

## **Leadership - For the Battlefield and Business**

by iPriority

One of the best lessons I ever learned in team building came in 1951, while I was at Fort Benning, Georgia, in Infantry Officers Candidate School. Out of the 286 original candidates that enrolled, there were only 86 of us who graduated twenty-one weeks later as second lieutenants. That in itself built a significant amount of esprit de corps, but it was an experience during the eighteenth week that profoundly influenced my appreciation of team interaction.

During the preceding weeks, we had drilled and drilled. Part of the process was swapping roles with each other, from the company commander to rifleman to radio man to squad leader. Frankly, we had regarded this as tedious and unnecessary.

However, we did learn each other's jobs well. We watched each other and learned from our mistakes, we critiqued each other, solved problems together, and our goals were clear, understood, and agreed upon. As a result, we grew to trust one another.

In the eighteenth week we were on a night exercise and I lost contact with the man on my left. Momentarily the thought passed through my mind that our advancing line had been broken, but just as quickly I relaxed. Because we had exchanged roles in training, I knew exactly what the next man to my left would do and knew what I must do to regain the integrity of our line. Best of all, I knew that he knew what the training was all about. We had become a team by working together, living together, and understanding each other's roles.

### Principle into Practice

One year later, I was able to put this principle into live action. It was in the Chor Wan valley of Korea. I had been given command of a rifle platoon that had been decimated by casualties. These were twenty-two tired, demoralized, and frightened individuals. There should have been forty-four men. I decided to try passing on what I learned in Officers Candidate School.

We built back up to forty-four soldiers, and every third week we went back in reserve, but instead of letting them sleep, drink, and play cards, we ran platoon exercises up and down hills. We swapped jobs, got to know each other and our individual capacities. I didn't win any popularity contests; even my fellow officers thought I was too "gung ho."

But on July 7-10, 1953, this training paid off. We and two other platoons were on Pork Chop Hill and were surrounded for three days by eight divisions of Chinese--thousands of enemy soldiers. The other platoons were pushed off the hill, but my guys held their positions.

In the first few hours of the battle, I was wounded and cut off from the rest of my command. Our hand-held radio did not work, so communications were nonexistent. But through our drills, we had become a fighting team that could function even without me.

We trusted each other, knowing that we would look out for one another. A number of our men sustained wounds in the fighting, but not a single life was lost. When the fighting ended, we all got off the hill together.

### **Keys to Survival**

The keys to survival were simple. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, we see that these concepts come directly from the Bible. This passage talks about a group of people that has many gifts and skills who work together as a team to accomplish a common goal.

Today, nearly forty years later, they apply to any setting, especially business:

1. Purpose. We knew why we were there.
2. Roles. We knew what each other's jobs were and how they related to ours.
3. Goals. We understood the specifics that were required to carry out our purpose.
4. Trust. We could work together because we had built up trust and confidence in one another.