

Learning Leadership at the Academy (Continued)

I actually really enjoy learning leadership theories and applying them—it's challenging, rewarding, and fun! I also realized how important leadership is, how important a strong, good (for lack of better word) leader is, in making an organization successful. I realized (I think) that what I want to do as a career is lead others and organizations. There is not one career path or technical skill set that I want to master *in particular*—I could go any direction and be fine; what I want is an opportunity to lead. Leadership is something that I am extremely passionate about (at least right now, being in the thick of leadership training). I enjoy transforming whatever organization that I'm a part of *in order for* that organization to *serve* the people who make it up.

This past semester has truly shown me how interesting and exciting and important leadership is. We talk about leadership all the time at meals; grasping leadership is important to many successful cadets here—they get it. They understand that *leadership* is the ultimate goal of this place. Yes, the Academy produces commissioned officers with Bachelor of Science degrees, but what is most important is their leadership skill set. Our seniors stress this to us so much, but not everyone embraces that as their ultimate goal for being here (and that's fine). The people I talk to about leadership, they're on the same page as I am; that's why we talk about leadership so much, because we're trying to figure it out. The regimental staff application process has been another tool in helping me discover effective leadership. I can quickly define my leadership style now: to be a transformational leader so that my organization (and I) can better serve the people at all levels of the organization (above and below me). I am comfortable aligning myself with organizational/seniors' values and with developing a vision with strategies, tactics, and branding techniques.

In writing this, that the Academy's system has succeeded in helping me learn leadership, I am also slightly concerned. Why? Because it totally undermines my belief that there are many (and major) improvements that can be made to the leadership development program. I've heard people say that the Academy was designed to be the way it is—to be a crucible and put you through character building and leadership testing. Ok, maybe, but I'm not sure that what we are doing here was *all intentionally* designed to make life difficult and challenging so *that* we would develop into better leaders. And maybe I have learned so much leadership because I'm trying to improve and transform what we have. Not everyone is trying to do that, and it seems to me that this system is not working for everyone. At the end of the day, cadet buy-in and ownership of personal leadership development is low. What I'm seeking to discover is whether this is a more natural way for more people to develop as leaders instead of the rigid, carrot-and-stick system we have now. Can we make our leadership development program *more accessible* to different types of people? I'm also interested in the *practicality factor* of it all: Can we provide leadership challenges to cadets while not adding superfluous challenges that don't achieve the result of character development as *leaders*?

Interestingly, one faculty member explained that all the things that we have to do here (or rather, what we can't do here, [e.g. drive cars]) are to help us focus on our leadership development. In my view, many of these things have become the distractions that are holding us back from fully taking advantage of leadership learning opportunities. What I am struggling to find is a way to make the process of developing as a leader challenging, but not impossible and not distracting. It's a delicate balance that will not be easy to find. Hopefully my years in the operational fleet will help me figure that out. I've got a long way to go, and I'm excited.

So, where is all this rambling leading me? Well, I'm confident that when I graduate I will be able to say that I was glad to have attended here. At points in this semester I had begun to worry that I'd leave here ultimately let down because the Academy, to some extent, hasn't really lived up to my expectations. But I just didn't have the *right* expectations. Thankfully, I know now that I have not been let down—at least not to this point, and I don't think I will, not with this new outlook. Sure, I may not necessarily get an opportunity to be a transformational leader on a large scale, but that does not mean what I'm doing now is not building the foundation for my future as a leader—I

can't wait to get out to the fleet and put to use what I've been working on so long here! I've had a fantastic opportunity to participate in an incredible leadership development program, even if it was something that I had to build much of on my own. I'm determined to make a difference here, even if a small one. I have one more year at the Academy, and I'm going to make the best of it!

Until next time, take care!