

Facilitator Best Practices

Training and Developing Soldiers through Storytelling and Analysis

Leaders are responsible for both training their Soldiers to high levels of competence and developing their character as Professionals. An effective method toward training and development is the telling and analysis of stories. There are many types of stories: technical; tactical; moral and ethical; human relations; historical renditions; written, oral, and video; Soldier challenges, problems and successes; etc. They are presented during AARs, Lessons Learned, operational reports, citations, Professional Development (PD) sessions, whenever Leaders recognize an opportunity to train and/or develop their Soldiers, and during personal interactions. The most effective practice of Soldier training and development using stories is through facilitated analysis of the story by the Soldiers in a small group discussion setting. Stories that contain complex problems and/or dilemmas that have various courses of action that Soldiers analyze together provide the best opportunities to train competence in decision-making skills and to develop moral and professional character through the sharing of ideas, values and principles and are many times called Case Studies or Vignettes. A successful approach to facilitating these discussions of analyzed stories is the Case Study Method.

Practicing Ethical Decision-Making and Developing Character

A story that presents a group of participants with a problem, dilemma or conflict in a situation that has personal and/or professional moral/ethical considerations is called an Ethical Case Study and using the Case Method with it allows practice of ethical decision-making and promotes the development of Soldier Character. The situations require analysis and, in most cases, resolution. Within the Case Study Method, depending on participant experience and/or time for the exercise, members of the group are asked to identify and discuss the problem, situation or conflict from various aspects: what should happen or should the actors do; what would they do or how do they feel about it; they are placed in the role of a decision maker facing a problem; they may prepare for and role-play one of the parts; they may debate for or against opinions or actions in the case study; etc.

Case Studies/Vignettes provide a conceptual setting for discussion and to work through new ideas, differences of opinion, or solutions to basic and complex situations. Case Studies can be valuable as they allow learning from the successes and mistakes of the persons in the story. This will provide practice working through the Case Study and empower Soldiers in the development of their own Professional Characters and Identities and to proactively negotiate ethically stressful situations encountered in service to successful conclusions. Additionally, when properly facilitated, the learning occurs within the group as the members share and think about the ideas presented and their reactions to them.

Preparation:

During session preparation you pick and review the Case Study/Vignette to ensure applicability both for the desired learning outcome and the audience composition. Additionally you need to review which approaches to take during the discussion to maximize participation and learning.

You are the expert and need to build the conversation.



When using an case study or vignette containing an ethical decision-making scenario and if the group is inexperienced with either the case study method or the content, it may be best to work through the story using the Ethical Processing model steps (questions are developed to follow these steps: 1. Recognize the Conflict/Problem, 2. Evaluate the Options, 3. Commit to a Course of Action, and 4. Take Action) and develop questions that allow the group to practice ethical decision-making while they gain experience with new topics. As the group becomes more experienced additional techniques can be used to promote deeper discussion and enhanced moral character development through feedback and reflection. You may consider assigning multiple roles in a more experienced class, such as devil's advocate, judge, host, or moderator; or assign members to various sides of an issue and debate.

Considerations:

There are numerous techniques to prepare the group for an effective discussion. **Let the group members know you expect lively discussion; they should express a viewpoint and then defend their position.** Explain to the group that each participant should not be agreeing with everyone else. To frame the discussion and set the group up for discussion, use a question prior to presenting the story. Sometimes starting with a myth or challenging question at the beginning will help the group members to realize their own perspectives before trying to apply them. For example, you could mention a known myth and have them defend it – such as, “What happens on (during) deployment stays on deployment.” OR “What a Soldier does at home is his own business.”

You can employ various methods also to keep the interactions fresh and to shape the conversation. In addition to having a member of the group summarize the story or comments, consider having one start the summary and someone else finish it or build upon it. Redirect student questions to the group. Ask both general and direct questions. Another way is to encourage group members to look at the problem from another perspective, using questions such as, "Jessica, what do you think of this proposal?" and “What might someone say who opposed this plan?” and “Assume that in this story ...,” and “What one thing would change your decision...,” and “Why do you feel that way...,” etc. You can consider interjecting new assumptions and new information and being prepared to contribute with your own experiences.

Presenting the Story:

Prior to starting the story, encourage the group to **actively listen** by making notes while listening to or watching the story the first time. With some stories, it is often effective to deliver the story, or if the story is has multiple parts at least the introduction, twice before engaging in the discussion. If applicable, give the group clues and pertinent information to look for in the story.

Discussion:

You should consider ways to engage and persuade the group, such as appealing to the emotions of the group, posing arguments, or challenging their reasoning. **Avoid summarizing the story for the class.** If there are some questions on the items of discussion, you should ask one member of the group to summarize. If you summarize the story, you will be acting as a filter and most often highlighting only the important or essential information. Group members must learn how to do this on their own.



Group members should carry the discussion through their answers to a stream of questions. For the most part, you should be the source of the questions. The responses should build upon the thought presented in the previous question or response. It is important for you to guide the discussion by choosing speakers, following up your questions with pertinent feedback on answers and being the sustaining foundation of the discussion. This can only be accomplished if you are **actively listening** to group responses. For you, it is vital to guide the conversation and, as applicable, ask the **RIGHT** question at the **RIGHT** time not forcing the questions or treating them as a checklist – your statements and questions are recommendations to support the flow of the conversation. It is often very effective to choose or have a student choose a different point of view to the majority of the class or to one of the predominant options presented as a solution.

You may ask them to defend a different view point or a different perspective than they would have naturally chosen. You should avoid providing responses or feedback that would be construed as a personal opinion during the discussions. It is important to **shape the conversations without allowing opinions or biases to impact the outcome**. Expertise should serve as a guide in shaping the concrete portions of the story.

Learning:

See each session as an opportunity to learn from the members of the group and remain open to new and sometimes uninformed perspectives. It is important to be comfortable with the uncertainty of some of the discussions but maintain a focus on the learning objectives. This can be accomplished by posting the objectives in the classroom and bringing the conversations back in-line to address them.

What NOT to Do When Facilitating an Ethical discussion

Don't fail to prepare –

Some Leaders/instructors never adequately prepare. The problem may be that they don't know what kind of preparation to do. They don't have a clear understanding of the objectives. They don't know how to ask the right questions. They don't come into the classroom with a planned outline or a way to connect the major issues together. And they won't have prepared the students or themselves for this major break from the traditional lecture format. They are under the illusion that a good discussion will just happen.

Don't start a discussion with a closed-ended question –

The first question that you ask is crucial. The primary consideration is to get members to talk. The best first questions are open-ended, with multiple reasonable answers, or where the question is neutral and simple to answer. Using a closed-ended or “yes/no” question should be minimized if used at all. If used, be prepared to immediately follow up with a “Why” or “How”. Closed-ended or “yes/no” questions can be effective for some group members who are reluctant to speak – it is easier to say a single word. But once spoken they will more readily finish their thought.

Don't forget to use teaching materials in an organized way –



Before you start go into class, develop a plan to logically use the available materials to best present and organize the discussion. Decide how to organize the case. Simple cases may not need much organization. More complex cases may require note pads, white/black board or flip chart, etc. One common strategy is to write the facts of the case on the left side of the board as they emerge in the discussion. In the center of the board you might group the major issues of the case as they are analyzed. Finally, if you are dealing with a situation where a decision has to be made, the possible choices, courses of action, and consequences could be listed on board or poster paper for use by the group. What you and the group members get out of this exercise is that there is a sense of order to the case--and you have visible evidence that you have accomplished something.



Don't expect to have a great discussion until the students know one another –

It isn't tough to get experienced persons to speak, but inexperienced ones are another matter. No one wants to look stupid. You have to make the classroom safe for their conversations. This doesn't happen right away. People have to get to know each other and develop a certain level of trust. Ideas for breaking down barriers include introductions, “ice breakers”, etc.

Don't leave the seats in a row –

Arrange the classroom with the goal of each person being able to see the face of all the other persons.

Don't deal with controversial emotional material until you have analyzed the facts –

The safest way to discuss a case is to be sure that everyone has a clear understanding of the facts. If the group is confused, discussion will be rough. Having the facts straight at the outset is best.

Don't forget to call on different people –

How easy it is to call on the eager student who is always waving his hand, especially if he usually has good things to say. It is essential to try to get everyone into the act, to get diversity into the discussion. One way is to simply keep your eyes open and watch student body language: are they leaning forward, nodding their head, frowning, opening their mouths as if beginning to speak? We all have these so-called “intention movements” when we have something to say. Watch for these clues and call on these people.

If some students are having problems giving input due to other more outspoken or aggressive participants, try a question like “Who has an opinion/answer for...?” and at the show of hands pick a student who has not yet had an opportunity to contribute. Steer clear of calling on the



same person repeatedly, especially one who wants to dominate the discussion. In fact, you may have to address the issue outside of class if it is a serious problem.

Don't forget to listen to the students and respond to them –

You must connect one student's ideas with another. To do this successfully, you must listen. You should operate at several levels during the discussion. At the first level you must be aware of the case material and how to get the content out. At the second level be aware of the process, thinking about whom to call on next to develop the discussion, how to resolve a conflict that has just exploded, how to stop the private conversation in the corner, how to move to better engage a set of students, and when to change pace. And on the third level think of the bigger picture.

To be successful at all of these levels requires careful listening both inside and outside of class.



Don't stand in one place in the classroom; move about –

It is almost unnecessary to make this point to a case teacher. It is hard to stand still. You have to write on the board. You have to move forward to listen seriously to a speaker or move to the side to let members of the group engage one another. Also, you don't always have to be in the center. You can go behind the group so that you are looking over the backs of some members on one side and into the faces of those on the other side. This technique works well when the members are talking to each other and you simply want to get out of the way

Don't be discouraged –

It takes time to get good at anything. This goes for facilitating ethical discussions. The members of the group need practice and so do you. Trust me, you'll get better.

Additional Ideas for Consideration during Facilitations –

I. Keys to facilitation

A. Create action in the classroom

1. Avoid lecturing
2. Engage students in learning through activities

B. The classroom layout sets the tone

1. What layout is best for the desired setting?
 - a. Group work: tables and semi-private or secluded workspaces
 - b. Take focus off of the instructor and placed on the group but still allowing interaction with the instructor

C. Create expectation in students that they will participate in learning

1. This is difficult if students have been conditioned to be passive learners
 - a. Be patient and provide guidance and positive reinforcement
 - i. As students succeed they will change their expectations
 - ii. Some will continue to want to be passive learners despite your best efforts – do not be discouraged, eventually they may participate or other students may influence them to participate

II. Facilitating discussions

A. Discussion is one of the best forms of participatory lecturing

B. Effective for:

1. Recertification or refresher classes during a review of concepts
2. Topics involving opinions
3. Getting started or wrapping up a classroom session

C. Tips for facilitating discussion:

1. Get all of the students involved
 - a. Use small groups discussing the same idea to include all students
 - b. Inattentive students should be redirected back to the group
 - c. Move the discussion around the class
2. You don't have to comment on each person's contribution
3. Paraphrase: check your understanding and the students
4. Redirect an inaccurate or incorrect statement to the class for correction
5. Elaborate – suggest a new way, even when the student seems to have answered the question correctly
6. Energize – quicken your responses, use appropriate humor,



7. Disagree (gently) or play devil's advocate
8. Mediate differences in opinion
 - a. Mediation is a balancing act; try to keep the discussion going without interjecting yourself as the authority
 - b. Encourage students to back up their statements with facts
 - c. Remind everyone to respect differing opinions
9. Pull together ideas
10. Allow students to summarize what occurred in the discussion group
 - a. Provide follow-up information for additional study or reading

III. Facilitating activities take time

- A. Objectives can often be met in lecture format faster than in facilitated learning format
 1. Remember: students retain more when they practice over and over again
 2. They do not argue with their own results of learning, if they discovered it for themselves - they own it
 3. The goal is to assist students to become professionals who think critically about what they do and move beyond the lower levels of thinking into the higher levels
 - a. This cannot be done with passive learning techniques
- B. Tips to save time during practical sessions:
 1. Start on time
 2. Give clear instructions one time
 3. Prepare visual information ahead of time
 4. Distribute handouts quickly
 5. Expedite group reporting
 6. Record on flip charts - no repeating of information from group to group
 7. Shorten discussion points – emphasize short answers
 8. Get volunteers rapidly
 9. Quicken the pace to create energy
 10. Come back from group work or breaks promptly

IV. Classroom control issues with facilitation

- A. Instructors can easily lose control in an environment with a high amount of facilitation
 1. Students may perceive that you are “not doing your job” because they are participating more actively in their learning
 - a. Students are also more responsible for their learning
 - b. Students may believe this if they do not understand facilitated learning
 2. Ensure students stay on task
 - a. Conversations should be monitored to ensure they are on topic
 3. Students having difficulty may give up or quit working w/o asking for help
 4. Offer assistance in finding resources but do not do their work.
 - a. The “3 before me” technique works well in helping students become more independent
 - i. When they ask for assistance they should be able to inform you of at least three places they looked to find the information first
 - ii. If they do not have three (or an appropriate) number of resources direct them to the appropriate resources instead of simply telling them the correct answer

