaders as a field grade officer.

The School for Command Preparation at Fort Leavenworth, which hosts the Pre-Command Course (PCC) for Battalion and Brigade Commanders and Command Sergeants Majors (CSM), has initiated two programs that discuss command climate and toxic leadership. The first program is the benefits of a positive command climate and the affects of toxic leadership, which has both classroom content and discussions. The second program is specifically for the Brigade Pre-Command/CSM Course and includes an Introspective Leadership Assessment (ILA) that is administered by LWM III Consulting, LLC. The company conducts a weekend session that focuses on "balanced readiness" and includes private "coaching sessions" where the students review their ILA with a coach.³⁰ The goals of these two programs are to provide recognition and self-development tools to senior leaders that will have an impact on the Army's future leadership.

Other tools could also be developed. Using interactive software with video, audio and text allows the student to learn through their most receptive media. Interactive technology could be developed for use during pre-commissioning, or during a junior

leaders training, to teach leaders about positive and negative leadership styles through interactive software and stories. Army Doctrine Publication 7-0 states, “they (Soldiers) learn through regular and as-needed feedback. They learn from their mistakes. They learn to take risks and experiment with non-textbook solutions to problems.”³¹

We must also expand junior leader’s knowledge in communication skills. The current curriculum has a lesson on what these skills are and there are some counseling lessons where a leader may practice oral and written communication skills, but these need to be expanded to include interaction skill that build a positive climate and work environment. If we wait until a leader has entered an organization without the proper education, they will fall into the trap of emulating negative behavior of their leaders. If those leaders are negative, then we will continue to promulgate negative leadership. We are told by senior leaders and the Pre-Command Course at Fort Leavenworth to not change our leadership style, we are who we are by that time in our careers. If we accept that assumption, then how do we prevent senior leaders from being negative leaders in command? It is done first by providing the right command climate and work environment as they are promoted through the ranks. Second, a complete evaluation of the leader must be completed during command and promotion boards for officers in the grade of lieutenant colonel and higher and command sergeants major.

Conclusion

Senior leaders can do more to prevent negative leadership. We must define the various forms and degrees of negative leadership. Not all negative leadership is toxic. We need to build on the efforts already undertaken to address negative leadership. Our senior leadership must be able to identify negative behavior and be willing to take corrective action early in a leader’s career. In the short term, negative leaders may

produce the end results, but in the long term, negative leaders will undermine morale, create a negative climate and impair the effectiveness of those under his/her command.

Historical references, senior leaders that have recently been asked to retire or resign, and the Center for Army Leaders Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL) clearly demonstrate that there is, if not part of the Army culture, a sub-culture that fosters a negative leadership style. But, when you look at the number of senior leaders in the Army, it is best to reflect on what General Martin Dempsey stated in reference to the CASAL Survey, “It’s important to remember that the vast majority of leaders in the Army are very good and are deeply committed to leading our nation’s sons and daughters.”³²

Today’s senior leaders must have the moral courage to stop negative subordinate leaders before they achieve a senior leader rank and infect their subordinates. As George Reed and Richard Olsen stated in their Military review article called “Toxic Leadership: Part Deux,” “Sometimes leaders overestimate their own ability to identify the impact of their subordinates’ actions and fail to step in when subordinates exhibit toxic tendencies. The superior might see some behaviors as merely “a bit rough” and fail to see the full measure in the ranks.”³³ To achieve these goals, the Army must agree on the definitions, implement a comprehensive program in every United States Army Training and Doctrine Command school, teach future leaders to be positive leaders throughout their careers, and to recognize, if need be, the moral courage to eliminate these negative leaders.

Endnotes

¹ Greg Jaffe, “Army Worries about ‘Toxic Leaders’ in Ranks,” 25 June 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/national-security/army-worries-about-toxic-leaders-in-ranks/2011/06/25/AGThw4kH_story.html (accessed December 2, 2012).

² Marcia Lynn Whicker, *Toxic Leaders: When Organizations Go Bad* (Westport, CT: Quorum Books, 1996), 11.

³ Joe Gould, "Ex-Brigade Commander Slammed for Behavior," November, 20, 2011, <http://www.armytimes.com/news/2011/11/army-brigade-commander-slammed-for-behavior-112011w/> (accessed December 9, 2012).

⁴ U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Leadership*, Army Doctrine Publication 6-22 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, August 1, 2012), 3.

⁵ Walter F. Ulmer Jr., "Toxic Leadership: What Are We Talking About?," *Army* 62, no.6 (June 2012), 48, http://www.ausa.org/publications/armymagazine/archive/2012/06/Documents/Ulmer_0612.pdf (accessed February 28, 2013).

⁶ Marcia Lynn Whicker, *Toxic Leaders: When Organizations Go Bad* (Westport, CT: Quorum Books, 1996), 11.

⁷ Jean Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders: Why We Follow Destructive Bosses and Corrupt Politicians – and How We Can Survive Them*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 18.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 19-22.

⁹ Robert I. Sutton, *The No Asshole Rule: Building a Civilized Workforce and Surviving One that Isn't* (New York, NY: Warner Business Books, 2007), 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹ U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Leadership*, Army Doctrine Publication 6-22 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, August 1, 2012), 3.

¹² George Reed and Richard Olsen, "Toxic Leadership: Part Deux," *Military Review* 90, no.6 (November-December 2010): 60.

¹³ John P. Steele, *Antecedents and consequences of toxic leadership in the U.S. Army: A two year review and recommended solutions*, CAL Technical Report 2011-3 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Center for Army Leadership, June 2011), 6.

¹⁴ John P. Steele, *2010 Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL): Volume 1, Executive Summary*, CAL Technical Report 2011-1 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Center for Army Leadership, 2011), 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁶ Ulmer, 48.

¹⁷ Stephen Gerras, Leonard Wong, and Charles Allen, "Organizational Culture: Applying A Hybrid Model to the U.S. Army," in *U.S. Army War College Academic year 2013 Core Curriculum, Strategic Leadership, Selected Readings* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: 2008), 215.

¹⁸ Stephen Gerras, "2004 Division Commander Study and Leader-Member Exchange," in *U.S. Army War College Academic year 2013 Core Curriculum, Strategic Leadership, Selected Readings* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: 2008), 273.

¹⁹ Gary Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, 3rd edition, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994), 197.

²⁰ Josh Rogin, "Exclusive: Missile Defense Agency chief harassed and bullied staff, investigation found," July 3, 2012, http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/07/03/exclusive_missile_defense_agency_chief_harassed_and_bullied_staff_investigation_fou (accessed December 8, 2012).

²¹ U.S. Department of Defense, Inspector General, *Report of Investigation on Lieutenant General Patrick J O'Reilly, United States Army, Director, Missile Defense Agency* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, May 2, 2012), 7, <http://www.dodig.mil/fo/Foia/PDFs/O'ReillyROI.pdf> (accessed December 9, 2012).

²² Gould.

²³ Gould.

²⁴ Gould.

²⁵ Gould.

²⁶ Jaffe.

²⁷ United States Army Combined Arms Center, Center for Army Leadership, "US Army Implements Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback (MSAF) Program," May 14, 2008, <http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/CAL/Repository/CALMSAFPressRelease-200805.pdf> (accessed February 9, 2013).

²⁸ U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Command Policy*, Army Regulation 600-20 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, Rapid Action Revision (RAR) Issue Date: 20 September 2012), 97.

²⁹ U.S. Department of the Army, *Training Units and Developing Leaders*, Army Doctrine Publication 7-0 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, August 23, 2012), 7.

³⁰ Julie A. Dunn, email message to author, February 11, 2013.

³¹ U.S. Department of the Army, *Training Units and Developing Leaders*, Army Doctrine Publication 7-0 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, August 23, 2012), 7.

³² Michelle Tan and Joe Gould, "Army Wants to Rid Top Ranks of Toxic Leaders, Army Times," July 31, 2011, <http://www.armytimes.com/news/2011/07/army-wants-to-rid-ranks-of-toxic-commanders-073111w/> (accessed December 13, 2012).

³³ Reed and Olsen: 60.