

Culture And Leadership West Point-Style

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Over the 4 years that a cadet is at the United States Military Academy at West Point, only once are the parents invited to spend a day with their son or daughter. That day typically includes attending a few classes, seeing the barracks, and getting a first-hand glimpse of the cadet's new home. I was quite impressed with a couple of the leadership lessons that I picked up while tagging along with my daughter on this special day.

Who is keeper of the culture?

This question was assigned to the West Point cadets as part of their English class: Are the non-commissioned officers the ones who set the culture in the Army, or does the responsibility for the organization's culture reside in the officer corps?

Clearly, the non-coms are closer to the troops, just as supervisors and crew leaders are closer to the machinists and operators in our businesses. But does that mean they are the keepers of our culture by default?

My answer that day was that it is incumbent upon the leaders to set

the standards, have a vision of the culture and hold subordinates to those standards (if you're a parent in a class, you get to work on assignments). Jack Welch wasn't a West Pointer, but his philosophy was, "Leaders create a vision, articulate a vision, passionately own the vision, and relentlessly drive it to its completion." That philosophy is visible everywhere at the academy.

In our shops, who is responsible for our culture, our values, our policies and our ideals? Who is responsible so that all of those concepts are learned?

People Development

It is a point of faith with me that our people are our companies' greatest competitive advantage. Technology can be purchased or replaced, and capital can be borrowed, but the talents of our people remain the unique strength for all companies.

What is your plan for the development of your people—your company's greatest advantage? Do you have a plan, a context for people

development? The following comment from my daughter's tactical officer should be laser-engraved in stainless steel and handed out to each and every one of us with the responsibility for the leadership, supervision, management and development of others:

People cannot make other people develop, but organizations can create an environment in which development is supported; design a context in which it is expected and rewarded; model it; and ultimately, see to it that those who choose not to grow go on to do other things.

— Major Richard Berry, Tactical Officer, Company G-3, USCC

Have you created an environment that supports development of your personnel? An environment that both expects and rewards it, where that expectation is modeled and exemplified from the top down?

Who is the keeper of our culture? Take a good hard look in the mirror. It cannot be delegated to others. That responsibility belongs to us, of course.

