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# Insights from Lieutenants 2021

COMMAND SERIES

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# Introduction

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Welcome to the first edition of the *Insights from Lieutenants* produced by the Army Knowledge Centre. The Army Knowledge Centre produces a series of command handbooks for a variety of command positions. As you prepare your first 'real' command appointment as an Army officer you'll want to make sure you have all the knowledge and tools required to take up this challenging role. The real value from this handbook is the genuine, real-life advice and tips provided by lieutenants who are currently in command positions. These comments from current lieutenants were sourced by a survey undertaken in 2021. This survey asked a variety of questions covering many aspects of troop/platoon command. The responses were varied with some lieutenants seemingly thriving in their positions whilst others explained the challenges they face. Everyone's experience is different whether it be in a combat fighting unit, specialist trade, units that are continually on exercise or units that are predominately barracks-based. Whatever your new command role is, there is real value in hearing the tips and advice from others and understanding what worked and what didn't. These lieutenants have provided their thoughts and tips to guide their successors in their new roles in an effort to avoid the mistakes of the past.

As expected, many of the observations in the survey results were similar. These observations have been merged into tips throughout this handbook. Understanding what has and hasn't worked for others is a great way to 'get ahead of the curve' and start considering plans, actions and leadership methods that are going to work for you.

We learn by reflecting on experience, and this process is much more effective if we can do so by learning from the experience of others. We encourage you to reflect at regular points throughout your posting and to drop a quick email with your lessons learned to [army.lessons@defence.gov.au](mailto:army.lessons@defence.gov.au) so that your experiences can be used in the next version of this handbook, which in turn will help others.

We hope you find this handbook a valuable source of information and we wish you success in your new appointment as a junior commander.

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# Part 1

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## ***Preparation for Troop/Platoon Command***

You have been in training for a considerable period of time to get where you are at this stage of your career, whether it be through RMC, ADFA, previous military experience or previous civilian training in specialist areas. You have been taught the same skills that many before you have been taught, and your first posting into a junior command position as a TP/PL commander is rapidly approaching. The military training you have received is first class in comparison to other military training institutions around the world and you should feel confident that you have been prepared well for your new role as a TP/PL commander.

Here are the opinions of some lieutenants on their training prior to their command appointment:

*RMC-D has prepared me in terms of planning, time management and multi-tasking.*

*EX SEAGULL STRIKE at RMC – Honestly it's the most accurate descriptor of an All Corps Command.*

*Drawing on the wealth of knowledge from instructors at RMC from both NCOs and officers helped provide a well-rounded snapshot of what to expect when first posting into a unit. The main area fresh LTs lack in is experience and as such it is so important to absorb as much as you can from those more experienced around you, but it is also important to diversify who you draw experience from to ensure you come out the other end as a well-rounded individual.*

Your first appointment is where the 'rubber hits the road' and before you know it you will be leading Australian soldiers who will have high expectations of their TP/PL commanders. Some of these soldiers will test your abilities as a leader, whilst others may follow instructions without question. The soldiers you lead have a good idea of the intensive training you have just completed and will be eager to see how you apply what you know towards day-to-day Army life both in barracks and out field. Remember that you will always be in the



spotlight and they will notice all that you do, the way you lead, your level of confidence, your technical knowledge, your fitness, your ability to clearly articulate what is required of them as well as how to react when you do not have all the answers. There will naturally be a lot you don't know in your first appointment, so think about what your reaction will be when you are faced with a question or challenge you have never come across before. Your first reaction matters and will paint a picture of the sort of person you are in front of soldiers.

Everyone comes from different backgrounds and will be posted into units with different cultures. Some have considerable life experience and previous military experience to draw from when faced with difficult situations, whilst others have transitioned to Army direct from school. Some SSOs will feel very comfortable with their technical abilities but may be concerned about the level of leadership training and military skills they have received compared to GSOs. Some will take over their TP/PL before ROBC and feel like a fish out of water if leading in a technical trade, whilst others have learnt enough on ROBC to be 'dangerous' but will be more comfortable coordinating trade/Corps-related activities.

*Although you are in a position of authority over your soldiers, you need to acknowledge when your soldiers have experiences and expertise that can aid your decision making.*

## Supporting staff

When you march in to your unit it is important to 'remember that you are joining them, they are not joining you' so it is important to earn the respect of your supporting staff. Give these staff the respect they deserve which will lay the foundations for a healthy work relationship where they will support you and help ensure that your TP/PL succeeds in whatever task is presented. The staff in your unit will be influential in the way you develop your Army skills.

*I had very limited experience that assisted me to prepare to be a PL COMD. RMC was very Infantry minor tactics focused, and I graduated early due to COVID. Our administration and PL COMD daily duties was a very short period at the college. Learning to be a PL COMD was an OJT situation for me. I'm fortunate enough that I have excellent members in my PL HQ who have guided me with their experience from their decades in the Army.*

*There are limited experiences that can really prepare you for a role in Defence. Relying on training given and experiences from trustworthy JNCOs, SNCOs and other officers helps complement your development.*

Remember, your TP/PL SGT could also be in their first appointment at their new rank and will likely be just as excited as you to succeed in their new role. Taking their advice will be important, as will vetting this excitement.

## **Get good advice**

Lieutenants with previous military experience will most likely be comfortable knowing who to turn to for advice. However, if you are new to the Army you need to work out who you can turn to and who can provide the best advice at this early stage of your career. Your peers, higher chain of command and SNCOs are an obvious choice to start with, but don't expect everyone to provide the level of advice you need. Work out who you respect the most and look at who is actually competent in your job. This is something you will need to work out yourself.

*I spoke to LTs in other units, my OC, CAPT and MAJ from my Corps and several officers I meet at the mess. Regular interaction with senior officers at the mess helps me understand my roles and responsibilities as an officer and get an executive perspective on my small-scale issues.*

*I received very little formal preparation for my position (such as a handover or anything else of that nature) due to matters outside of our control. However, my time in training taught me to remain flexible and make the best out of any situation. Being personable and approachable makes it easier to seek advice on matters you know little about, as others will be more inclined and motivated to help.*

*My PL COMD and PL SGT were invaluable in those first few weeks, as were other LT nursing officers with more experience. Also, the PTE and CPL medics were so helpful in filling my own knowledge gaps.*

## Handover takeover

HOTO is a finite period of time where you have a chance to meet/communicate with your predecessor. You can gain a lot of information and insights towards many aspects of the TP/PL you are joining, therefore it is important to be ready and have a clear understanding of what you want to know before your HOTO period.

It is also important to understand that you might not receive a HOTO. This should not be seen as a negative nor a crutch for poor performance. Your predecessor may have had other pressures that led to this event. Many TP/PL commanders have had to complete HOTOs on the fly in the field, just prior to force concentration and even whilst on operations. It is your job as a TP/PL commander to quickly build your situational awareness via the tools you have at your disposal. Key management tools like TP/PL commander's notebook should be developed quickly to get on top of your responsibilities. If for any reason a face-to-face HOTO is not going to occur, do everything you can to at least communicate with your predecessor to gain the information you need.

HOTOs are normally coordinated by your predecessor and the quality of this HOTO will make a big difference to how prepared you are before your predecessor leaves. ***This time is the most valuable time you will have in your lead up to taking command.*** If your predecessor is well organised he/she should provide you HOTO notes before you arrive so you can get your head in the game prior to commencing your takeover. If you have not received HOTO notes prior to arrival ask your predecessor for them. There is no set format for HOTO notes. However, good HOTO notes will be provided electronically with links to all the relevant systems you need to have access to for doing your job including Objective folder access and any other content management areas you need to be aware of.

Once in location, the HOTO period will provide an opportunity to run you through all aspects of the job. Make sure you have discussed personnel, planning issues, resource management and the direction the unit is heading. Ask for the current commander's command philosophy. The commander's philosophy will provide you valuable understanding of how your OC operates, what he/she expects from



## Preparation for Troop/Platoon Command

members of the sub-unit, and the direction the sub-unit is heading. The TP/PL commander's notebook is another very important document which will provide insights on the individuals you will be leading. You need to understand which soldiers are more likely to help build a strong team, those who need more attention, those you should support for promotion etc. Ensure you ask for the TP/PL commander's notebook if you are not provided it.

Meeting key personnel such as SNCOs, 2IC, OPSO, SSM/CSM, CCLK, Q Store staff is also important during the HOTO period. You need to get on well with all of these key staff and if you feel your personalities are going to clash then work out ways to get around this quickly as these are the people who can make your role as TP/PL commander easier if they like and respect you. These people are also likely to be staff you work with on future postings, exercises and deployments, therefore it is important to create good working relationships now so that when you cross paths in the future you already have a good level of respect in place with people that are willing to go the extra mile for you.



## | Insights from Lieutenants |

The following comments from lieutenants provide insights on both good and bad experiences. Remember if you experience a poor HOTO, learn from this and make sure you do not make the same mistake when you coordinate a HOTO for your successor:



*I was lucky to have good JNCOs who made transition into command relatively smooth.*

*The HOTO document was very helpful and I will continue to maintain this document for my successor.*

*I had continuation of the PL SGT when I posted in, which greatly eased the transition. The pers/skills tracker was well maintained and enabled quick decision making when I was still unfamiliar with the platoon.*

*I am creating a 'handy hints' document for the HOTO I am preparing for my replacement. Information on common problems that could arise and how to deal with them.*



*HOTO was a Word document (admittedly, rather comprehensive) which didn't provide much in the way of transitioning to a new role.*

*There was no formal HOTO at the unit which meant a significant loss of knowledge coming into the position.*

*Coming into a previously vacant position, there were very few existing mechanisms in place.*

*Unfortunately, in my role the existing legacy was poor and I felt that I had to work harder to regain respect for the position from subordinates. I believe a formal HOTO should be created and the legacy of PL commander's notebook, helpful links/documents and resources should be shared to assist colleagues to feel supported and more job ready.*

HOTOs should be done in person wherever possible. However, not everyone will have the opportunity to do this for reasons outside their control. If you find yourself unable to complete your HOTO in person, as a bare minimum make sure you receive HOTO documents electronically and arrange a period of time to talk to your predecessor over the phone or VTC.

## Preparation checklist

When you march in to your new unit you will be provided a march-in sheet which will ensure you have completed all the mandatory tasks so that you can operate in your unit. However, the more you can do before you arrive, the more time you will have to get started in your role as opposed to waiting for access to the systems you require.

Demi-official letter – Don't delay writing your demi to the CO. Start drafting your demi as soon as you receive confirmation of your posting as it demonstrates you have initiative and that you look forward to your new role. You should also write a demi to your OC. Once your OC has received your demi he/she may start sending you important information that you will need to start preparing for your posting. If you need information regarding your new unit contact the LTs currently at the unit and find out as much as you can before writing your demi.

Physical fitness – ***If you are not fit, GET FIT!*** Manage your lead-up time and make time for fitness.

Arrange HOTO dates – preferably in person otherwise via teleconference.

Objective links – The sooner you can organise Objective links the sooner you can start reading key documents relative to your role.

Read key documents that relate to your role such as:

- HOTO notes
- Tp/Pl commander's notebook
- Personnel tracker/  
qualifications tracker
- Unit SOPs
- TP/PL SOPs
- CO/OC directives
- Unit OPORD and Synch  
matrix
- CO/OC command philosophy
- Doctrine relative to your unit
- Manual of Army Employments.  
This will explain what Army  
expects from soldiers and is  
relevant to your Corps [http://  
drnet/Army/DWMA/Manual  
of\\_Army\\_Employments/  
Pages/Manual\\_of\\_Army  
Employments.aspx](http://drnet/Army/DWMA/Manual_of_Army_Employments/Pages/Manual_of_Army_Employments.aspx)

Keep reading to improve your knowledge (your professional development in the Australian Army will never stop).

## Prepare for success

Being mentally, physically, professionally and administratively prepared will ensure a smooth transition into your command role. Determine your command style. During your training to this point you have had opportunities to determine what command style will work for you. Remember what worked and what didn't on field activities and think about your instructors and chain of command during training. What leadership traits did you admire? Where appropriate, adopt the leadership traits that were good and avoid replicating the command style of the leaders that were less effective.

Be proud of your new appointment and remember that it is a privilege to lead Australian soldiers. Leading Australian soldiers should never be taken for granted no matter what stage of your career you are in. It is also important to realise that other people being posted in at all ranks will also be excited about their new role. Your OC maybe in their first year of appointment and will also be feeling the mix of emotions that you are. Everyone will genuinely want you to succeed and no one will be out to let you fail.





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## Part 2

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### ***Getting Established***

The first 100 days is really where the rubber hits the road, where everything you have learnt will finally be put into practice. It is important to understand what you may encounter at your new unit will undoubtedly shape your early years in Defence. Understanding how to best manage your time and learning from any mistakes will be important and influence the way the rest of your tenure at your unit evolves. It is important to remember that you are marching in to a unit that has been established for a long time, it will have a proud history, many procedures in place, some of which you can influence over time and some of which you can't. Make sure you understand this history and the procedures in place and that you are unlikely to change them for good reason but continually look at areas where you can have a positive influence.

*Do not reinvent the wheel. You are joining the organisation, they are not joining you.*

*My advice to any person entering into their role with no experience - ASK QUESTIONS! Lots of them! And never underestimate the value of each and every member at your unit. Any experience or knowledge they have that may just rub off on you will only make you all the better at your role.*

### **March in early**

Wherever possible aim to arrive at your unit before the rest of the TP/PL. If your unit does not require you to arrive early, ask that you have a chance to settle in and prepare as much as you can prior to becoming inundated with the day-to-day demands. Use this time wisely to test your accessibility to electronic files, catch up with any changes that have occurred over the leave period, and use the time to get to know senior members of your TP/PL if they have marched in early, as well as other key personnel around the unit. This is an ideal time to ask questions about the unit before things start getting hectic.

*Having the confidence to ask questions you need answers to, whether that is asking up or down the chain of command, is an important skill.*

*Ensure you ask sensible questions to both your supporting staff and seniors. By asking questions it will show that you care about your command appointment and that you care about your soldiers.*

## Routine

Routine will play an important role in your life at any rank whether in barracks, out field or on operations. Make sure you understand your barracks routine (battle rhythm) early. Make sure you know when and where weekly meetings are held, know when PT is scheduled, understand where unit activities are taking place and then you can work out when you have time to plan and execute other TP/PL activities. When planning other activities, make sure your chain of command is aware of your intentions. If your chain of command does not understand what you are planning in the little time you may have available, that time can quickly be consumed with other unit tasks or extra regimental activities. Make sure the activities you are planning are useful and constructive and ensure your planning activities align with the commander's intent. If your activity does not align you will need to be prepared to explain why your planned activity is more important than other unit activities.

*My chain of command had provided myself and the other TP leaders with a battle rhythm. I would model my routines to nest within that of my higher HQ to ensure that everything lined up where possible.*

*I made sure I nested my individual Battle Rhythm with SQN Battle Rhythm, and REGT Battle Rhythm. This worked to a degree, however, there were challenges with changing/competing priorities. I also maintained a personal daily diary (mobile) and work daily diary (physical - Defence issued) to separate the two lifestyles and ensure focus and preparedness/readiness for current ops. You have to have something to keep organised ... no one can maintain complete awareness and tracking on*

*current ops in their head without some form of buffer like a diary/notebook/phone/calendar.*

The most important thing is to have a plan that you have developed with your SNCOs. If you don't plan early then you will have no chance of executing TP/PL planned and lead activities. However, at the same time be prepared for those plans to change. Part of being an officer is to plan regularly, have contingency plans and be prepared for your plan to change completely whenever your chain of command demands otherwise. It is easy to become disgruntled when your plans do not come to fruition. However, having a plan in place to begin with means that you are doing your job. Planning will play a big part throughout your career so get used to it.

Some advice/experiences from lieutenants regarding routine:

*Get to work 30 minutes early, read and process.*

*I would go to the unit gym every day at lunch to maintain my own fitness goals. The routine in the unit is already dictated by the battle rhythm.*

*I didn't allow my platoon to make a habit of working outside hours, e.g. if the section commanders were behind on tasks and were staying late it was to be for no more than 1 hour. I maintained the same. It encourages communication up the chain of command when workloads increase, encourages finding efficiencies and encourages delegation. Our CO strongly imparted the concept of maintaining work-life balance. The reasoning was that when a commander needs to call on their force to surge and achieve a difficult task on short notice, the force must be capable and not burnt out. Increased workloads and commitments should be a command decision and not an accident.*

*Routine, such as a weekly catch up with CPLs, is useful. Due to the nature of work within the unit, it is near impossible to have a regular work rhythm.*

*The most valuable part of my daily routine is a morning 'huddle'. It provides an opportunity to start the day on the right foot by identifying roles and responsibilities, tasks to be completed, expectations, and opens the floor to any questions or queries.*

## Change

As officers we naturally want to be innovative, make things better and more efficient. However, you need to be smart about when to make changes and when to let current practices continue. Change is a good thing if done the right way and for the right reasons. Before making changes make sure you understand why a particular procedure or system is in place. Are the reasons for change in line with changing circumstances or better technology, or have you genuinely worked out a better method of improving things under the same circumstances?

*Allow practices that are working to continue. Things that trigger change are ones that most negatively affect morale. If it is in my power to improve something that will improve morale I will change it.*

Generally speaking people like to stick to a routine so **don't chase change for the sake of it**. Make sure your reasons are clearly communicated with your SNCO because **if you get their buy-in, you'll likely have soldier buy-in. Sometimes they won't agree, then there are two options:**

- 1) take on their experience and advice and change the plan, or*
- 2) make the difficult command decision, communicate why the change is necessary and proceed.*

It is essential that your TP/PL understands your rationale as to why decisions for change have been made.

*Asking your command team straight up what they thought worked last year is a good start. It gives the command team a chance to voice their frustrations and potentially avoid the same mistakes if they can be rectified. It also gives you the opportunity to explain why that certain system is in place if you can't change it.*

## Build effective relationships

Your ability to work with a wide range of personalities will be key to getting things done. You are now part of a big team and your ability to cooperate with key members both within and outside your TP/PL will influence how much assistance you will get to support TP/PL activities.

**TP/PL relationships.** Firstly you need to have established a healthy working relationship with your SNCOs. Respect the position they are fulfilling in the TP/PL and build on that. Note that SNCOs have been working a long time for their appointment. Whilst they bring a wealth of knowledge, they may also want to make changes. You as the TP/PL commander need to vet these changes to ensure there is no breach in Army policy and/or unit procedures that make these changes impossible.

The relationship with your SNCOs has to be genuine. If it is not genuine your soldiers will notice very quickly and if not careful you could easily be in a position where the soldiers are picking sides on who they prefer to be led by.

*Effective relationships are fundamentally built upon trust and respect, which must be earned. Credibility can only be attained through personal example and achieving buy-in through authenticity as it applies to core soldier behaviours and values. Develop and nurture relationships both professionally and personally - it is possible to have both once trust and respect are earned.*

Relationships with your JNCOs and soldiers need to remain professional and a healthy relationship will be determined by your ability to lead effectively. Leadership topics will be covered in Part 3 of this handbook. Many TP/PL commanders have commented that PT creates a great opportunity to connect with your soldiers so attending PT should be high on your priorities when establishing your weekly routine.

*Fitness, Fitness, Fitness. You do not need to be the biggest, the fastest or the strongest but you always need to put in, always seek self-improvement and be someone that a younger you would have looked up to.*

Getting to know your soldiers well as individuals is an important part of creating effective relationships with your TP/PL. ***Be honest with your subordinates, be friendly and approachable. They will listen and respect you if they know you're a human.***

*You build these effective relationships by working as a team to solve problems and complete tasks, ensuring that members have*

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*buy in and feel as if they are an effective member of the team. Sustaining these relationships is achieved by getting to know the individuals and remembering this knowledge.*

*At the beginning of my tenure I was not firm enough. It took time to learn when I had to be strict and when I could be friendly. I was too weak in my leadership style and it was a hindrance to discipline and motivation. The largest takeaway was to be clear in my instruction. Clarity makes it less likely that issues will arise and makes it easier to hold individuals to account.*

Keep the soldiers in mind when you first post in. Soldiers will often have immediate concerns they want rectified quickly. Sometimes giving them these easy wins can build trust immediately and cement you as a TP/PL commander who listens.

**External relationships.** There is not a lot of activity that occurs without the coordination of others outside your TP/PL. Field exercises do not occur without the support of Q Staff, soldiers do not receive their entitlements without the efficient assistance of clerks, resources allocated to your TP/PL might not get prioritised to you if you can't effectively communicate with your HQ and resource manager.

As you progress through your career as an officer, your ability to work as a team with those supporting you will become even more important when you find yourself planning activities at a higher level. Your professional network of those who can help you will be very valuable over time so start developing effective relationships early.

## Set goals

**Personal goals.** Setting personal goals is important as it will provide you motivation to drive towards success. Goals will vary for everyone. Some common goals include maintaining/improving fitness, work-life balance and workplace goals.

When asked about goal setting, lieutenants had mixed feelings, with some satisfied they had achieved their goals during their posting whilst others were disappointed that their goals were not achieved, largely because of factors outside their control. Setting goals is important and



at the same time it is important to think about contingency plans in the event you are not going to meet your goals. Here is what lieutenants had to say about the difficulties of reaching their goals:

*Goal setting in the unit was exceptionally difficult. Short term goals were only achievable due to the changing nature of tasking or job in the unit.*

*Finding time to develop the Troop's individual and section skills. Goals were unattainable due to time pressures. Requires more realistic time appreciation.*

*What didn't work was the amount of interruptions to the training program and last minute requirements given by parent Battalion Group.*

**TP/PL.** The most successful goals for your TP/PL are ones that you develop in consultation or buy in from your higher chain of command. Some OCs may run a command lead planning event early in the year in order to enable command staff to plan tasks that help fulfill commander's intent. These leadership planning events often provide opportunity for you to back brief your OC or OPSO so that they understand what you want to achieve with your TP/PL and can provide early endorsement or modification to your plans. This level of planning helps prevent wasted time and effort on plans that do not complement the larger picture within the unit.

*Goals must be realistic within the confines of the unit's tempo and schedule.*

Buy in from key personnel is vital, remembering that you are part of a team. Goals developed with your SNCOs have a much greater chance of success than just your own ideas you are trying to pass onto others. If your SNCOs firmly believe the goals you are trying to achieve are beneficial to the TP/PL, they will sell the goal to soldiers with confidence which goes a long way when trying to encourage your soldiers to go above and beyond.

*Setting the goal and vision as a group with all of the PL's input worked far better than I have seen it previously done with the goals and vision of the commander being forced upon the subordinates.*

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It is a good idea to share your goal ideas with those who have done the job before you. Find opportunities to talk to the 2IC and OPSO as they will provide advice on what they think is attainable.

Build flexibility into your TP/PL goals. Battle plans rarely last beyond first contact so you need to be flexible and you need to think about contingency plans to help get you back on track when the situation changes. Setting broad goals as a TP/PL commander gives you wriggle room for late notice changes and adjustments to the plan outside of your control. Goals like improve the overall fitness of your TP/PL has tangible metrics you can assess and is broad enough to be achieved despite tasking. It is also a good idea to focus broad goals on achieving your OC or COs command directive/philosophy. These type of goals can be achieved across multiple training activities or tasks. Remember to let you TP/PL know when you have accomplished goals and complement their performance so that they know and understand that the hard work they are doing is being noticed and has purpose.

Here is what current lieutenants had to say about setting goals

*Adhering to goals once set is often difficult in a high-tempo environment. While it is good to give your team a direction, make sure you're not promising something that may be affected by unit tempo or command decisions.*

*It can sometimes be hard to hit specific goals due to the high tempo of the Regiment and the Battery going out field. I have achieved most of my goals I set at the start of the year, though I can still find room for improvement.*

*Don't over-extend your goals at the start of the year, look more at 6 month intervals.*

*Prioritising goals is essential as certain goals will need to be skipped IOT meet the ever changing time-frame available.*

**SMART** is a useful tool that many lieutenants recommended for setting goals:

**Specific.** Specific goals will usually answer the five “W” questions:

- What: What needs to be accomplished?

- Why: What are the reasons, purposes or benefits of accomplishing the goal?
- Who: Who is involved?
- Where: Identify a location.
- Which: Identify what is required to achieve the goal and what constraints may hinder its accomplishment.

**Measurable.** Measurable goals will usually answer questions such as:

- How much?
- How many?
- How will the assessor know when it is accomplished?

**Achievable.** Goals must be realistic and achievable. An achievable goal will usually answer the question of: 'how can the goal be accomplished?'

**Relevant.** Goals must be relevant and contribute to fulfilling commander's intent.

**Time-based.** A time-based goal will usually answer the questions:

- When?
- What can be done 6 months from now?
- What can be done 6 weeks from now?
- What can be done today?

*SMART formatting for goals is helpful as it provides the who, what, when, why, and how.*

*SMART goals, smaller goals that work towards a bigger goal worked really well because it made the team and myself feel like we were achieving something and working towards that big team goal.*

*Using the SMART template ensured that goals were realistic and that we had the right people to achieve those goals.*

*Life, Army, field, personal circumstances will often get in the way. Adding time to the SMART goal complex reduces disappointment and encourages you to keep fighting for what you want to achieve.*

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## Part 3

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### *Leadership*

Leadership is a topic you will look at in detail time and time again throughout your Army life. For most new officers your TP/PL command appointment will be your first opportunity to lead Australian soldiers. You will soon find out if your style of leadership is as effective as you were anticipating or if it needs improvement. Some junior officers will have more natural ability than others to lead. However, what matters in the long run is the effort you put in to develop your leadership skills. Every officer needs to continually improve and refine their leadership style throughout their career as they manage different people and take on more responsibility. The approach you take when leading a small team whose members all know each other will be different to the leadership style you use when you promote to higher ranks and are managing a sub-unit or other officers.

As you live and breathe the role as a TP/PL commander you will naturally find you become more passionate about leadership as you discover what works and doesn't work for you. During your posting observe the leadership styles of your senior officers and your peers and think about what they do well and where they could improve. Observing others can be a great way of determining what not to do. The time you have spent in training to date has only given you small glimpses into the pressure and loneliness of command. Adjusting your leadership style as you develop is important as what might have worked leading your peers on a 6hr lead will need a lot of refining when you are in the hot seat 24/7.

The ADF has recently released [ADF-P-0 ADF Leadership](#). Good leadership is key across all of Defence and this doctrine sets a solid benchmark for any leader in the ADF. The themes addressed in this doctrine closely align with what Army has been promoting for years and therefore anyone practicing good leadership in Army will find this document complementary to what Army has taught. This

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doctrine is a must read for all officers and discusses the following leadership principles:

- Mutual trust
- Shared understanding
- Commander's intent
- Mission style orders
- Disciplined initiative
- Risk
- Check and verify

To practice good leadership as a junior officer, you need to understand these leadership principles and how they apply to you as a new leader leading a TP/PL.

## Mission command

You have already learnt about mission command through training and now you have an opportunity to put it into practice. This is easier said than done and there are important factors/conditions that need to be met before effective mission command can be achieved:

**Trust.** Trust needs to be established both up and down the chain which can take time after marching in. It is about providing freedom of action to enable your team to complete the mission without being micromanaged. Failure will inevitably occur on occasions and you need to manage where failure is acceptable and ensure that soldiers have opportunities to learn from failure.

Trust and freedom of action was a topic that many lieutenants were clearly passionate about in their responses. Here is what they had to say:

*Freedom of action is giving intent and allowing the member to attempt to complete it. Failure in smaller tasks needs to be treated as a learning experience. To give subordinates FOA, there needs to be a level of trust.*



*My PL have a lot of freedom. If they think something can be done differently, I allow them to try and see if it works better. They think for themselves, I don't micromanage them. The only time I don't is when there is a safety concern, or time sensitive issues. However, they are the SMEs of their trade, I will allow them to achieve the task the way they do.*

*Be honest, be transparent. Don't hide bad news. Don't make excuses or throw people under the bus. Take responsibility. Be humble but not unconfident. BE CONSISTENT.*

*Trust is built through communication and honest, sincere support. Ongoing proactive and responsive communication is crucial in developing trust, in fact it is the pre-requisite. If I don't communicate well then it is unlikely that soldiers will respond to anything else. Once that is mastered I am dealing with genuinely interested soldiers.*

*Earn respect through an alignment of actions with words - talk is cheap, execution is irrefutable. Never compromise your own personal standards, hold yourself to the highest standard set. Be firm, fair, approachable and consistent.*

*Trust takes time to earn, it has taken months to get to know, and be fully invested in my soldiers to earn their trust. I have made it clear that they are my priority, and I am not out to just further my career or get promoted, I want to look after their welfare and support them in their career advancement. Learn about them, about their families, about what they are passionate about, so you can have in depth conversations about what is important to them which helps you become more engaging in a meaningful way.*

**Shared understanding.** Shared understanding needs to be achieved quickly. You need to enable two-way dialogue to ensure the plan is understood and that 'war stoppers' are addressed early so that they can be dealt with. Shared understanding needs to go both up and down the chain. The following comments are lieutenants' thoughts on shared understanding down the chain.

*Ask leading questions to encourage subordinates to come up with their own plan to do things. Make this a habit. Give what (effect) and why, but leave how to them.*

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*Provide a clear intent and have subordinates back brief on a plan, this allows freedom of planning and the ability to mentor if needed post back brief.*

*Explain 'why' you're doing something, don't keep them in the dark. People are far more willing to perform and enjoy their work if they understand and agree with the goal.*

*Include them in goal setting and planning - the plan is ours and not just mine because they are part of making it. Communicate vision. Encourage and highlight success and link it back to actions taken by the troop where applicable.*

**Commander's intent.** When commander's intent is delivered properly your team will understand the mission well enough that they can achieve the desired result without any further orders even when things do not unfold as planned. Commander's intent will enable your TP/PL to keep fighting for mission success even in high stress, chaotic situations as it provides mission purpose and the desired end state. You need to be a good communicator. The more you practice it, the easier it gets.

As leaders we often visualise exactly how we want something done. We think about what our boss will think and what might go wrong that will negatively reflect on us as leaders. The reality is that a lot of the time your subordinates will have great ideas and come up better solutions than you.

**Mission style orders.** You need to deliver orders in a way that gets buy in from your TP/PL and to do this you need to provide purpose which articulates what is to be achieved and why. The format of your orders should be tailored to your task. ROBC will provide you specific orders formats for your discipline. Always remember that you own the plan when you are delivering it.

**Disciplined initiative.** Initiative is encouraged but must be in accordance with the mission's purpose. Apply initiative when the situation changes and where you know you can make an improvement, but also know when it is time to adopt standard procedure.

**Risk.** Determine who owns the various risks during activities. Some of the risks will be yours and hence your responsibility to mitigate. Other risks should be owned at lower levels and some at higher levels. Make sure you understand what your risk is. Remember things will go wrong from time to time. If they do, is the consequence worth it? If unsure, discuss with your chain of command and get guidance until you are comfortable making your own judgement.

**Check and verify.** Remember that if you ordered the mission then you also own the outcome of that mission. It is a fundamental error to think of mission command as 'set and forget'; rather it is 'set, follow, check, support and adapt'.

## 10 leadership principles

ADF Leadership outlines 10 leadership principles. Use these principles as a self-assessment both now and once you start leading your TP/PL. Self-assessment is an important process towards being truthful to yourself, enabling you to identify the areas you need to concentrate on so that you become a better leader, one that others will want to follow:

- Know yourself and seek self-improvement.
- Be proficient.
- Seek and accept responsibility.
- Lead by example.
- Provide direction and keep your team informed.
- Know and care for your subordinates.
- Develop the potential of your subordinates.
- Make sound and timely decisions.
- Build the team and challenge its abilities.
- Communicate effectively.

Remember at all times you need to be authentic about your leadership. Faking leadership will only get you so far before your soldiers work out who you really are.

## **Pandemic management/Flexible working arrangements for new TP/PL commanders**

The COVID-19 crisis has dramatically changed the way we are now required to manage personnel, many of whom have worked individually from home throughout long lockdown periods. Army units have faced situations where it made sense to disperse the workforce and work from home where possible in order to preserve the force so that it is ready for operations. Although good results can be achieved from working at home, it relies heavily on trust and you should have measures in place to monitor performance.

It is important to understand where opportunities can be gained by dispersing the force as well as understanding the potential costs for dispersing personnel. COVID-19 presented opportunities that prove that quality work can be completed from home which has now set a precedence for more flexible working arrangements where appropriate. Your chain of command will provide further guidance on working from home if relevant. Be prepared to adjust to this dispersed team environment if you are instructed to do so.

## **Motivation**

Motivation is an important part of your job and if you can keep your soldiers motivated they will enjoy working under your leadership. Motivated soldiers will go above and beyond your expectations and they will be more willing to 'dig deep' when it counts and will be more likely to succeed in difficult situations.

The difference between a TP/PL that completes a task because they 'have to' but don't really 'want to' compared to a TP/PL that sees it as a challenge and wants to know if they can complete a task quicker or outshine previous performance or others' performance, results in the latter working harder and achieving better results. No matter what your line of work is, look at ways you can motivate your soldiers. Friendly competition and rewards for good achievement often work well, whether it be special recognition of individuals or a section or exemption from doing a particular task for a week. There are many ways of rewarding your soldiers without physically giving them something.

Here are some tips/advice of lieutenants on providing motivation:

*I created a bit of a contest on which table was the fastest and how quickly the waiting line was vanishing. When the soldiers could see the direct and physical evidence of their efficiency, suddenly the boring task of fitting SCE became exciting.*

*Friendly competition is always a good way to motivate.*

*Encourage a sense of humor, good banter and team cohesion. Exploit opportunities wherever possible during PT or social engagement activities. Take the time to actually get to know soldiers - what drives them to succeed, intrinsically and extrinsically. Capitalise on their strengths, challenge and develop their weaknesses. Develop competitiveness within the individual - the constructive kind; constant competition within oneself, each day striving to improve upon and be better than the last.*

*As a junior commander I understand how boring it can be sitting around and waiting for things to do. So by simply asking what training opportunities they would like to see arise in the workplace and have some reserve activities in my back pocket for days when the workload is lighter, eg maintaining IMT skills.*

*Inter troop competition is a good way to motivate as it builds pride within small teams ... motivating them to be better.*

*Conduct off-base PT and PME on topics that soldiers recommend or want to learn more about.*

*Where practical, allow pers to move between sections and try different tasks. Allow subordinates to raise ideas and provide time and resources for innovation.*



## Part 4

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### *Discipline*

Maintaining discipline can be challenging for some. Getting the balance right can be difficult to begin with as some lieutenants cringe at the thought of having to 'get up someone' and end up going 'too soft' whilst others have no hesitation at all and can go too heavy which may result in disgruntled soldiers. If you get the balance right your soldiers will respect the level of discipline you apply.

Every TP/PL is different, and you and your NCOs are best placed to determine the level of discipline you need to apply. This of course will be influenced by the CO and RSM, as they will set expectations regarding performance and general behaviour.

SNCOs in your unit have been dealing with disciplinary issues over many years and the way they handle discipline can greatly influence the level of effort you need to apply in this area. Remember that 'the standard you walk by is the standard you set'. These are very true words, as your soldiers will notice your presence during all aspects of work and if you are seen to let standards slip without any action, you have effectively reset the standards at a lower level.

*Don't doubt your decisions or your instinct when something seems off.*

Make sure you communicate clearly with your SNCOs regarding discipline. Make sure you are both on the same page and are continually setting consistent standards. If soldiers identify a difference in your standards make sure you address this issue behind closed doors. Never let soldiers see you and your SNCO/JNCO arguing over disciplinary standards (or any other work for that matter). Sort out any differences in private and ensure your efforts in front of our soldiers is a team effort. Openly criticising your leadership team can lead to soldiers choosing a side or NCOs not effectively passing on your intent to soldiers.



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Additional considerations and tips from TP/PL commanders are as follows:

*Discipline is maintained by establishing good professionalism both as a role model and correcting behaviour.*

*Don't be afraid to have a formal conversation when addressing poor discipline. Clearly explain the shortfall and commit the subordinate to addressing the issue.*

*Respect the senior soldiers but don't hesitate to sparingly exercise your authority to establish standards and expectations. Make it a habit of respectfully correcting anyone who is not following standards then it will come naturally to you.*

*It is essential to maintain professionalism. This assists with discipline. I feel that by ensuring expectations are set early, then people know exactly what is required of them.*

*High standards of discipline are associated with high levels of morale, soldierly conduct and professional mastery, engendering a culture of pride, group identity, will to win, excellence, self-improvement, high motivation and commitment.*

*Utilise discipline early. Easy to go from strict to more relaxed rather than relaxed to more strict.*



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## Part 5

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### **Professionalism**

Professionalism goes hand in hand with being an officer. People will expect you to be knowledgeable across a broad range of military matters, as well as know the specifics about your Corps/trade. Some people you deal with will understand where you are on your career path whilst others will expect you to have an in-depth knowledge of whatever your core role is. Wherever you are in your military journey, it is important to keep developing your knowledge and professionalism.

If you don't know something, ask. If you have an inkling that someone is going to ask you a question about a particular subject, find out what you don't know before that CAPT or MAJ asks you to explain.

*Be an SME in your specific field. You are not expected to know everything..., but a basic grasp of many little things goes a long way, especially when working with other Corps or services.*

*Be competent at your job, be honest about your failings but have a plan to improve when the opportunity arises.*

*I believe you don't always need to be an SME - just on your way to becoming one.*

*Understand the technical role of your subordinates to a level that you can clearly communicate with them. This can be done through courses or simply tasking subordinates to run lessons on a subject. This doubles as an opportunity to improve their presenting skills and confidence in speaking.*

*You need to know enough to answer RFIs from your chain of command. Ask your commander what their requirements of you are, what their CCIRs are, and develop those areas. Then continue your education by communicating with your subordinates. Continuous development will only be a benefit.*

ROBC will teach you details about many aspects of your Corps. However, you may not always get the opportunity to gain the full experience of particular aspects of capabilities that you now manage.

Make sure you get the most out of your TP/PL ***through asking the team to explain and demonstrate their own knowledge.*** This will give you a far better understanding of the capability they can provide and will help you understand any limitations associated with your TP/PL capability. Asking your team detailed questions about what they do and how they do it shows that you have a genuine interest in their roles.

Providing regular reports of your TP/PL current status and capabilities will be a regular and important part of your role. You need to be able to effectively communicate your capability up the chain of command and highlight where pressures may lie or risks you are taking on. If for example you lose one of your specialists to a course, tasking or welfare issues, knowing the capability they provide will help articulate concerns higher.

*You need to know how your sub-unit operates and how it interacts with adjacent units.*

Remember that your soldiers are looking to you for direction and they will expect you to know everything there is to know regarding admin processes, eg how do I get on that specialist course, when can I take compassionate leave, how do I update my personal details, why did I not get the same field pay as others in the unit, and the list goes on and on. If your knowledge of Army/ADF admin processes are lacking, talk to your unit clerk and become familiar with the [ADF Pay and Conditions Manual \(PACMAN\)](#).

*You need to know everything admin-related to brief your soldiers when they ask for benefit entitlements, and you also need to know about courses and promotions.*

*I have to be an SME on personnel management, administration, welfare and being a medium between Company HQ and my Platoon HQ to effectively manage expectations of those above and below me.*

1. *Learn your paperwork and how to format a minute and brief.*
2. *Develop and sustain good relationships with the orderly room, CC, ADJT and OPSO.*
3. *Stay on top of admin issues to avoid being embarrassed by unit members 'coming up in red' on weekly status reports.*

*Efficiencies must be gained wherever possible in the interests of timeliness. Administration must be executed in a timely manner, with accuracy. Build resources of 'where to find' information.*

*Understand and be fluent with the admin approval matrix for the unit, be intimate with the PACMAN and the [Electronic Manual of Personal Administration \(eMPA\)](#) for soldiers' admin, know the clerks, if you don't know, don't leave it sitting there - ask someone.*

*Ensure you have templates ready to fill in. Always ask your peers for help before sending any administration up or down. Learn how to use Microsoft Word and all its niche capabilities (eg setting up paragraph formatting). Ensure you get along well with your clerks. And get really good at admin.*

As you progress through your role as a TP/PL commander, you will soon discover where your administrative knowledge gaps lie. Make sure you educate yourself in areas where you know there are deficiencies and know where to find policy so that you can provide accurate advice to soldiers. eMPA is a useful website for discovering policy. Take some time a junior officer to explore and read random policy to better prepare yourself for future issues that will require an understanding of policy.

*If someone else knows more, I will lean on their expertise. If I find myself in a situation where there isn't much experience to support me, I will study and attempt to learn quickly.*

## **Social networking**

Making a network of friends goes hand in hand with being a professional in your field. As you begin to network with people in your new role you will increase your situational awareness of 'what's really happening' in both your unit and other units. You will increase the pool of people you can potentially get advice from, and it is a great way to pick up new ideas or capitalise on situations that you might not have known about through the normal passage of information coming down your chain of command.

Social networking in Army is unique compared to civilian networking. The mess, PT sessions, sports competitions and dining-in nights all provide unique settings for getting together. Social networking should also be enjoyable, so make sure you do not let the opportunity of social networking slip by.

*Always take the opportunity to build bridges and always be hesitant to burn them.*

*Fitness networking and social events [in the unit] are good ways to social network.*

*The mess has turned out to be the most important place for my professional learning. It may be because I don't drink so to keep busy I make small talk and that keeps me informed. But more seriously, I have made some long-term friendships and associations in the mess and learnt a lot about my peers and seniors which has been an inspiration and a lesson for me.*

*Social networking can be a really powerful thing and can help present opportunities you may have not otherwise had. It also provides you with more resources which you can utilise as needed.*

*Social networking is good, but it is a tool and not a solution to existing platforms. People need to realise that it's a faster way to convey information and not for personal gain whilst in the organisation*

*Networking is hard when you have a mountain of tasks to do and get stuck behind your desk. Use the mess to socialise if you find you have no time.*

## **Innovation**

Army actively promotes a culture of innovation. Innovation happens at all levels of Army and as military professionals we should always be looking for ways to do things better. As an officer, you should be promoting and facilitating innovation wherever you can within your means. Here are lieutenants' thoughts on innovation and how to promote it in a team environment:



*Be innovative yourself and support the 'crazy ideas' from your team. Create space for them to discuss and bring these ideas to the table without fear of performance punishment or being told they are too much.*

*Bring the team together. Relax the team, then ask leading questions. Promote a mindset that the default will be to try an idea unless there's a very good reason not to (eg think big, prototype small, and if successful scale up).*

*Innovation was already strong within the platoon when I arrived. Fostering it was a matter of hearing out suggestions, allowing ideas to progress or providing constructive criticism.*

*I had some very keen diggers who would come to me with ideas for shaping current practices. I fostered and encouraged this by giving them the time and tools to properly sell their ideas and then followed through with trying to get them implemented when appropriate. Knowing that your boss is open to ideas and can be reasoned with is an important part of team cohesion.*

*I try to foster innovation. I think the biggest thing is if/when you get negative feedback about a process, you work with people to create a solution and create change to benefit yourself, your colleagues and those in your position in the future.*

*Innovation is best fostered through encouraging critical thinking, performance efficiencies, promoting group thought and seeking opinion in streamlining processes that will enhance the team abilities to execute.*

## **Mentoring**

Who is mentoring you?

The amount of mentoring you receive largely depends on what mechanisms your chain of command put in place. Some COs/OCs are very passionate about mentoring and self-improvement and will coordinate formalised PME sessions or one-on-one mentoring. If you get on well with someone in your chain of command you may find this person will provide personal advice and share their experiences which is also mentoring. Don't wait and just expect to be mentored

by someone as the opportunity might not eventuate. If mentoring occurs through formalised training activities this is all well and good, but don't expect someone to just offer up their time out of the blue. If you believe you could really benefit from more personal mentoring, invest time in building good working relationships with those you trust on both a personal and professional level. If you invest the time, those higher in your chain will be more willing to give up their time to help if they know you are genuinely trying to improve your performance and the quality of leadership you provide to your TP/PL.

Who are you mentoring?

Mentoring is an important part of developing your subordinates. Some people will need more mentoring than others, some are more than happy to receive mentoring, whilst others who have been in the Army for longer may be happy with where they are on a professional level and feel that they do not need any form of mentoring. Mentoring may be completed individually or collectively as a group. It may be a scheduled and planned activity or it may be a 'spur of the moment' activity, like discussing what went wrong with an activity they just attempted or providing advice to your SNCO/NCO on how they could have handled an incident more appropriately or effectively. Whatever the format of mentoring that is occurring, it is an important process of improving both individuals and collective groups.

Here are some lieutenants' thoughts on mentoring:

*Don't do all the admin for your soldiers. Challenge them to look for the policy themselves, then have them teach others.*

*Enable others to make decisions then walk them through the effect and how that worked or could be improved. The best lesson I learnt was how to delegate, and then to verify that tasks were completed.*

***Everyone should be training subordinates with the mindset of being replaced by them. Empower the individual so that they can. Encourage decision making, critical analysis, objectivity, professional development across all disciplines of skill, knowledge, attitude and behavior; challenge ethics, morals, perspectives, judgements, rationale, and subjectivity. Provide guidance, alternate points of view/perspective, offer experience, insights and advice.***

*I have given JNCOs the opportunities to run activities or support activities, write PARs on their subordinates, do presentations for PME on the topics they're passionate about, or when they do their subject courses, discussing their assessments.*

*I have given tasks to soldiers above what is expected of them and have got the CPLs to mentor them when they completed the tasks. The small amount of mentors I had were a few other CAPTs in the same Corps. They know how to complete the tasks you need to complete and approach problems in the manner that they need to be approached, and dealing with pers in the same Corps, they have similar personalities and are easier to get along with.*

*I have tried to maintain a balance of mentoring without creating favourites. The key thing I have found is investing time in those who will listen and use your advice well. Other members are not as invested in work in which they will prefer not to be mentored.*

*I would have competent and strong NCOs and officers around those who are junior to shape them to be strong leaders. The best advice that I received is that the day you stop learning is the day you die. You can learn anything from anyone at any level every day.*

*Mentoring is all about getting to know a subordinate and setting in place achievable goals for them to reach. It is accepting a certain level of failure and being able to correct it to ensure that the member improves. I did not have a mentor and it was hugely detrimental to my development.*

*When a subordinate shares their goals with me, I make it my mission to support them. Even those who have categorically and firmly told me that they are not interested in a promotion, I continue to engage with them and share professional development activities to help them improve their skills in their current role or achieve more. I did not have a specific mentor during my time as a LT (continuing) but I regularly have frank conversations with my superiors in the unit and at the mess to seek out gems of wisdom. I love having conversations and it always helps when the person sitting opposite me has stories and experience to share.*

## Reporting through Performance Appraisal Reports

PAR's are a key component of professional development both with the comments and advice you receive from your OC as well as the reporting you provide to your TP/PL members. PAR writing will continue throughout your career so it is something you are going to have to get good at.

You will receive your personal PAR from your OC. However, your OC may well ask his/her key staff to contribute to your PAR as they will more than likely be working closer with you and be in a better position to provide a more accurate assessment on your performance.

When writing PARs you may take the same approach. You will form your own opinions on a subordinate's performance. However, it is also important to get the opinions from those who work more closely with the individual you are reporting on. Do not take PARs lightly. PARs are a key part of mentoring as you are formally telling someone where they need to improve their performance. PARs are also a key instrument in determining if someone is ready to be promoted and therefore it is important you are not giving poor-performing soldiers a glowing report that is going to see them promoted in preference to better-performing individuals. True and honest feedback can be hard to give, especially to individuals who are trying hard but still performing poorly. However, it is such an important process to ensure that Army as an organisation is promoting quality individuals who are going to be an asset and who are going to improve the organisation. All COs/OCs have lived and breathed PARs throughout their entire careers and will provide guidance on the way PAR writing should be done in your unit, noting it is in their best interests to make sure that only those who deserve promotion are provided the opportunity to take on more responsibility in the unit.

It is wise to ensure your subordinates receive feedback throughout the reporting period so they are not shocked by what you have to say at reporting time. If someone is not performing well, make sure they know early so that they are provided the opportunity to improve before being formally reported on. It is also important that you can provide examples to individuals of poor performance when providing a poor PAR, and if you have not recorded these occurrences you may

struggle to remember what has occurred throughout the reporting period. Maintaining a TP/PL Commander Notebook is a good way to record both good and bad points on performance of subordinates. If you record good and bad performance notes as you go, it will enable you to provide a more accurate PAR at the conclusion of the reporting period. Those who fail to maintain a TP/PL commander's notebook will find that the process is very long when it comes to writing/reviewing PARs. It also is important not to leave your report writing to the last minute. If you do, you leave next to no time for other tasks that may come down the chain which just places added pressure on your ability to write a quality PAR.

It is also important to understand policy in relation to the conduct of PARs. Accessing the DOCM-A and SCMA websites will give you the most up to date information. Understanding reporting timelines, redress process and unit submission requirements will ensure you are fully prepared for your responsibilities.

*Monthly and/or field reports can be useful. I personally have benefited from them. But formalising mentoring into an administrative process shouldn't be your singular approach. A quick chat behind the scenes when someone does particularly well (or poorly), when the act is fresh in their mind, is going to be easier to discuss than reading about it four weeks or six months afterwards*

## **Resources recommended by TP/PL commanders**

Reading throughout your career as an officer will help you improve your knowledge in many areas, and the reading you complete early in your career will help provide the edge you need for promotion later in your career. Promotion courses will prepare you well for the next phase of your career, however those who complement their training with professional reading will have a distinct advantage when compared to their peers who have not. The following reading list contains books and websites recommended by lieutenants. If you are short on time but still wanting to fit in some professional military education (PME), the websites listed are a great resource of short articles that can be completed in quick time. Visit these

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websites regularly as they are continually being updated with new articles and papers.

## Books

- *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* by John Maxwell.
- *Start With Why* by Simon Sinek
- *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl
- *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R. Covey
- *12 Rules for Life* by Jordan B. Peterson
- *Extreme Ownership* by Jocko Willink
- *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie
- *Thinking, Fast and Slow* by Daniel Kahneman
- *Dare to Lead* by Brené Brown
- *Leaders Eat Last* by Simon Sinek
- *Chasing Excellence* by Ben Bergeron
- *Team of Teams* by Stanley McChrystal
- *SUMO (Shut Up, Move On)* by Paul McGee
- *The Mission, the Men, and Me* by Pete Blaber
- *The Shadow War* by Jim Scitutto

## Websites

- <https://cove.army.gov.au>
- <https://groundedcuriosity.com>
- <https://theprinciplesofwar.com>
- [www.themilitaryleader.com](http://www.themilitaryleader.com)
- [www.thearmyleader.co.uk](http://www.thearmyleader.co.uk)
- [www.lowyinstitute.org](http://www.lowyinstitute.org)
- [www.lifeonthelinepodcast.com](http://www.lifeonthelinepodcast.com)
- <http://drnet.defence.gov.au/Army/EMPA/Pages/Home.aspx>
- <http://ako.drn.mil.au/wps/portal/cal>





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# Part 6

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## Wellbeing

It should go without saying that looking after your own wellbeing should be a priority, as your wellbeing is going to get you (and your family) through your career in the Army. When the performance of your TP/PL rests in your hands you are obviously going to work hard to make sure the reputation of your TP/PL and your personal reputation is high. Although working hard is an essential aspect of running a high performing TP/PL, you also need to weigh this up with your own wellbeing as well as that of families and partners.

### Mental resilience

Expect to be away for extended periods of time on field exercises and courses, and make sure you do everything within your means to prepare your family or partner for the extended periods away from home. Being away from home is something some people struggle with whilst others are happy to be away and enjoy doing 'real' Army activities.

Some TP/PL commanders have to deal with soldiers with serious personal issues. If you have to deal with serious personal issues, expect that these soldiers will absorb a lot of your time. Once in a while you need to take a step back and take time to self-reflect to ensure you are looking after your own wellbeing. You need to look after yourself so that you are in a strong position to look after others.

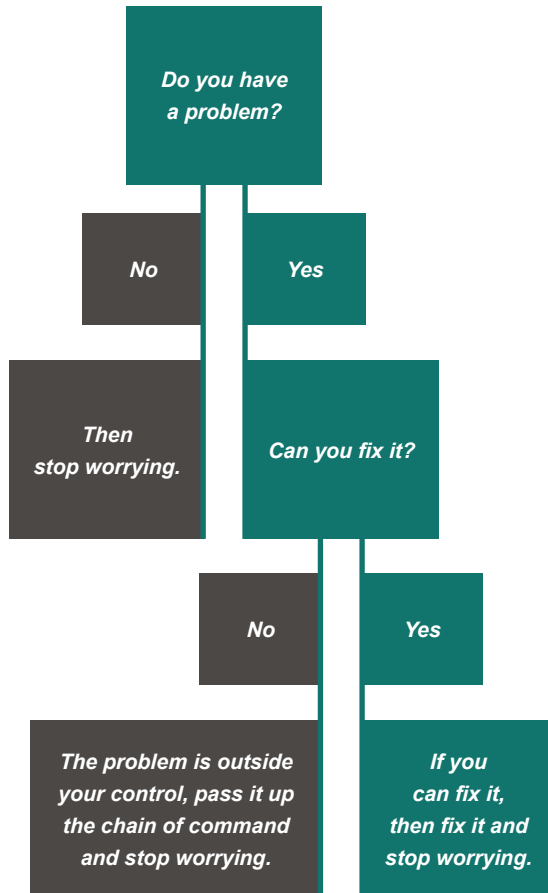
Lieutenants were very keen to provide advice about mental resilience. Mental resilience was clearly one of the most discussed topics, therefore we have included many of their comments in hope that readers will find this advice helpful:

1. *Remember why you joined.*
2. *Do it for your troops.*
3. *Challenging yourself and improving yourself not just for a successful Army career, but for a successful life.*

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1. *Don't care up. Manage up and care down.*
2. *Be an actual human and people will be the same in return.*
3. *Don't care when you get in trouble, just cop it on the chin and keep going.*

1. *Nothing is ever as bad as it seems. Things will get better, but everyone will remember how you acted under pressure.*
2. *Focus on immediate tasks and problems. If you are being overwhelmed, simplify problems to what specifically needs to occur and how it can be achieved. Follow a simple flow chart:*



1. *Training physical resilience will push mental resilience more than anything.*
2. *As a Defence member it is important to spend time away from family and friends IOT test how you would cope for longer absences if required.*
3. *Find time within your own schedule to develop your own coping mechanisms or even test out new ones so that when a tough situation arises you have a mental resilience toolbox ready to go. Communicate your difficulties with your mentors (superiors or peers). Venting about issues reduces stress and they may be able to assist. Become comfortable with failing. We have busy and difficult jobs. Always try your best, but accept that you can't achieve everything. Rationalise why you fail, learn from it and move on. Dwelling on past decisions is mentally taxing. Monitor your relationship with alcohol. Don't allow it to get out of hand.*

*I care enough about the outcomes for my soldiers that I generally am able to achieve anything I need to support them. Resilience is about perspective and a continuous growth mindset.*

*Resilience is something that can be taught, but I believe it is something that people have from day one. To be resilient you need to know that someone has your back and believes you can do it. You need to have something to aim and strive towards. Nothing lasts forever - no matter how difficult things might seem, it's still only temporary. Always try to make the best of a bad situation – there's always something good you can take away.*

*Learn about how trauma affects people, and if you don't know, tell them. They understand that you likely have never dealt with or experienced anything like it. Be supportive, but support them in finding someone that has experienced it or is more a friend they can talk to. Just being there for them, and fighting for their welfare, is invaluable.*

*Listen more than you talk. One mistake I made early on was suggesting all the avenues of approaches my soldiers could take and trying to solve their problem before they even finished telling me what it was. Listen to what they are telling you and try to understand the underlying cause before throwing doctrine and admin in their face.*

## | Insights from Lieutenants |

*No LT is ever fully ready. Just be empathetic with people when listening to their issues, and ensure they have some support network. If all else fails, get your Padre to help. As well as being someone to listen to their problems, ensure you walk away from a discussion having clarified what help they need and that you are able to provide the relevant assistance. It will increase certainty for both you and the member, and help make it easier to move forward.*

*We should be exposed to and taught counselling in more depth.*

*I have a hotline to the RSM and Padre and they are always happy to help.*

*Take the time to hear everything. Don't compare it to your own experience. Actually care about your soldiers and the rest will follow.*

*Understand that there will always be situations you haven't specifically been prepared to handle. As long as you know where to look and who to ask there isn't a situation that you can't come up with a reasonable solution for.*

## Physical resilience

Physical fitness was discussed in Part 1 - Preparation. By now you should be fully aware that fitness is going to be an important aspect throughout your career. Make sure that PT is a habit and expect soldiers to compete with you. It is OK if soldiers beat you, but at least make sure it is a challenge.

Here is what lieutenants had to say about physical resilience:

*Always make time for physical exercise. It's easy to prioritise other tasks, but that decision will catch up with you. I entered my command at a standard I consider too low. I had to do extra PT outside of work to raise my ability. I received an injury during my command time. I identified it early, sought help, stuck to rehabilitation and returned to normal PT quickly.*

*Exercise is key and I utilised a PT program to improve my push-ups and running time.*

*I have always been highly motivated to lead by example and maintain my personal fitness. ADFA and the college built on that and gave me the skills to maintain a level of fitness suitable for Infantry.*

*I made serious efforts to stay fit and still continue to push myself to my limits (I wish I were younger). However, inculcating Army discipline into my life has helped me develop and maintain my physical resilience. **I still follow the same schedule I had at Duntroon and hence am never worried about PT or BFA.***

*Put yourself out of your comfort zone, push boundaries, enjoy finding something you are bad at so that you can improve in something else.*

*PT prior to courses ... it was sufficient to start with, but without routine it was easy to allow this to drop away as focus was drawn to other work.*

***Try to stay in the top 25% of fitness for your troop.***





# Part 7

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## *Dealing with Issues*

Dealing with soldiers' issues is going to be a major part of your role. There are so many types of personal issues that TP/PL commanders deal with every day. Those who deal with soldiers' issues well will earn the respect of their soldiers, while those who do not handle them well will struggle to be an effective leader without the respect of their soldiers. Be prepared to ask seniors for advice. Those who have been in Army for some time have most likely have already dealt with a wide range of personal issues.

Personal issues faced by Army members are often similar to issues faced by civilians. Each one of your soldiers has a different background, different upbringing, different home life and different ability to deal with issues. Some issues are complicated, some soldiers are very proud and are determined to deal with their issues in their own way, whilst some are more than happy to let you know all of their issues and will feel good about telling someone else their story. Some issues might be work-related while others may be family issues which affect work performance. Some may be both.

*Expect the unexpected and don't be shocked when someone tells you their issue.*

Life experience helps when providing advice. You will gain life experience every day at work. However, do not hesitate to hold off on providing quality advice until you have had time to think about the situation or seek advice (noting any confidentiality issues that may apply).

Some lieutenants believe that counselling skills are not taught enough before they become a TP/PL commander. However, generally speaking, those more mature members felt they were comfortable dealing with issues:

*Be open, accepting and ready for anything. Sometimes people just need you to lend an ear. Other times you may just be the person to point them in the right direction to deal with whatever the issue is.*

## | Insights from Lieutenants |

*Do not attempt to provide an answer immediately. Take the time to think, reflect and seek guidance before providing assistance. Obviously, provide immediate assistance where required.*

*I had an understanding of how to deal with complex admin scenarios, but you learn a lot more when you're out of training.*

*I was not prepared for all the personal issues. Army culture encourages very open communication within command structures. Foremost, if a subordinate has come to you for help, allow them to express themselves and vent. Let them be angry or upset. You then need to be calm and logical. It's your role to assist with policy, get them assistance if required (medical, financial, psychological) or communicate up the chain of command. Always respect the SENS PERS nature of these issues. **Peers are fantastic at providing advice, but know when you need to withhold information.***

*I was not prepared. I don't think preparation will help. It is not until you are facing the issue that you then understand whether you are ready or not. If you are not ready to be the advice giver, then recommend them to another person. Or tell the soldier you need time to think of working solutions.*

*I was ready from life experience. Listening to understand (not to respond) is key. **Bounce any course of action off your boss or sub unit 2IC.***

*I was ready. Be compassionate and seek out expert advice when complex cases present themselves.*

Bad news does not get better with age. Make sure that when an issue is identified, you do not waste time addressing the issues and do not wait for the issue to just disappear.

*Not addressing some of the issues I identified when I first posted in meant my hand was eventually forced to take action. I could have avoided quite a bit of stress and kept better team cohesion if I had identified and acted on the deficiencies within my team when I first posted in.*

## Getting advice

When dealing with soldier's issues you are likely to come across issues that you have never faced and probably never even thought about. When the situation is complex, remember to take your time to consider the situation before making a decision or offering advice, and let the person know you will think about the situation and get back to them. Know where to get advice and know when you need to refer soldiers to an expert such as a doctor, psychologist or padre.

If the nature of an issue is likely to involve the chain of command (eg likely disciplinary action required) you should notify and seek advice from the CSM/SSM as soon as possible so that the chain of command is fully prepared to take appropriate actions in the time frames required. Here is what lieutenants had to say regarding getting advice:

*Consider getting advice from family, friends and trusted mentors whose leadership style, outlooks, morals, values and ethics resonate with your own.*

*For trade, SNCOs, then JNCOs, then soldiers. For career and command direction, my OC. For sensitive issues and when I was uncertain, I discuss with my 2IC.*

*My seniors and peers were a good source of advice. When it is about leadership challenges, I speak to anyone and everyone who is willing to talk to me and who I think can give good advice. When I need advice on Army customs, traditions, or soldier management issues, I speak to the RSM or SNCOs who are willing to give serious advice.*

*The CAPTs in my unit helped significantly. But it would also be worth talking to senior ORs as well.*

## Issues involving social media

Dealing with social networking issues is something that Army has had to learn and adapt to as social media has become more and more prevalent in recent years. Gone are the days of just advising soldiers not to use social media, as that is never going to happen. Yearly induction training covers social media awareness. However, you need to be prepared to provide advice to soldiers or take other action when inappropriate social media incidents occur. The effect of inappropriate use of social media occurs quickly so you need to take corrective action swiftly. If you are informed of inappropriate social media issues, or if you discover the issue yourself, promptly decide if DFDA action is required or if the situation requires a quick warning and additional social media training. If unsure, get advice from your chain of command.

Here are a few thoughts from lieutenants regarding social media:

*It is necessary to remind soldiers of the DI (G) Admin 08-2 "Use of Social Media by Defence personnel". "Keep your soldiers aware of what they can and cannot post" and "warn all members who use social media of the inherent dangers of passing inappropriate information". An idea implemented by one OC was to use "an ABC Four Corners program to reinforce Army themes about personal security and social media".*

*The example of one can also educate the many. "Being ruthless with any offenders worked for me." Soldiers who observe their mates undergoing DFDA action for misuse of social media receive a more personal reality check.*

*Personally, I don't interact on social media. I do, however, maintain group chats and instant messaging. Being able to call on peers for advice has proven successful numerous times.*

## Conduct of Fact Finding Investigations

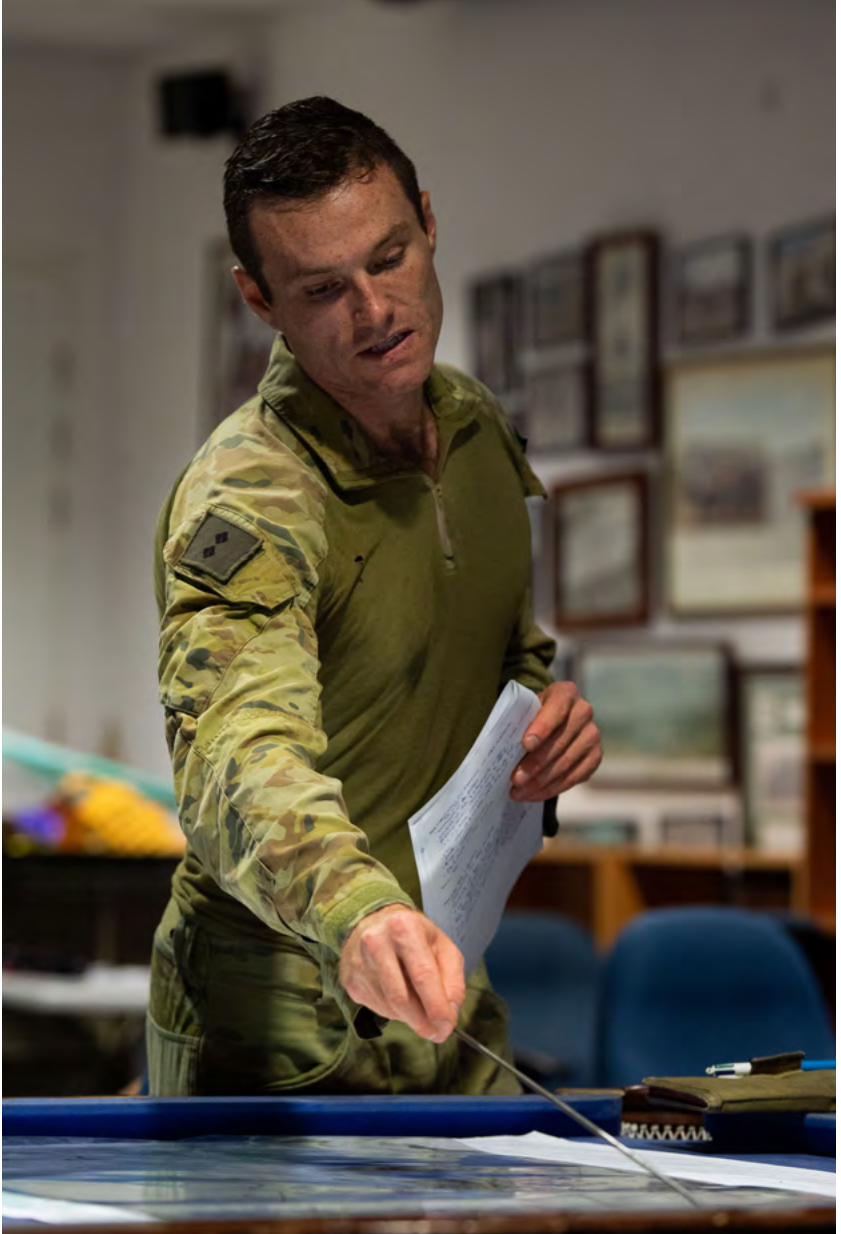
Fact finding is a task that is often delegated to LTs by the OC. They happen regularly and are designed to provide relevant information to the OC in a timely and logical way so that he/she can make quick decisions on how a particular issue needs to be handled next. Knowing that you are very likely to receive a fact finding task, it makes good sense to invest time into reading about the fact finding investigation processes prior. This will ensure you understand what is required of you and that you have timely access to relevant forms. Chapter 3 of '[Good decision-making in Defence](#)'<sup>1</sup> explains the principles of fact finding in plain language and is a good place to start improving your knowledge in this area.

Fact finding tasks have to be completed in very short time frames so make sure you know what will be required of you prior. You will be glad you invested time into understanding the conduct of fact finding investigations as it will save hours of valuable time at a moment where you wish you had more.



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1 [http://intranet.defence.gov.au/home/documents/data/DEFPUBS/DEPTMAN/Good\\_Decision\\_Making\\_in\\_Defence/Good%20Decision%20Making%20in%20Defence.pdf](http://intranet.defence.gov.au/home/documents/data/DEFPUBS/DEPTMAN/Good_Decision_Making_in_Defence/Good%20Decision%20Making%20in%20Defence.pdf)



# Final thoughts

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We hope the comments and advice from the TP/PL commanders who contributed to this handbook are useful to you during your preparation for your command appointment.

Many senior officers will tell you that their posting as a TP/PL commander were the best days of their career. Senior officers reminisce about those days when they had the opportunity to work closely with soldiers, and take on tasks in a 'hands on' and practical way. Ensure you give yourself the best chance of success as a TP/PL commander. Your reputation as an officer starts now, and the soldiers and NCOs you work alongside will one day be the NCOs and SNCOs you work with in years to come. Make sure you start the journey on the right foot.

Enjoy the journey, and if you experience situations during your time as a TP/PL commander that you think others could learn from, remember to inform us via [army.lessons@defence.gov.au](mailto:army.lessons@defence.gov.au) to ensure that your experiences can be included in the next version of this handbook.



## Words of wisdom

*Be a values-based leader first. All the skills and knowledge in the world doesn't matter if you aren't making decisions for the right reasons.*

*Dive in head first. You cannot succeed as an officer if you don't jump in.*

*Take a commander's pause where situations allow IOT to conduct analysis from all perspectives before acting. Don't be too proud to admit fault, or too stubborn to accept help. Never be too afraid to show humility.*

*Continue to develop physical fitness. PT sessions are a quick way to earn the respect of your soldiers, but also a quick way to lose it.*

*Don't assume all SNCOs and officers are proficient and ethical. Back yourself and challenge malpractice.*

*Always check that you are using the most up-to-date webforms.*

*Delegate and trust your team. They will often do it better than you can anyway.*

*Be authentic, be professional, delegate when necessary and lead from the front.*

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If you would like to share your thoughts and experiences for the next edition of the Lieutenant Command Handbook, please send them to [army.lessons@defence.gov.au](mailto:army.lessons@defence.gov.au).

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