

LESSON 3: DECISION MAKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING



*cohesive
conjecture
contingencies
flexibility
improving
influencing
intuitions
non-judgemental
objectivity
operating*

PURPOSE

As a leader, it is not enough to exemplify the leadership traits and principles and possess an appropriate leadership style, you must also know how to plan, identify and solve problems, make decisions, and supervise. After being introduced to a leadership framework, you will then examine several variations of those processes — deciding for yourself the best way to use them to get the job done and achieve excellence.

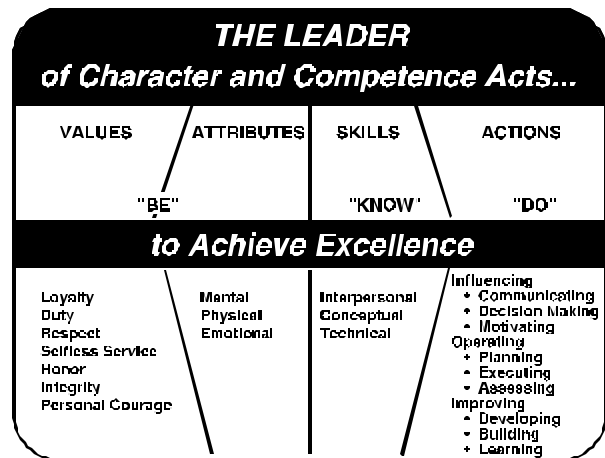
INTRODUCTION — PUTTING YOUR LEADERSHIP SKILLS IN PERSPECTIVE

As we have indicated throughout your previous JROTC lessons, leadership is the process of **influencing** others by providing purpose, direction, and motivation while **operating** to accomplish the mission and **improving** the organization. Purpose gives subordinates a reason why they should do different

things, sometimes under stressful circumstances. Direction shows what must be done. Through motivation, leaders give subordinates the will to do everything they are capable of doing to accomplish a mission.

LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

Recall the fundamentals of *BE*, *KNOW*, and *DO*. As you can clearly see, they are deeply embedded throughout the leadership framework illustrated below. The top of this framework shows the four categories of things that leaders must *BE*, *KNOW*, and *DO*. They are values, attributes, skills, and actions. The bottom lists the dimensions of leadership, grouped under these four categories. The dimensions consist of the seven values and 15 subcategories under attributes, skills, and actions.



Leadership starts at the top, with the character of the leader, with your character. In order to lead others, you must first ensure your own house is in order.

Leadership begins with what the leader must *BE*, the values and attributes that shape a leader's character. It may be helpful to think of these as internal qualities: You possess them all the time. They define who you are. They are the same for all leaders, regardless of position, although you refine your understanding of them

as you become more experienced and assume positions of greater responsibility.

Your skills are those things you *KNOW* how to do — your competence in everything from the technical side of your job to the people skills a leader requires. The skill categories apply to all leaders; however, as you assume positions of greater responsibility, you must master additional skills in each category.

But, character and knowledge — while absolutely necessary — are not enough. You cannot be an effective leader until you apply what you know — that is, until you act and *DO* what you must. As with skills, you will learn more leadership actions as you serve in different leadership positions or opportunities.

The leadership framework is a tool that will allow you to think about leadership as a whole. The dimensions each contain components that are all interrelated — none stands alone. This framework will help you to put your job, your followers, and your unit into perspective. Think about it in this manner:

***BE** a leader of character. Embrace the values and demonstrate the leader attributes. Study and practice so that you will have the skills to **KNOW** your job. Then **act** — **DO** what is right to achieve excellence.*

APPROACHES TO DECISION-MAKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING

A leader is expected to get the job done. To do so, he or she must learn to plan, analyze situations, identify and solve problems (or potential problems), make decisions, and set realistic and attainable goals for the unit. These are the thinking or creative requirements of leadership and they set direction. These actions provide vision, purpose, and goal definition.

They are your eyes to the future, and they are crucial to developing a disciplined, **cohesive**, and effective organization.

Decision-making and problem-solving are basic ingredients of leadership. More than anything else, the ability to make sound, timely decisions separates a leader from a non-leader. It is the responsibility of leaders to make high-quality decisions that are accepted and executed in a timely fashion.

Leaders must be able to reason under the most critical conditions and decide quickly what action to take. If they delay or avoid making a decision, this indecisiveness may create hesitancy, loss of confidence, and confusion within the unit, and may cause the task to fail. Since leaders are frequently faced with unexpected circumstances, it is important to be flexible — leaders must be able to react promptly to each situation. Then, when circumstances dictate a change in plans, prompt reaction builds confidence in them.

As a leader, you will make decisions involving not only yourself, but the morale and welfare of others. Some decisions, such as when to take a break or where to hold a meeting, are simple decisions which have little effect on others. Other decisions are often more complex and may have a significant impact on many people. Therefore, having a decision-making, problem-solving process can be a helpful tool. Such a process can help you to solve these different types of situations.

Within business and the military today, leaders at all levels use some form of a decision-making, problem-solving process. There are at least several different approaches (or models) for decision-making and problem-solving. We will present three such approaches: The first, and most common, is the seven-step problem-solving, decision-making process; the second is a more complex problem-solving

model; and the third is a simplified decision-making process.

SEVEN-STEP PROBLEM-SOLVING, DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Having a logical thought process helps ensure that you will not neglect key factors that could influence the problem, and ultimately your decision. In fact, you should always apply a clear, logical thought process to *all* leadership situations that you encounter. The seven-step process is an excellent tool that can guide you in solving problems and making those sound and timely decisions. The seven steps are:

1. Identify (recognize/define) the problem.
2. Gather information (facts/assumptions).
3. Develop courses of action (solutions).
4. Analyze and compare courses of action (alternatives/solutions).
5. Make a decision; select the best course of action (solution).
6. Make a plan.
7. Implement the plan (assess the results).

Identify the Problem

Being able to accurately identify the nature of a problem is a crucial undertaking. All leadership problems, whether they involve a work-related situation or a counseling session, are exploratory in nature — that is, leaders do not always identify the right cause of a problem or develop the best plan. In fact, two of the most common errors of leaders are identifying the wrong problem and identifying the wrong causes of a problem. Plus, the tendency for leaders to make mental errors increases as their levels of stress increase. We all make mistakes. If leaders are given false information, it may lead them to incorrect problem identification and to incorrect assumptions about the causes of a problem. Then, if leaders fail to determine the true

source of a problem, they may develop an inadequate plan.

Learn to identify the real problems. Consider all angles. Learn to seek only accurate information that leads to the real causes of a problem. To ensure that information is accurate, question its validity. In other words, leaders must take what accurate information they have, use their best judgment, and make educated assumptions about the causes of a problem. Then, they must consider the courses of action that will be most likely to succeed.

Even though leaders may use the right problem-solving process, incorrect problem identification can lead to the wrong decision. It is a fallacy to think that using a correct formula or set of steps will lead you to the real problem and to a successful course of action. Your values, character, knowledge, and way of thinking have a direct and vital impact on the problems you identify as important. These inner qualities affect how you view, gather, and analyze information bearing on the identified problem.

Gather Information

In this step, leaders must gather all available information that pertains to or can influence the situation (identified problem) from sources such as higher, lateral, and subordinate levels of command as well as from applicable outside agencies. Although some of the information may not bear on the problem at hand, it must be available for leaders to consider when developing and analyzing courses of action.

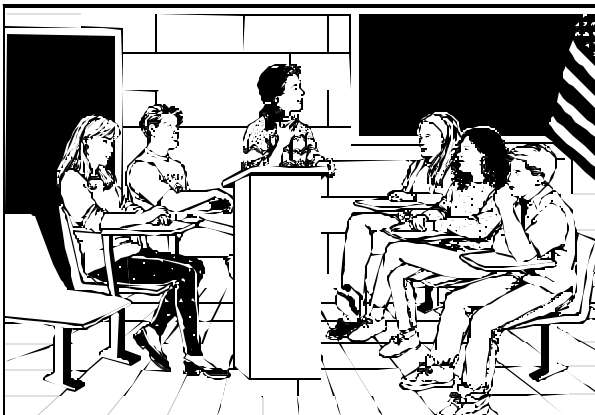
The amount of available time in a leadership situation can be a limiting factor on how much time a leader spends performing the various steps of the problem-solving, decision-making process. If time is extremely limited, this is the only step that leaders may omit so

they can quickly think through the remaining steps.

Develop Courses of Action

With the problem identified and available information gathered, you are now ready to develop possible courses of action. Keep an open mind throughout this step and be prepared to anticipate change. “Sixty percent (of good problem-solving) is the ability to anticipate; 40 percent . . . is the ability to improvise, to reject a preconceived idea . . . , and to rule by action instead of acting by rules.” (*S.L.A. Marshall*)

Think of as many “what-ifs” as you can and prepare for them — do not be surprised. The laws of probability are strongly in favor of surprise. Develop courses of actions to counteract events that might hinder accomplishment of your mission. Conducting “brainstorming” sessions is a good technique to use when there is difficulty in developing courses of action. Brainstorming is a creative technique that encourages several people to suggest as many solutions to a problem as possible. Generally, you want to have at least two or three possible courses of action — more if the situation dictates and time permits.



Analyze and Compare Courses of Action

The next step is to determine which course of action will best solve the problem. Therefore, leaders should develop as many advantages and disadvantages for each course of action as possible. Then, they must **objectively** and logically analyze the advantages and disadvantages of each one against the advantages and disadvantages of the others.

It is another fallacy to think that the course of action with the most advantages or the fewest disadvantages is the one that you should recommend or use. In most cases that may be true, but by weighing the importance of each advantage and disadvantage, there may be times when the “best” course of action has fewer advantages (all critical to mission accomplishment) and one or more disadvantages than another choice (but most are insignificant).

Up to this point in the problem-solving, decision-making process, leaders should have involved subordinates to research the problem, gather information, and develop and analyze the various courses of action. *Subordinates are more likely to support a plan or decision if they took part in its development.* This technique will pay off in terms of increased interest, higher morale, and better efficiency by team members.

Make a Decision

After you have carefully analyzed the possible courses of action using all available information, consider your **intuitions** and emotions. The decision-making process is not a purely objective, mathematical formula. The human mind does not work that way, especially under stress. Instead, the mind is both rational and intuitive, and since the decision-making process is a thought process, it is also both rational and intuitive. Your intuition is that

aspect of your mind that tells you what “feels” right or wrong. Your intuition flows from your instincts and experience.

However, never make the mistake of making decisions guided totally by emotions or intuitions and immediately doing what “feels” right. *This is a prescription for disaster.* Follow the problem-solving process as rationally and objectively as possible. Gather information; then develop, analyze, and compare courses of action. Consider your intuition or hunches, emotions, and values. Try to identify a “best” course of action that is logical and likely to succeed and that also “feels” right in terms of your intuition, values, and character. Finally, make your decision, make a plan, and take action.

Make a Plan

Make a plan that includes who would do what, when, where, how, and why. Be as specific as time permits, but do not leave out vital information that could prevent mission accomplishment. Plus, ensure that you specify the what, when, where, how and why for all personnel or elements under your authority. Finally, include **contingencies** in your plan that address possible unexpected situations or actions. Develop these contingencies based on the assumptions made when you identified the problem and gathered available information.

As you did when developing the courses of action, be prepared to anticipate change. The ability to make appropriate changes in decisions and plans requires a certain **flexibility** of mind — a crucial trait of a good problem-solver, decision-maker, and planner.

Implement the Plan

Once the decision and plan are made, it is time to act. In this final step, you must put

the plan into action, then evaluate it to ensure that the desired results are being achieved. Evaluation is often a neglected step in the decision-making process

The key to evaluation is to seek feedback constantly on how your plan is doing. Get feedback from subordinates. Go to the point of the action and determine first hand if the plan is working or not. If not, determine why not and take immediate action to correct the plan. Mental flexibility is vital.

SAMPLE DECISION-MAKING MODEL

Leaders often look for the simple decision, perhaps because they are easier to act on and explain. However, you must be extremely careful about making decisions too fast or too simplistically. Since you want to foster individual growth and/or improve the performance of your unit, do not automatically choose the first approach to solving a difficult situation. Leaders must evaluate each decision for its contribution toward the accomplishment of the task at hand and for future missions. If appropriate, a shared problem-solving, decision-making process with professionals, such as your instructors, will often help you to make wise decisions.

The decision-making model described in this lesson is a quick and easy approach that leaders can use in many situations. First, briefly state the problem: For example, Connie has a drill practice on Friday night, but she forgot to cancel work for that night. Next, identify at least three options or courses of action. Concerning Connie’s situation, she could:

⇒ Speak to her drill leader about missing drill practice and working that night (*Option 1*).

- ⇒ Find someone to cover for her at work while she participates in the drill practice (*Option 2*).
- ⇒ Speak to her employer about showing up late for work after the drill practice is over (*Option 3*).

Determine the positive and negative consequences for each of these options and whether you need more information upon which to make the best possible decision. The simplicity of this model allows anyone to use it almost anywhere and for any situation.

SAMPLE PROBLEM-SOLVING MODEL

The problem-solving model shown below represents another approach that leaders can use to help them find solutions to problems and to make wise decisions. Within its three steps are numerous procedures that leaders can use as guides to solve a problem. Notice the correlation between these procedures, especially in the first and third steps, and what you have learned in *Techniques of Communication*.

Step 1: Understanding the Problem

- Review the issue again.
- Write down what you know.
- Look for key phrases.
- Find the important information.
- Tell it in your own words.
- Tell what you are trying to find.

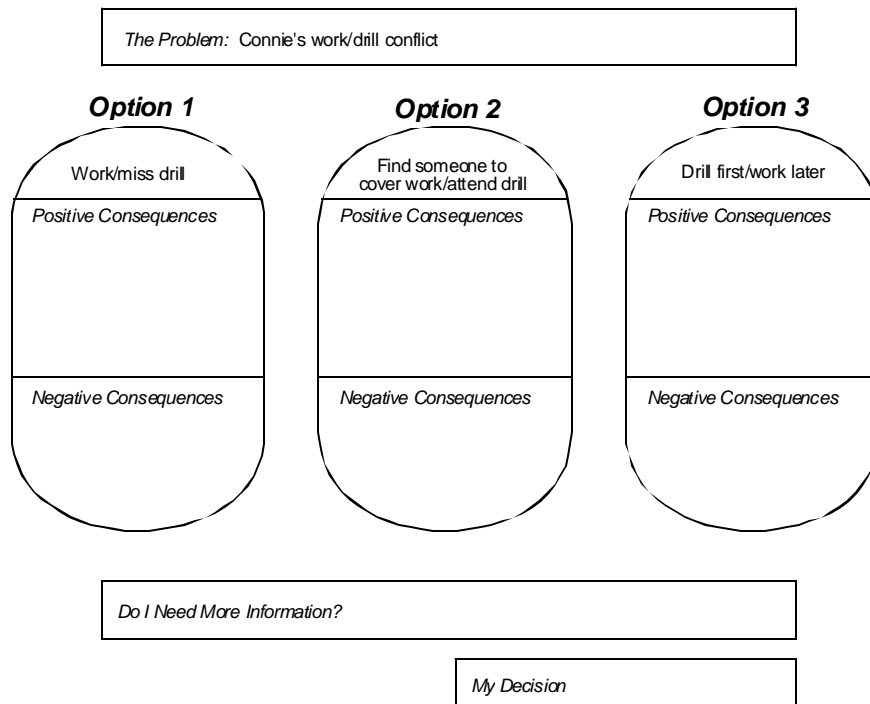
Step 2: Selecting Strategies

- Make a model — involve the senses.
- Make an organized list or table.
- Look for a pattern — find relationships.
- Guess (or **conjecture**) and test.
- Make an organized drawing or sketch.
- Work backwards — start with the consequence.
- Role-play — become an active player.
- Solve a simpler matter — try simulations.
- Use estimation.

Step 3: Looking Back: Checking the Answer

- Does the answer make sense?
- Is it reasonable?
- Can the issue be generalized?
- Is there a pattern?
- Are there other similar situations?

THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS



CASE STUDIES OF PROBLEM-SOLVING AND DECISION-MAKING

This section contains two case studies of leaders who had to make a complex decision under totally different circumstances. While you read these case studies, visualize in your mind the seven-step problem-solving, decision-making process and see if you can identify each step.

The Student Council President

James Newman, a senior at Gateway High School, was elected president of the senior class and the student council. The administration at Gateway, which has a student body of over 2,700 students, encourages independent thought and the free expression of ideas.

During the early part of the school year, one group of students carried that free expression too far — or so believed the administration, the majority of the student body, and most parents. This group called themselves the Vigilantes. One day, James noticed that they were handing out leaflets to solicit new members.

The group grew from just a few members to about 50 members. There was anger and confusion among the student body about the group because its members were so intolerant when it came to discussing any views but their own. There was also tension between those who were members and those who were not. Several fights broke out in the lunchroom and on the school grounds between members of the Vigilantes and non-members.

Midway through the first semester, the Vigilantes decided to organize a rally. They went through channels and received school permission to hold the rally on campus after school. They promised that it would be peaceful and non-provoking.



When other students and many of the parents heard about the rally, they became angered and called the school demanding that the principal stop the rally. Many thought it would end up out of control.

The principal and several school board members were prepared to stop the rally because of public opinion, but some teachers, administrators, and board members believed the rally should go on. They felt it would be unfair to allow some student groups to hold such events and not to allow this group the same privilege; it would also oppose the democratic, **non-judgmental** ideas of the school. They decided to leave it up to the student council to make the decision.

James and the other members of the council discussed the problem for a long time. James listened to each person's view. Then he and several other council members met with parents,

teachers, administrators, and school board members. They also attended a meeting of the Vigilantes and met afterward with the group's president for a discussion.

James was still unsure of the best way to handle the problem. Of 12 council members, he and one other student were the only two who wanted the rally to go ahead as planned. The other members hated the ideas and tactics of the Vigilantes and believed that the rally would fire up those against the group and lead to violence. James said it was against his principles to deny one group a privilege allowed to all others. However, he also was concerned about the welfare of the entire student body.

Finally, he asked the principal to call a meeting of the student body and to invite the parents. James told the students and adults that he had decided to permit the rally to go on as planned. He said that those who opposed the ideas of the group could show their disapproval simply by staying away and ignoring the event. He said that permitting the controversial rally would reinforce the school's views of free speech and tolerance.

James impressed the students with his sincerity, his honest interest in their welfare, and his willingness to stand by his principles. They agreed to stay away from the rally.

On the day of the rally, the students quietly went about their usual routine and after school, most went home. The Vigilantes held their rally, but there was such a poor showing, it broke up early.

* * *

Complex, emotional decisions often require leaders to consult others as James did in the above case study. After receiving input from everyone involved and weighing the facts, a leader is better able to make careful and well thought out decisions.

There may be occasions, however, when leaders do not have time to consult with others or weigh all of the facts carefully before having to make a decision. The following case study illustrates how a leader had to make an immediate decision because a subordinate challenged the leader's authority in a disrespectful manner. If a similar situation happened to you, would you know how to handle it?

The New Squad Leader

You are a newly promoted sergeant and the platoon leader just made you a squad leader. During your initial encounter with the members of your squad, you sense some resentment as their "new" leader. The squad leader you replaced was popular with them, but the platoon leader relieved him for failure to motivate the squad to achieve standards.

Your first assignment as squad leader is to fold the U.S. flag at a ceremony. While you are meeting briefly with the platoon sergeant, your squad departs for the football field to prepare for a rehearsal. During the meeting, the platoon sergeant tells you who in your squad has been on these details before.

As you approach the field, you see your squad relaxing. Instead of going straight into a rehearsal, you decide to

have a few knowledgeable people demonstrate how to fold the flag.

You state to the squad that you are going to conduct a demonstration and for them to move into a circle. They don't move. You walk up to PFC Hart, whom the platoon sergeant said knows how to fold the flag, and he gives you a challenging stare as if to say, "I don't want to be a demonstrator." You ask him to come forward and take the flag. He says something disrespectful and still doesn't move.

This action infuriates you, but you control your emotions and remain calm. Your mind swiftly goes to work on the situation. This subordinate has challenged your authority and put you in a difficult position. He has given you a major disciplinary problem — disrespect and insubordination — before you have even had the opportunity to get to know your squad members and the informal norms of the squad. The way you handle this situation will have a major impact on the cohesion, discipline, and the respect these people will have for you.

After identifying this challenge as one of how to take immediate action to gain control and maintain discipline while earning the long-term respect of your subordinates, you consider the following alternatives:

⇒ Reprimand PFC Hart in front of the squad, informing him that you will recommend him for an instructor's reprimand for his insubordination. If he continues to disobey, you will recommend that he be demoted.

⇒ Stand directly in front of PFC Hart, look him in the eye, and order him to stand up and take the flag from you.



You quickly weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each course of action.

If you take the first course of action, you come across as decisive and strong and you immediately assert yourself as the authority. The disadvantage is that it is normally unprofessional to reprimand someone in front of others. Also, it is never wise to tell a subordinate exactly what punishment you would recommend until you have had a chance to think the situation through and discuss it with your seniors.

If you take the second course of action, you would not be reprimanding PFC Hart in front of others — you could do that later in private. You would show your squad that you do not back down from a challenge, and that you do not resort to threats in order to maintain discipline. Remember, you could still recommend punishment that you believe is appropriate at a later time depending on PFC Hart's actions. The disadvantages are that you would not be immediately asserting yourself as the unquestioned

authority, and that some of your subordinates might think they could get away with disrespectful and insubordinate behavior.

You quickly think through the actions you could take, including the use of possible contingencies. If you order PFC Hart to stand and take the flag and he does, continue with the demonstration; then order him and his team leader to meet you immediately after the rehearsal. If he refuses, inform him: (1) that he is being insubordinate and give him another order, and (2) by refusing your order, he will have committed two serious offenses. If he still refuses, immediately send for the platoon sergeant or platoon leader while you select other squad members to do the demonstration. This plan prepares you for possible contingencies if he finally obeys you or if he continues to disobey.

Depending on what PFC Hart does, take action in terms of your plan or make appropriate changes. Also observe the effect of your actions on the manner and obedience of the other squad members. Explain that you will not tolerate insubordination and disobedience, and that you will always take suitable disciplinary action against those offenses.

You decide on the second course of action. Initially, some squad members do think that PFC Hart got away with his insubordination, but they discover otherwise when they find out that you sternly reprimanded him in the presence of his team leader, counseled him, and recommended him for additional punishment.

* * *

Much of your ability as a problem-solver and decision-maker depends on the correct identification of the situation, the accuracy of your information, speedy analysis, a sound decision, and rapid execution.

However, do not be a leader who tries to “pass the buck.” Some people just do not like or want to make decisions. They feel they are unprepared to accept the consequences of a bad decision. Instead, those people will try to get others (their superiors or subordinates) to make decisions for them — placing the responsibility for any unsatisfactory results on those other people and not on themselves.

Now that you understand the basic problem-solving, decision-making process, it is important to give you a detailed explanation of how to plan.

DID YOU KNOW?

President Harry S. Truman kept a plaque on his desk with the inscription “The buck stops here.” Truman was one of America’s most honest and ethical presidents. He never flinched from accepting responsibility for his decisions, however unpopular or controversial.

APPROACHES TO THE PLANNING PROCESS

Planning is the cornerstone of all other functions — what goes on in planning affects what is done in the remaining functions. There is an old saying that has proven itself time and time again: *“If you fail to plan, you plan to fail; plan your work, then work your plan.”*

Planning is also the basis for the problem-solving, decision-making process. Leaders spend many hours planning the activities of their organization. In doing so, they must consider the missions and objectives of their unit and how they are going to best accomplish them.

Every activity in which you take part during the day requires some degree of planning and at least one person to do that planning. Naturally, depending upon the activity, some aspects of it may require more planning (and more people) than other aspects. Therefore, performing detailed, careful planning should be like a habit — it should be automatic and continuous throughout the activity. Just like in the problem-solving, decision-making process, there are specific steps that you should follow when planning. Likewise, there is more than one planning process. In this lesson, we will present two of the more common approaches to planning: the four-step planning process and the (seven-step) planning wheel.

FOUR-STEP PLANNING PROCESS

When planning, leaders must visualize, consider, and examine all the factors involved in accomplishing a mission. Planning is not an easy process and it requires a lot of work. The first approach to planning consists of four basic steps that can help leaders to focus on the essential information when planning an activity. These four steps are:

1. Define the objective.
2. Study the current situation.
3. List and examine possible courses of action.
4. Select the course of action that will best help to achieve the objective.

Simply stated, there are two primary purposes of planning: selecting an objective and deciding on how to accomplish it. In the four-step planning process, step one addresses the first purpose; the remaining steps show how you can use planning to reach your objective.

Define the Objective

In this step, leaders begin to define or break down their primary objective by determining the various *tasks*, *conditions*, and *standards* that are necessary to complete it.

Defining the objective sounds easy; everybody knows what they want to do. If you are in business, you might say, “I want to make a profit.” That is a good objective, but there is more to it than that. How much profit do you want to make? When do you want to make it?

There is more to setting an objective than just saying what you want (or would like) to do or what a supervisor wants you to do. Be specific. Ensure that subordinates have a clear understanding of the objective so that everyone will be working to accomplish the same thing.

Defining the objective so that it indicates what action is required is the first part of clearly identifying the *task*.

Everyone involved must know exactly what they must do in order to accomplish the objective. Additionally, use words that describe the action that must be done, such as to “sell” so many items, “fill out” so many forms, or “build” a bridge.

Next, identify any *conditions* that describe the circumstances under which you must perform the objective. For example, let us say you are a member of a junior band and the group wants to meet 95 percent of the requirements (*standard*) necessary to become senior-band members (*task*). The circumstances or conditions are those factors that you must plan for to ensure task accomplishment (such as obtaining sheet music, having the correct mix of instruments, rehearsing, etc., for our example).

Finally, state the objective in a way that makes it measurable. If an objective does not have a measurable *standard*, how will you know when you have accomplished it? Think back to the objective of “making a profit.” When have you achieved this objective? Is it when you make \$1? . . . \$50? . . . \$100? By stating your objective in measurable terms, you will know when you have reached it.

Defining the objective is a critical step. Without a well-defined objective, it would be difficult to complete the remaining steps of the planning process. Once you are satisfied with the objective, proceed to the next step.

Study the Current Situation

You are now ready to study the situation that can affect or influence your

ability to accomplish the objective. First, stop and look at what you have to work with: How much *time* do you have? How many *people* will help you? What kind of *supplies* do you have? What other *resources* are available to help you?

Then, identify any barriers or obstacles that may stand between you and your goal. Some of these barriers may be a lack of time, people, supplies, and/or other resources.

As you can see, studying the current situation involves a systematic process of defining tasks and arranging resources with respect to mission accomplishment. You should consider five factors when performing this step: effective use of time; identification of subtasks, people, and resources; and setting priorities.

Time. Time is a very important factor. You must consider time when you plan events, meet deadlines, and set goals; then, you must make plans and execute tasks according to an established time schedule. Effective leaders will schedule their time and the activities of their team to meet these events, deadlines, and goals. You must also ensure that your team members can do all of the tasks within the specified time frame.

Tasks. Identify all the tasks and sub-tasks that your team must do to accomplish the objective. Be specific. Develop detailed lists to record them and, just as you did in defining the objective, set measurable standards for each task and subtask.

People. Once you have a detailed list of tasks/subtasks, determine if you

have enough people to do the job. Tentatively match someone to each task/subtask. Base your selection on what each task/subtask requires versus the capabilities of your team members and on how many people (man hours) you will need to accomplish the objective.

Set Priorities. You will always have some tasks that are more important than others or you must start them before others because of how difficult they are. In these situations, plan a to-do list in terms of priority for every task and subtask you have identified. Determine which ones your team must do first, second, and so on until you have included everything necessary to carry out the plan. Establish priorities in categories such as priority A, priority B, priority C, etc., for each item on the to-do list. Do the A priorities first, then the Bs, the Cs, etc.

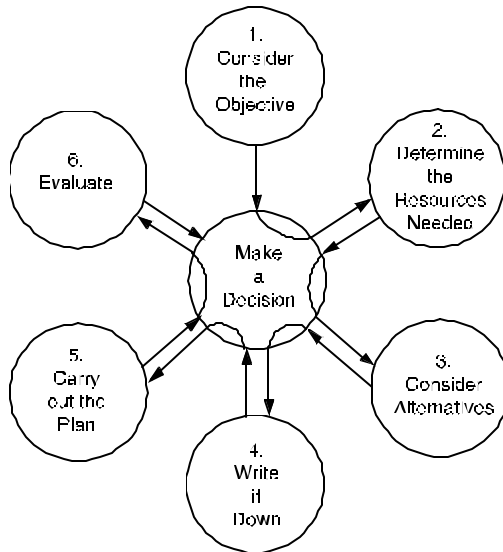
Resources. Identify all resources that are necessary to complete the objective. First, determine what is and what is not available. Then, before you begin work, set aside what is on hand for later use and make arrangements to obtain the items that you do not have, but need. While completing the task, periodically check the status of your resources and follow up on the availability of those items that you are still trying to obtain.

Courses of Action and Selecting the Best Action

You must now list all of the different ways you can think of to accomplish the objective and to decide on the best course of action. Depending upon the objective, these two planning

steps could be very simple or very difficult tasks.

PLANNING WHEEL



In the following simplified discussion of the planning wheel, note its similarities to the four-step planning process as well as to the seven-step decision-making, problem-solving process discussed earlier.

Consider the Objective

In this step, you should consider the five Ws: what, who, where, when, why (plus how). For example, you should consider:

- ◇ *What* has to be done? *What* do you want to accomplish? *What* are the desired outcomes? *Why*?
- ◇ *When* is it to be done?
- ◇ *Who* does (is responsible for doing) *what* actions?
- ◇ *Who* makes the decisions? *Where*? *When*? *How*?

Determine the Resources Needed

These resources should include:

- ◇ Time available
- ◇ Skills and competencies of team members
- ◇ Equipment and supplies
- ◇ Money
- ◇ People
- ◇ Transportation

Consider Alternatives

When planning, always consider more than one alternative. As mentioned earlier, we suggest that you develop at least two or three alternatives. After all, the first one that you consider may not be the best, or its completion may be affected by circumstances beyond your control (such as weather, emergencies, etc.).

Plan for what could go wrong; then, develop contingencies that address how you will be prepared for each situation.

Make a Decision

In actuality, decision-making occurs throughout the entire planning process as indicated by the arrows going to and from the other six steps. Placing this step now in our discussion is meant to reflect the near-final decision on determining the best alternative. Factors to consider when making this decision are:

- ◇ Who has responsibility for the decision?
- ◇ Weigh the alternatives of making a poor decision versus not making one at all.

- ◇ Is no decision a decision?
- ◇ Is a group decision best? Why?
- ◇ When does the leader involve the group in planning and decision-making?

Write it Down

Once the leader reaches a decision on an alternative, write it down; then, discuss it with the group. Writing it down:

- ◇ Ensures accuracy.
- ◇ Avoids mistakes due to miscommunication or memory lapses.
- ◇ Assists in executing the plan and delegating responsibilities.
- ◇ Preserves a record for later use.

Carry Out the Plan

As stated earlier, this is the time to act. It is where you put your plan into action. If everything up to this point in the planning process was done correctly, everyone knows what to do, where, when, how, and why. They also know what the standards are for their individual performance and for completing the objective.

Ensure that people have sufficient time to do their job well. Not planning enough time for each task could result in the work being half-done. Plus, do not let people spend too much time on tasks that are unimportant. People have a tendency to put off those “really important” jobs until later. Know what must be done according to the priorities that you set. Remember, *plan your work, then work your plan*.

Planning never stops. As you carry out the desired alternative,

unexpected situations may affect its execution, requiring you to modify your plans. When change occurs, it is wise to be patient and to keep an objective attitude.

Patience is an ingredient that all leaders must possess. Although it is sometimes very hard to be patient, especially when changes occur, you should reexamine the facts, coordinate with people who may be helpful, and readjust the plan (as necessary). *Most importantly, do not give up*. Exercise patience and maturity while the designated people carry out the plan.

Keeping an objective attitude is the ability to see and consider the different sides of an issue or situation. It involves being flexible, listening to opposing points of view, making compromises, or making changes when necessary. Your objective attitude determines how much time, effort, and patience you are willing to exert to ensure mission accomplishment.

Evaluate

Finally, you should develop a system for ensuring that subordinates accomplish their tasks according to set standards and on time. Like planning and decision-making, evaluation takes place all the time. Learn to evaluate every time you make a decision. Use evaluation to:

- ◇ Measure and improve results.
- ◇ Determine progress.
- ◇ Determine levels of knowledge.

Evaluation improves the planning and decision-making processes if it incorporates feedback into action.

Evaluation will only be reliable, however, if there is a climate of honesty and trust in the unit. Leaders must create a climate where their subordinates feel they can give an honest answer or participate in a constructive way, without being degraded or threatened.

SUPERVISING TO ACHIEVE DESIRED RESULTS

Supervision is a vital aspect of communication. It means keeping a grasp on the situation by ensuring that subordinates properly perform their duties and implement unit plans and policies. Supervision includes:

- ◇ Setting the example.
- ◇ Specifying the goal, objective, or standard.
- ◇ Delegating authority/fixing responsibilities.
- ◇ Coordinating efforts and activities.
- ◇ Resolving conflicts with peers/subordinates.
- ◇ Inspecting and evaluating.
- ◇ Providing feedback.

OVERSUPERVISION VS. UNDERSUPERVISION

There is a narrow line that determines the levels of adequate supervision. On one side of the line is oversupervision; on the other side is undersupervision.

Oversupervision can stifle initiative, make subordinates resentful, undermine trust, or undermine delegation of authority. On the other hand, undersupervision can lead to mission failure, especially in cases where the leader's intent was not fully understood, or where there was disorganization or a lack of

coordination between units. Undersupervision can also make leaders look as though they do not care. Both extremes can lead to resentment and low morale.

EVALUATING

Evaluating is a part of supervising that means judging the worth, quality, value, or significance of people, ideas, or things. Evaluation includes:

- Looking at the way subordinates accomplish a task.
- Performing all types of firsthand checks and inspections.
- Assessing, gathering information, and asking subordinates questions.
- Obtaining feedback on how well something is being done.
- Interpreting feedback by asking: "Does the feedback indicate the plan will succeed?" or "Does it indicate the need for a modification or a major change in plans or policies?"

ACCOMPLISHING SUPERVISION

Leaders should have a routine system for checking and double checking the actions that are important to cohesion, discipline, morale, and mission accomplishment. They must check, but human nature can cause them to fail to check the most simple things that can lead to big disasters. You will hear some people say, "Worry about the little things and the big things will take care of themselves." You will also hear others say, "Worry about the big, important things and don't sweat the small stuff."

However, do not go by either expression — they are both poor guides.

Concern yourself with all of the matters that require attention — big or small, short-term or long-term. Then, plan, develop courses of action, analyze them, establish priorities, set goals, and make sound and timely decisions that are the best ones for your subordinates and the unit. Finally, supervise, evaluate, and obtain feedback that your decisions are getting the job done.

CONCLUSION

Successful leaders are energetic. They exert a great deal of effort in order to communicate effectively, solve problems, make decisions, set goals, plan, execute plans, and supervise/evaluate. These are a leader's directional (or thinking) and implementing skills. As a leader, you cannot expect positive results from your subordinates unless you work equally hard at solving problems, making plans, and putting plans and decisions into action. Successful leaders also work hard at accomplishing their missions and objectives while maintaining only the highest possible standards of performance.

In your professional and leadership development, you should strive to exercise the same degree of effort and excellence.

* * *