AIR FORCE FELLOWS

AIR UNIVERSITY

ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERShip:

A UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD CASE STUDY

by

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Abstract

For the past decade, the Department of Defense (DoD) has been engaged in global contingency operations as it combated terrorism following the attacks of 11 September 2001. During this time, the DoD has enjoyed increased funding levels commensurate with a nation at war. Today, that fiscal environment has changed. This paper highlights the need to take an entrepreneurial approach to finding solutions to the challenges facing all the Services.

A review of the literature found that there are leadership traits that transcend the military, Corporate America, and entrepreneurial environments. These leadership traits include:

* Ability to communicate effectively
* Use of sound judgment and integrity
* Ability to motivate others
* Have a visionary outlook
* Collaborate with others and develop teams
* Mental agility and creativity
* Results focused
* Optimistic and enthusiastic

As part of his fellowship with Union Pacific Railroad, the author develops a case study focused on the Positive Train Control (PTC) continuous improvement project he participated in. The case study provides examples of the implementation of an entrepreneurial leadership approach to improving productivity in the installation of the telecommunication infrastructure for PTC.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Gentlemen, we have run out of money; now we have to think.

Sir Winston Churchill

For the past decade, the Department of Defense (DoD) has been engaged in global contingency operations as it combated terrorism following the attacks of 11 September 2001. During this time, the DoD has enjoyed increased funding levels commensurate with a nation at war. Today, that fiscal environment has changed. With a national debt of $15 trillion and growing, Congress and the White House have taken small steps to begin addressing this problem. In its submission of the fiscal year (FY) 2013 budget, the DoD requested $525.4 billion for baseline operations, as well as an additional $88.5 billion for Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO).

As part of the Budget Control Act (BCA), the FY 2013 DoD budget request represents a reduction of $259 billion over the next five years, the timeframe of the Future Years Defense Program (FYDP), and $487 billion over ten years.[[1]](#endnote-1) Additionally, the BCA also established the Joint Select Committee on Debt Reduction, also known as the “super committee”, which was charged with finding an additional $1.5 trillion in budget savings. With the failure of the super committee to identify and agree on these savings, the DoD stands to lose an additional $500 billion as part of a process known as sequestration. With a reduced funding baseline, the DoD is still expected to train and equip a force capable of deterring the many threats facing the nation today and in the future; including the Middle East, China, the Korean Peninsula, and elsewhere.

The DoD faces many challenges in their goal of meeting these existing and emerging threats while operating in a more constrained resource environment. The solution set will likely include a mix of both mission changes and efficiencies. To reach these goals, the Services will have to take on a more entrepreneurial approach; an approach that will fundamentally change the way they view their battle space and how they develop their leaders.

**Entrepreneurial Environment**

When we think of companies that are entrepreneurial, we often think of Silicone Valley high-tech firms like Apple and Oracle, or groundbreaking internet services like Facebook and Groupon. Even large multi-national corporations like 3M garner recognition as an innovation organization. But what about governmental organizations like the Air Force? Before answering that question, let’s first define an entrepreneurial organization. An internet search of entrepreneur yields many definitions, but most center on something along these lines; “a person who organizes and manages any enterprise, especially a business, usually with considerable initiative and risk.”[[2]](#endnote-2)

Further research highlights the additional categorization of entrepreneurial as those of the firm or organization and those focused on the actions or leadership traits of people. In their research, Fernand et al. describe a key entrepreneurship trait as one that promotes change and innovation leading to new combinations of resources and new ways of doing business.[[3]](#endnote-3) If one looks at the Air Force through the lens of entrepreneurial organizations, it’s difficult to make the case that it in fact behaves in an entrepreneurial manner; it is less agile and more bureaucratic than those organizations or companies most would view as entrepreneurial. However, when looked at through the lens of entrepreneurial people, it is certainly easier to view the Air Force as an organization where its members and leaders are engaging in entrepreneurial activities.

The purpose of this research paper is to explore entrepreneurial leadership traits, specifically those experienced during the author’s Senior Developmental Education assignment at Union Pacific Railroad as a Secretary of Defense Corporate Fellow, and provide analogous insight to the Air Force highlighting implementation of such traits.

**Secretary of Defense Corporate Fellowship Program**

Originally established as the Secretary of Defense Fellows Program, and later re-titled the Secretary of Defense Corporate Fellows Program, former Secretary of Defense William Perry established the fellowship in 1994 in response to his recognition that the then military-technical revolution was really part of broader current changes that included political, social and economic aspects. Secretary Perry believed that much of the change was occurring outside of the military setting; specifically, within the business world. With these changing currents as a catalyst, the fellowship was established

to build a cadre of officers who understand not only the profession of arms, but also the organizational and operational opportunities made possible by the revolutionary changes in information and related technologies. They also need an appreciation of how this revolution is influencing American society and business in ways that will ineluctably impact the culture and operation of the Department.[[4]](#endnote-4)

In order to achieve these goals, the fellowship sends several officers (this year there are a total of 14 Fellows in the program) from each military service, both active duty and Guard/Reserve, to receive their senior professional military education by working alongside leading companies in Corporate America. Fellows are exposed to businesses reshaping organizational structures and methods of operations to provide innovative and competitive advantages, where they are able to glean the best of change, innovation, and leading edge business practices that could be implemented to transform their Service and the DoD. Areas of emphasis include, but are not limited to: strategic planning, finance, organizational structures, change management, human resources, information technology, supply chain and outsourcing strategies. With most Fellows having 20 years, or more, of military service, the year spent in Corporate America is an exchange of ideas, rather than a one-way learning experience for the Fellow.

Prior to actually beginning their company assignment, each Fellow spends three weeks in the National Capital Region and a week at the University of Virginia’s Darden School of Business. This orientation period is intended to provide each Fellow with a strategic baseline of current events, both inside and out of the Pentagon. Orientation topics include national security, the current budgetary environment, international trends, the media, and high-technology industries (i.e. robotics and nanotechnology). Additionally, time is spent meeting with members of Congress and developing a relationship with the National Defense University. The orientation program culminates with a one-week executive education program at the Darden School of Business, where lectures and discussion focus on current business thinking.

In addition to the daily interaction between Fellow and leaders within the company they are assigned to, Fellows are provided the opportunity to interact with other companies in the program during “Company Day” visits. Throughout the course of the year, each sponsor company hosts Fellows from other companies for a two to three day on-site meeting. The objective is to provide a strategic level perspective on each company, with briefings often presented by senior leaders within the company. These Company Days provide each Fellow with the opportunity to discuss strategy, leadership, industry best practices and challenges facing each company and Corporate America writ large. The fellowship concludes at the Pentagon, where the Fellows are provided an opportunity to brief senior DoD officials on their observations and to provide recommendations as to those industry practices which may prove beneficial to DoD transformational efforts.

**History of Union Pacific Railroad**

The author was assigned to Union Pacific Railroad for his fellowship assignment, where he served in the Information Technology department. This year, Union Pacific celebrates its 150th anniversary, a feat achieved by only 28 other US firms. The history of Union Pacific is intertwined with military history; dating back to the employment of Civil War veterans to help build the Transcontinental Railroad, to today’s strong support for hiring military veterans.

In the mid-19th century, only trails and wagon tracks crossed the US. Many considered a railroad key to westward expansion and the future development of the nation. The Pacific Railroad Act of 1862 made construction of the transcontinental railroad possible. It divided this monumental task for two companies to complete. The Central Pacific Railroad of California was to build eastward from Sacramento, and the Union Pacific was to build westward from Omaha.[[5]](#endnote-5) After nearly six years of construction with a workforce of 20,000 men, the connection of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads was complete. On 10 May 1869, at Promontory Point, Utah, a golden spike was driven to join the last rails from east and west. The completion of the Transcontinental Railroad enabled cross-country travel to be completed in 10 days; a journey, which prior, would have taken nearly six-months to complete.

Following decades of rapid growth and over-expansion, Union Pacific found itself unable to meet its expenses near the end of the century. The railroad was sold at foreclosure on 1 November 1897 to E.H. Harriman and a small group of investors. Harriman in-turn focused on rehabilitating Union Pacific “by spending millions of dollars for modern locomotives, freight and passenger cars; eliminating curves; reducing grades; replacing wooden bridges with steel or masonry; constructing cutoffs; reducing mileage; improving water supply; enlarging operations yards; installing heavier rail; and double tracking by the hundreds of miles.”[[6]](#endnote-6)

Today, Union Pacific is one of the largest transportation companies in the US, with routes covering 23 states and nearly 32,000 miles of track. Union Pacific continues the efforts set out by Harriman; to provide outstanding customer service in the most efficient manner. These efforts have resulted in record highs for both customer service ratings (92 out of 100) and revenue ($19.6 billion) in 2011.

**Organization of Paper**

A literature review is presented in Chapter 2, which will address several different leadership environments, including a review of entrepreneurial leadership traits. Using those tenets identified in Chapter 2, a case study is developed in Chapter 3 which highlights the author’s experience participating in a Union Pacific continuous improvement project. Chapter 4 provides recommendations that could be applied to the Air Force to improve business operations.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

*Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do*

*something you want done because he wants to do it.*

Dwight D. Eisenhower

Leadership has been analyzed, studied, and in general, looked at from just about every angle imaginable since early writings on the subject by Plato and Sun Tzu. In fact, a keyword search using Google finds more than 490 million results for “leadership.” The objective of this chapter is to define key leadership traits found within both the military and corporate arenas and search for common threads among the two groups. The funnel is narrowed further towards the end of this chapter with a review of entrepreneurial leadership and the traits of successful entrepreneurial leaders.

Before defining some of the key leadership traits found in Corporate America and the military, it is worth spending a moment to discuss the organizational aspect as it relates to leadership. In his article, “Organization Theory for Leaders,” Hunsicker writes that Corporate America and the military share much in common, but also have some unique differences. He summarizes that,

* Organizations, both military and commercial, relate to their environments and are dependent on them.
* Both types of organizations are influenced by five primary sectors of the broader environment (economic, cultural, political, competitive, and technological).
* There are some distinct differences between the two types of organizations, especially the way they relate to economic, political, and competitive sectors of the environment.
* Although military and commercial organizations do differ, their similarities outweigh the differences. Furthermore, the differences seem to be more procedural and technical, than fundamental.[[7]](#endnote-7)

The role of leaders is to balance, leverage or defend against the broader environment Hunsicker describes above. Hunsicker’s perspective provides us an anchor to which we can begin to compare leadership traits between Corporate America and the military. There will undoubtedly be differences, but our goal is to find common ground among these traits.

**Military Leadership Traits**

A review of military leadership quickly yields information on the different traits, development practices, organizational structure, and the differences between the Services. For example, Air Force Doctrine Document 1-1 (AFDD), *Leadership and Force Development*, defines leadership at the “Art and science of influencing and directing people to accomplish the assigned mission.”[[8]](#endnote-8) AFDD 1-1 further defines leadership as a focus on both mission and people, with its foundation centered on the Air Force Core Values, leadership competencies, and leadership actions.[[9]](#endnote-9) The Air Force leadership competencies are divided into three categories: personal leadership (exercise sound judgment, adapt and perform under pressure, inspire trust, lead courageously, assess self, and foster effective communication), leading people/teams (drive performance, influence through win/win solutions, mentor and coach for growth and success, promote collaboration and teamwork, and partner to maximize results), and leading the institution (shape Air Force strategy and direction, command organizational and mission success through enterprise integration and resource stewardship, embrace change and transformation, drive execution, and attract, retain and develop talent).[[10]](#endnote-10)

Surprisingly, in his 1995 address to the graduating class at the Naval Academy, Secretary of the Navy John H. Dalton identified several of the same leadership traits. Secretary Dalton’s list of leadership traits includes: trust, takes the initiative, uses good judgment, speaks with authority, strengthens others, is optimistic and enthusiastic, never compromises absolutes, and leads by example.[[11]](#endnote-11)

In his essay for the Navy Command Leadership School, *Reflections on Leadership*, Thomas E. Cronin identifies a tentative list of leadership qualities to include:

* Self-knowledge/self-confidence
* Vision, ability to infuse important, transcending values into an enterprise
* Intelligence, wisdom, judgment
* Learning/renewal
* World-mindedness/a sense of history and breadth
* Coalition building/social architecture
* Morale building/motivation
* Stamina, energy, tenacity, courage, enthusiasm
* Character, integrity/intellectual honesty
* Risk-taking/entrepreneurship
* An ability to communicate, persuade/listen
* Understanding the nature of power and authority
* An ability to concentrate on achieving goals and results
* A sense of humor, perspective, flexibility[[12]](#endnote-12)

Similar to the Air Force, the Army defines the “entry-level” requirements of leadership in Field Manual 6-22, *Army Leadership*. The Leadership Requirements Model’s two basic components center on what a leader is (attributes) and what a leader does (core leader competencies). Attributes include Character (Army values, empathy, and warrior ethos), Presence (military bearing, physically fit, composed/confident, and resilient), and intellectual capacity (mental agility, sound judgment, innovation, interpersonal tact, and domain knowledge). Core leader competencies include leads (leads others, extends influence beyond the chain of command, leads by example, and communicates), develops (creates a positive environment, prepares self, and develops others), and achieves (gets results).[[13]](#endnote-13)

**Corporate Leadership Traits**

The mission set of the military can vary wildly from that of Corporate America and the consequences of poor leadership in Corporate America may not lead to loss of life or severe injury like they possibly could in the military; although losing a multi-million dollar contract or a 20% drop in stock value may seem daunting. But Hunsicker’s research referenced before provides an alternate belief that the operating environment of the military and Corporate America may not be as disparate as some may believe. A review of the literature surrounding the topic of corporate leadership appears to bear this out.

Yogesh Ambekar’s compilation of corporate leadership traits includes several of those identified earlier; good communication skills, honesty, and the ability to motivate people. A visionary outlook, the ability to make decisions, consistency, and the ability to bear criticism are also included.[[14]](#endnote-14) In his review of executive recruiting literature, Toney consistently finds evidence that point to the importance of leadership skills and a strong understanding of business fundamentals the higher one climbs the corporate ladder. Strong communication, empathic listening, collaboration, trust building are all viewed as more critical compared to technical and functional expertise.[[15]](#endnote-15)

In some of the most comprehensive research in this area, IBM conducted face-to-face interviews with more than 1,500 chief executive officers, general managers and senior public sector leaders from around the world. While some 86% of those interviewed anticipate an even greater level of business complexity in the next five years, less than half of those say they are prepared for this increased complexity in their work environment.[[16]](#endnote-16) Based on their research, IBM found that those companies that are thriving in today’s markets have focused on three areas: embodying creative leadership, reinventing customer relationships, and building operating dexterity. Sixty percent of those interviewed rate creativity as the most important leadership trait over the next five years. Other key leadership traits (identified by percentage of interviewees) include: integrity (52%), global thinking (35%), influence (30%), openness (28%), dedication (26%), focus on sustainment (26%), humility (12%), and fairness (12%).[[17]](#endnote-17)

J. Evelyn Orr and Kathleen Sack found similar emerging trends in their study of corporate leadership. Using the 2009 Leadership Architect® Global Normative Study as their data source, Orr and Sack developed a model of those leadership skills that need to be developed. The Leadership Architect® Global Normative Study is based on survey responses 7,575 leaders across regions, industries, job functions and levels. Their model is categorized as four different segments: untapped strengths, leveraged strengths, hidden differentiators and known differentiators.[[18]](#endnote-18) Leadership traits within the leveraged strengths and known differentiators categories were labeled as skills that are important and valued by a company, while untapped strengths and hidden differentiators were also labeled important, but undervalued; traits and skills that should be developed. Skills aligned with hidden differentiators include creativity and innovation management, and the ability to learn on the fly was identified as an untapped strength.[[19]](#endnote-19)

**Entrepreneurial Leadership Traits**

In their research, Fernald et al. provide a comprehensive look at indentifying entrepreneurial leadership traits, and then comparing them with other leadership traits. Their research centered around 136 sources (journal articles, dissertations and theses, books and other periodical articles). The results highlight eight common characteristics among entrepreneurs and leaders. These include: ability to motivate, achievement oriented, creative, flexible, patient, persistent, risk-taker, and visionary.[[20]](#endnote-20)

Javitch identifies 10 key traits for today’s entrepreneurial leader based on his 25 years of experience coaching and assessing these leaders. The successful entrepreneurial leader understands the mission of the organization, can clearly layout a vision that others can follow, and establish goals to readily measure success along the way. They are experts in their field and have developed a high level of competency over time, but also know that a successful team can make or break an organization and takes the steps necessary to develop a strong team. A successful entrepreneurial leader has strong interpersonal and communication skills. Finally, they exhibit a strong “can-do” attitude; they inspire those around them; and they are ambitious in attaining the goals they’ve set for themselves and the organization.[[21]](#endnote-21)

Johannsen’s list of nine characteristics of successful entrepreneurs includes several common themes. He claims that successful leaders have a high-level of esteem and are driven by a need to succeed in their organizations. They are always screening for new opportunities and have developed a high internal locus of control, meaning they believe they make their own opportunities rather than luck or fate determining success. Additionally, successful entrepreneurs are able to develop goals, align their team/organization towards that goal, and work tirelessly to achieve it. They are optimistic and courageous, willing to make the difficult choices that come with leading their organization. Successful entrepreneurs don’t seek the security of well-established organizations, but rather are more tolerant of ambiguity in their professional lives. Finally, they have a burning desire to be successful, and to take action to reach their goals.[[22]](#endnote-22)

**Summary**

The preceding literature review, while not all-encompassing, does provide a representative sample of the differing leadership traits found in the military, Corporate America, and entrepreneurial environments. Of interest to this report are the leadership traits that transcend environments; those that are found in military leaders, captains of industry, or entrepreneurs. An analysis of the common themes of the literature reveals eight leadership traits that are prevalent in each of the three environments. They include, in no order of importance:

* Ability to communicate effectively
* Use of sound judgment and integrity
* Ability to motivate others
* Have a visionary outlook
* Collaborate with others and develop teams
* Mental agility and creativity
* Results focused
* Optimistic and enthusiastic

Chapter 3

Case Study

This chapter focuses on documenting the author’s experience working a continuous improvement project during his fellowship at Union Pacific. The chapter begins with a brief introduction of The UP Way; Union Pacific’s program to introduce a culture of continuous improvement across the entire network. An introduction to Positive Train Control follows, which specifically was the focus of this case study. The chapter concludes with a case study narrative of observations and best practices observed by the author during this project.

**The UP Way**

Union Pacific prides itself as a company built on a foundation of safety, service excellence, and continuous productivity improvement. The UP Way is a program that utilizes well-known tools such as Lean and Six Sigma. More importantly, Union Pacific understands it is more than just a set of tools, but rather a shift in cultural beliefs. The UP Way is more about the development of a continuous improvement culture, much like the Air Force’s goal with its Air Force Smart Operations for the 21st Century (AFSO21) endeavor. The tenets of The UP Way were utilized during this continuous improvement project. The UP Way is centered on four primary concepts;

* Value – understanding how to create value for customers and the company.
* Waste – reducing waste in all of its forms is essential to improving service, performance, productivity, and financial results.
* Process Improvement – a defined process is key and one of the most important roles of Union Pacific leaders.
* Reducing Variability - variability in the everyday processes is one of the largest creators of waste. Unpredictable results driven by variability impact service and performance every day.[[23]](#endnote-23)

In support of the four primary concepts, The UP Way implements a set of Lean and Six Sigma-focused tools. The first tool is standard work. Standard work implies developing work processes that use the same resources, the same tools, the same information flow, and are accomplished in the same amount of time, each time. Standard work for leaders follows the same premise as standard work, but as the title states, is geared towards the activities and processes of frontline management. Next, the 5S (sort, set in order, shine, standardize, and sustain) is a tool used to organize the workplace in order to maximize the efficient use of tools and materials, thus reducing wasted effort. Value stream mapping is used to graphical display work processes, with the goal of finding and eliminating non-value added steps. Finally, the implementation of visual management techniques provides a means for comparing measures of work against established expectations/standards.[[24]](#endnote-24)

**Positive Train Control Background**

Congressional legislation passed in 2008 requires the installation of Positive Train Control (PTC) for all US railroads carrying passengers or toxic-by-inhalation (TIH) materials by the end of 2015. The legislation was passed as a result, in part, of the collision of a California Metrolink commuter train and a Union Pacific freight train in September 2006, in which 25 people were killed. The term “Positive Train Control” refers to the technologies used to automatically stop or slow a train in order to prevent train-to-train collisions, derailments caused by excessive speed, excursions of trains onto unauthorized sections of track, and movement of a train through a track switch set in the wrong position.[[25]](#endnote-25) Of specific importance to this case study is the telecommunication infrastructure needed to receive and transmit data signals between trains and control centers. In the case of Union Pacific, more than 12,000 telecommunication antennas and supporting pole structures must be installed in order for the system to function properly. The continuous improvement project focused on improving productivity with the safe and efficient installation of the antennas and supporting pole structures.

**Findings**

The premise for beginning a continuous improvement project was to improve the productivity of antenna installations; at the time, installation rates were behind schedule, thus putting Union Pacific in jeopardy of not meeting the Congressionally mandated 2015 completion date. The undertaking was arduous, with more than 12,000 pole/antenna structures to be installed across the entire network; 23 states, and 32,000 miles of track. Union Pacific divides this network into three geographical operating regions; the northern, western, and southern regions. The actual installation had been contracted to two separate contractors; a single contractor for the northern region, and the same contractor installing pole/antennas in the western and southern regions.

The continuous improvement process began with a day-long kick-off meeting. Both Union Pacific employees and leaders from the two contracting companies were in invited. In all, approximately 30 people were in attendance. The evening prior to the meeting, a social event was set-up so that the entire team could meet and build some camaraderie prior to the next day’s working session. Much of the kick-off meeting focused on defining the problem, introducing the team to The UP Way concepts and tools, and concluded with the development of a draft value stream map.

Shortly after this initial meeting, more in-depth follow-on meetings were set-up with the contractors and Union Pacific supervisors from each of the regions. During these sessions, the draft value stream map was further refined to address specific regional issues and challenges. Additionally, this time was used to begin developing a set of metrics that would be used to track productivity progress. The key measure of productivity was the number of antenna/pole structures that were installed, per crew, per day (there are three contractor crews, supervised by Union Pacific employees, in each region).

In addition to these meetings, the program manager, along with other Union Pacific supervisors, led “go-see” activities in each of the regions. The objective of these “go-see” events was to physically get out in the field and see how the work was being accomplished; essentially, add some life to the paper value stream maps that had been developed earlier. Observing antenna/pole installations provided the team with a hands-on perspective of material flow, team cohesion, and leadership implementation. Key safety issues could be addressed and fixed on the spot, and each evening concluded with a comparison of the value stream maps to what was actually happening on the job site. After several of these “go-see” events, several common themed waste reduction solutions began to emerge. Examples include: how to safely and efficiently get access to the track to install antennas/poles with minimal impact to train traffic; how best to stage the work crews, and materials and tools in order to minimize unnecessary trips to supply trailers; and the importance of field leadership in developing a work plan and then executing it.

These waste reduction themes were then used as the foundation to begin developing standard work and standard work for leaders. There was some initial skepticism with the standard work plans, some viewed them as an attempt to take the decision-maker out of the loop, and in the end, several personnel changes were implemented in order to utilize key expertise. Over time, the results started to show an improvement in productivity, and the standard work processes were more widely accepted. Those in the field understood that standard work wasn’t an attempt to make robots out of the supervisors, but rather provided them with a tool to ensure installations were completed efficiently and effectively, every time, regardless of geographical location.

Productivity rates have improved over the five month period since the continuous improvement project was launched. Based on analysis of the process, a production goal of installing 270 antennas/poles per month was established, equating to a regional goal of 90 antennas/poles per month. In January 2012, 285 antennas/poles were installed; February fell short of the goal by three, with 267 antennas/poles installed; and as of the writing of this paper, March data was not finalized. January and February productivity rates were marked improvements compared to an average production for October and November of 130 antennas/poles per month.

Chapter 4

Recommendations

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight several of the key findings and provide recommendations to the Air Force as it continues to find ways to operate more effectively and efficiently given today’s resource constrained environment.

First, building teams is critical to success with these types of endeavors. Union Pacific took a very deliberate approach to building a team when beginning this continuous improvement project. The team was all-inclusive, to include contractors and ensuring those who were geographically separated from headquarters in Omaha were invited. The tone was set with the kick-off working session, and the previous evening’s social gathering helped solidify the team-based approach. Leadership was willing to make difficult choices along the way, ensuring the team had the right expertise, in the right positions, at the right locations.

Second, strong leadership matters. The program manager for the continuous improvement project took a “management by walking around approach” to leading this team. The “go-see” activities were critical to establishing a rapport with those doing the work in the field. Even more critical was the program manager’s commitment to traveling to each region at least one a quarter. The objective of these visits was to get a field perspective on progress and implementation of the standard work processes that had been established, but also to find obstacles and take action to remove them, allowing the crews to focus on results. The visits to the field sent the message that what the crews were doing was important and that they had the support of the field supervisors and those in-charge at Union Pacific headquarters.

Third, the first and second recommendations are useless without well established lines of communication. Additionally, developing the right team and ensuring strong leadership are the foundation to two-way communication. Initially, daily teleconference calls were set-up to share ideas and frustrations, establishing a means to seek input from the field in developing standard work processes. As standard work processes were implemented and productivity improvements realized, the frequency of the calls was reduced to once a week. But the key here was ensuring the experts who were doing the work had a venue to make recommendations.

Finally, developing an environment of optimism and enthusiasm was a motivational factor in achieving productivity goals. The program manager’s mantra is “success comes in cans.” Meaning you have to believe established goals can be reached in order to get there. Never once did the author hear doubt that 270 antenna/pole installations per month were unachievable. With strong leadership and communication skills, an optimistic and enthusiastic environment is contagious and buy-in from those on the frontlines was achieved.

Today’s constrained resource environment undoubtedly is forcing the Air Force, and all the Services, to review and rethink how best to accomplish their mission sets efficiently and effectively. This paper has highlighted the transcendent nature of leadership traits; from a traditional military environment, to Corporate America, to the entrepreneur. Remember, we earlier defined entrepreneurship as the management of an enterprise, usually with considerable initiative and risk. Sounds a lot like the Air Force, doesn’t it? Developing an entrepreneurial culture and cadre provides a path in which the Air Force can accomplish the mission, effectively and efficiently.

Endnotes

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