

Lessons from Yusufiyah: Module 10

“Discipline” (SSG John Diem)

Example Questions

[Watch “Discipline”]

1. Diem says, “When you allow your lack of understanding of these rules to become how you lead Soldiers, and you allow yourself to discount them, that’s when you start having a negative effect.”
A) What do you think of that statement? B) What should a leader do when he/she doesn’t understand Army rules? C) What impact does a leader’s misunderstanding of rules or SOPs have on his/her subordinates?
2. Diem talks about coming back from a combat patrol with casualties and having the discipline to then perform basic Soldier tasks. How does a leader balance that expectation of discipline with the need to display empathy?
3. Diem says, “Some of those things, logically, don’t contribute to your successes in combat.” How do proper preparedness and discipline in seemingly unrelated tasks lead to long-term success?
4. Diem gives his opinion on the effects of preparedness. He says of the activities, “They ... contribute to a mindset that allows you to deal with a reality that’s not going to give just because you want it to.” A) Why must a Soldier be willing to do things he/she doesn’t “want” to do? B) How might this mindset contribute to resilience?
5. What are the effects of a Soldier fulfilling his personal wants over the Army’s needs?
6. Diem says, “If every time someone heard something that they didn’t think made sense then they didn’t do it, then we wouldn’t be a professional institution.” A) What is your opinion of Soldiers exercising discipline to obey orders that they do not understand? B) How does trust enable Soldiers to exercise that kind of discipline?
7. Diem says, “It’s almost balancing on a razor’s edge...when to ease up on that and when to harshly enforce.” Diem leans toward harsh enforcement. Consider your own leadership style. Where do you lean?
8. Diem says, “So I don’t expect lieutenants, sergeants, privates, even staff-sergeants to understand all of these rules. But I think the Army has the right to expect them to enforce them.” What do you think of this statement?

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Transcription

SSG Diem tells his story:

John Diem is an Infantry Non-Commissioned Officer with several deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. In these deployments, he regularly faced heavy fire and was often located far from higher headquarters.

“I would say that it’s a shift that occurs over the course of someone’s entire career. Even today, I don’t necessarily believe that every little thing that’s even been posted in the Army manual is 100% the right thing to do. To be honest, there are a lot of logical leaps that are difficult for younger men to make—basically, connect the dots between disciplined units and rules. That doesn’t mean that you don’t enforce them, it just means that you personally don’t understand them. When you allow your lack of understanding of these rules to become how you lead Soldiers, and you allow yourself to discount them, that’s when you start having a negative effect.

I believe that the vast majority of being an infantryman in the United States Army is dealing with a reality that’s not always good; it’s not always palatable. These consistent rules, especially coming at a time when they don’t seem to fit in like you just came off of a heavy combat patrol, maybe you evacuated some casualties, maybe you have blood on your uniform, well you need to change. You need to do personal hygiene. You need to take care of yourself. You need to put on a new uniform. You need to make sure your equipment is clean. You need to start doing the things that make you a Soldier; get back into preparedness. Even get a haircut. Go that extra little bit. Go that extra mile. Some of those things, logically, don’t contribute to your successes in combat. But what they do do, is contribute to a mindset that allows you to deal with a reality that’s not going to give just because you want it to.

If every time someone heard something that they didn’t think made sense then they didn’t do it, then we wouldn’t be a professional institution. But that’s on the far-left edge of what I am talking about. Really what I’m talking about is sometimes people die, NCOERs still need to get written, uniforms still have to be worn, rooms still have to be cleaned. All of these things are still true. I think that it’s almost bouncing on a razor’s edge when you have to find when to ease up on that and when to harshly enforce it. I generally lay on the harshly enforce it side, and I believe that that’s a journey that everybody makes through their career as they gain experience and see the importance of these tasks—maybe even mundane tasks—and how they’re critical to the unit and its well-being. So I don’t expect lieutenants, sergeants, privates, even staff sergeants to understand all of these rules. But I think the Army has the right to expect them to enforce them.

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Additional Resources

Additional Resources

FM 6-22, Army Leadership

- 4-52: The Warrior Ethos requires unrelenting and consistent determination to do what is right and to do it with pride across the spectrum of conflicts. Understanding what is right requires respect for both comrades and all people involved in complex missions, such as stability and reconstruction operations. Ambiguous situations, such as when to use lethal or nonlethal force, are a test for the leader’s judgment and discipline. The Warrior Ethos helps create a collective commitment to win with honor.

The Discipline of Teams

By Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith, *Harvard Business Review*, July-August 2005

- The author draws a clear distinction between working groups and teams, highlighting the importance of determining which one is actually required for a given situation. He then discusses four elements associated with all successful teams: common commitment and purpose, performance goals, complementary skills, and mutual accountability.