

How to build battlemind

10 tough facts about combat and what leaders can do to mitigate risk and build resilience

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1. FEAR IN COMBAT IS COMMON.

- More than 2/3 of silver star recipients reported increased fear as battle progressed.
- Common symptoms of fear: violent shaking/trembling, losing control of bladder, feeling weak, cold sweats, and vomiting.

• Talk to Soldiers personally about critical incidences.
SOLDIERS DON'T CARE WHAT YOU KNOW UNTIL THEY KNOW THAT YOU CARE.

3. COMBAT IMPACTS EVERY SOLDIER MENTALLY AND EMOTIONALLY.

- Combat stress reactions are common and normal.
- Normal experiences such as nightmares, flashbacks, anger and avoidance of expressing painful feelings may lead Soldiers to fear they are "going crazy."
- More than 90 percent of Soldiers who receive combat stress support are returned to duty
- Intensity of reactions typically lessen within 60-90 days following return from deployment but might take longer to fully restore.

Development of Battlemind: What is Battlemind?

It is a Soldier's inner strength to face adversity, fear, and hardship during combat with confidence and resolution. It is the will to persevere and win.

Objectives of Battlemind:

To develop those factors (focusing on Leader behaviors) that contribute to the Soldier's will and spirit to fight and win in combat, thereby reducing combat stress reactions.

- Fear and anxiety are reduced in combat when Soldiers engage in actions used from training experiences.

WHAT LEADERS CAN DO:

- Drill and train Soldiers specific actions to use in combat conditions—Tough training is the best preparation.
- Provide Soldiers sufficient physical and mental reset time.
- Admitting and joking about fear will release tension.
- Remember that fear is NOT a mental disorder.
EVEN HEROES FEEL FEAR.

2. UNIT MEMBERS WILL BE INJURED AND KILLED.

- More than 1,600 service members have been killed and 11,000 wounded since OIF/OEF began.
- Soldiers were angry when Leaders failed to show they cared regarding combat experiences, especially those involving injuries or death.

WHAT LEADERS CAN DO:

- Ensure Soldiers don't assume unnecessary risks on missions.
- Conduct leader-led AARs and/or mental health debriefings led by mental health professionals or chaplains.
- Conduct memorial services with the utmost respect and dignity.

WHAT LEADERS CAN DO :

- Conduct Buddy-Aid mental health training so Soldiers can assist other Soldiers in coping with the stress of combat.
- Restoring mental fitness after combat sustains professional Warrior discipline, toughness, strength and proficiency.
COMBAT STRESS REACTIONS ARE NORMAL RESPONSES TO TRAUMA.

4. SOLDIERS ARE AFRAID TO ADMIT THAT THEY HAVE A MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM.

- PTSD symptoms are common after combat (10-20 percent of Soldiers.)
 - Combat stress often leads to excessive alcohol use and aggression.
 - Earlier treatment leads to faster recovery.
- WHAT LEADERS CAN DO:**
- Establish a command climate where leaders acknowledge that Soldiers are under stress and that they might need help.
 - Co-locate mental health assets at the battalion aid station/TMC.
 - Insist that mental health outreach be provided to each battalion.

ADMITTING A MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM IS NOT A CHARACTER FLAW.

5. SOLDIERS FREQUENTLY PERCEIVE FAILURES IN LEADERSHIP.

- Good leadership is linked to higher Soldier morale and cohesion, better combat performance, and fewer mental health problems.
- Soldiers report that leaders frequently engage in actions in order to enhance their own career and personal well-being.
- Soldiers also report that leaders often fail to exhibit clear thinking and reasonable action when under stress.

WHAT LEADERS CAN DO:

- Allow subordinates to seek clarification of orders or policies without responding defensively or considering the Soldier disloyal.
- Remove, reassign or demote subordinates who fail to measure up having been given the means and opportunities to succeed.

COURAGE AND VALOR, NEVER PERSONAL GAIN, ARE THE MEASURES OF SOLDIER AND LEADER PERFORMANCE.

6. BREAKDOWNS IN COMMUNICATION ARE COMMON.

- Soldiers report that deployment policies are often inconsistently applied.
- Soldiers often report that they don't know the status of wounded Soldiers.
- Soldiers resort to rumors if leaders don't tell them the facts.

WHAT LEADERS CAN DO:

- Keep your Soldiers informed. Telling soldiers you don't know is better than not telling them anything.
- Make sure that your policies and views on all matters are clearly expressed and made known.
- Let every Soldier in the unit know the status of wounded evacuees.
- Disseminate the news of your and other units' successes.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IS A LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITY.

7. DEPLOYMENTS PLACE A TREMENDOUS STRAIN UPON FAMILIES..

- Nearly 1/5 of all Soldiers deployed to OIF reported marital concerns or problems.
- Marital satisfaction declined after deploying to OIF.
- Soldiers generally report dissatisfaction with the FRG and rear detachment.

WHAT LEADERS CAN DO:

- Assess any reported problems in the FRG or rear detachment to ensure timely action.
- Do not allow family problems to go unanswered. Assign at least one of your staff to serve as an ombudsman or expediter of family problems.
- Formally recognize all special family occasions such as births and graduations.

"WHEN A SOLDIER IS AT WAR, HIS MIND SHOULD BE AT PEACE." - LORD MORAN, 1945

8. THE COMBAT ENVIRONMENT IS HARSH AND DEMANDING.

- Soldier's performance progressively deteriorates with less than eight-hours sleep daily.
- The combat environment (e.g., heat, noise, lack of privacy) take a toll on Soldiers.
- Soldiers are extremely sensitive to perceived inequalities in the distribution of MWR resources.

WHAT LEADERS CAN DO:

- Ensure adequate rest, (greater than or equal to eight hours of sleep) hydration, and other force protection measures.
- Insist on a fair distribution of MWR resources. Prevent double standards among officers, NCOs and junior enlisted Soldiers.
- Be aware of the physical condition and sleep patterns of your Soldiers and insist that physical conditioning is maintained throughout the deployment.

RECOGNIZE THE LIMITS OF YOUR SOLDIER'S FORTITUDE.

9. UNIT COHESION AND TEAM STABILITY ARE DISRUPTED BY COMBAT.

- Soldier bonds will be disrupted due to combat deaths, medical evacuations, emergency leave, etc.
- Changes in task organization and FOB locations might also impact unit cohesion.

WHAT LEADERS CAN DO:

- Maintain unit integrity to the greatest extent possible.
- During combat, rotate

units not individual Soldiers.

- Conduct team building throughout the deployment; immediately welcome and integrate new Soldiers.

SOLDIERS FUNCTION BEST IN COMBAT WITH THOSE THEY KNOW.

10. COMBAT POSES MORAL AND ETHICAL CHALLENGES.

- Combat exposes the reality of death.
 - Combat tests the character of leaders and Soldiers.
- ### WHAT LEADERS CAN DO:
- Reward and recognize Soldiers on a regular basis for their personal sacrifices. Tell them when they done a good job.
 - Do not allow the harassment and mistreatment of your Soldiers.
 - Discuss the moral implications of Soldiers behavior in combat, and how individual sacrifice contributes to America's enduring fight for freedom.

EVERY SOLDIER NEEDS TO COME HOME WITH A WAR STORY THAT HE CAN LIVE WITH.

More information on PTSD can be found online at the National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder web site at <http://www.ncptsd.org/index.html>

Realities of Combat:

- **Combat is sudden, intense, and life threatening.**
- **It is the Soldiers' job to kill the enemy.**
- **Innocent women and children are often killed in combat.**
- **No Soldier knows how he/she will perform in combat until the moment arrives.**