



### **Letters on Leadership #21 – Task, Condition, Standard**

Down by 17 at half-time, the coach gives a screaming, profanity-laced speech. Red-faced and with spittle flying, he grabs his star player and yells, “I need you to be a better leader.” That athlete is never a better leader in the second half.

After seeing her three-year team captain graduate, the coach calls one of her incoming seniors into her office and says “Now it is your turn. I need you to lead.” That athlete is being set up for failure.



Teaching leadership is important. It starts with clearly defining the standards that all leaders are held accountable to. 1) Mission accomplishment and 2) Taking care of your people. However, while teaching leadership is important, *developing* it is even more so.

The Marine Corps does an excellent job of developing leaders. I'm certain the other services do as well, but I'm a Marine, so I will speak to what I know. Developing leaders are given three things: A task, a condition, and a standard. A task to accomplish, the condition they have to work under, and the standard to which it must be completed. Nearly everything we do in the Marine Corps has a task, condition, and standard associated with it. There is a task, condition, and standard for making your rack (bed) at bootcamp. There is a task, condition, and standard for engaging a moving target with an M40A4 Sniper Rifle. We constantly put young leaders in charge of smaller tasks, and then hold them accountable for the results. We do this so that the first time they have to lead isn't on a combat patrol in Marjah, Afghanistan.

An easy example of where this process can be applied is the locker room. Messy locker rooms drive coaches crazy. How we do small things is how we do all things. If we are going to be disciplined on the field it needs to start in the locker room. However, this can be difficult for an 18-year-old to grasp. The coach has bigger things to worry about than the locker room. So do the assistant coaches. The locker room can be a great place to develop your younger leaders. Take one athlete and put her in charge of the locker room. Her "task" is to ensure the cleanliness of the locker room. Her "conditions" include the cleaning supplies available and the help of her teammates. For the "standard," set up one locker how you want it look. Explain to the leader that they must all look identical and that she will be held accountable for the results.

Here is the catch. When you walk into the locker room and see a towel on the ground, you don't lose your mind on the team. You don't even yell at the athlete who threw the towel on the ground. Instead, you call that leader into your office and hold her accountable. Hopefully, that athlete will improve her communication and accountability. You can offer to help her do so. However, maybe she complains that it isn't fair that she is being held accountable for someone else leaving their towel on the floor. In doing so, she is telling you that she doesn't want to be a leader on your team.

There are certain things that are critical to mission accomplishment that you need your trusted advisors to control. There will be certain things that you need your subject matter experts to teach. Find ways to develop your leaders by putting them in charge of other things, i.e. the warm



up, tomorrow's uniform, making sure everyone attends a team meeting, etc. The challenge here is that those developing leaders won't be as efficient or effective as you or your staff. When we work with teams, at the conclusion of the first day of training, we grab one participant and tell them everything they need to know for the following morning. This can make coaches very uncomfortable. Many would rather tell the team themselves or put an assistant in charge. We look at it differently - if someone shows up five minutes late the next morning in the wrong uniform we will still have a great day of training. The participant we put in charge of getting everyone there in the right uniform will be held accountable, though!

Leaders get held accountable to two standards. Accomplishing the mission and taking care of their people. Giving young leaders a task, condition, and standard is a great way to develop them. If you expect your leaders to lead, don't let the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter, a big project, or a combat patrol be the first time they have done so.

Attack!

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