



The Leadership and Development Handbook

**Pennsylvania Training Instruction
2025 – 2026**



Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States

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**State Commander's theme this year:
Encourage Team Management.
Expand Family Oriented Activities at Post Level.
Educate VFW Leadership in control of Post Activities and Programs.**

VFW Leadership and Development

Being a member of the VFW means being an agent of change.

But...

To be a leader within the VFW means connecting with those around you; inspiring them with a shared sense of mission; and through education and engagement, mobilizing them in order to accomplish a common goal.

As Gen Stanley McChrystal put it:

"I was most reinforced by the understanding that where we were, the status quo was failing, and because it was failing, I knew we had to change. But instead of trying to provide an exact path ahead, what I did was I tried to inform and engage the command by saying we have to move in this general direction- help me figure it out. As people did that, we refined the direction we were going, constantly shifting, and it made more people the agents of change."

Mission Statement: The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States believes America is defined by how it treats those who sacrificed to protect it; we believe in protecting and fighting for those who were brave enough to fight for us. Whether on Capitol Hill or in our communities, the VFW fights and defends the rights of America's veterans by lobbying for veteran's rights, helping veterans get the benefits they deserve, and assisting veterans further their education with scholarships and living assistance for them and their families. To do less, would be an unconscionable betrayal of our responsibilities as Americans and veterans.

Leadership in the 21st Century in 3 Questions

[Roselinde Torres: “What it takes to be a great leader”]

1. **Where are you looking to anticipate change?** *Proactive leaders practice identifying and sharing trends that impact your team in order to course correct a strategy or to anticipate new moves. Shape your future instead of just reacting to it.*
 - a. Who are you spending time with and on what topics? Where are you traveling? What are you reading? How are you distilling all of this information into understanding potential pitfalls so you can do something right now in order to prepare?
 - i. The following questions aim to identify local focal points of change. If you answer “No” to a question, think about expanding your awareness to identify potential trends. If you answer “Yes” to a question, discuss with your team how current trends in that area may impact you or your mission- this may offer an opportunity to raise awareness within your community and engage your local leaders in a call for action or collaborative campaign for change.
 1. Local Government
 - a. Do you pay attention to local government?
 - b. Do you know who your local government officials are and their priority goals?
 - c. Are you aware of current or upcoming ballot initiatives?
 2. Educational Institutions
 - a. Do you know all of the schools in your area?
 - b. Do you have relationships with the educators and administrators of those schools?
 - c. If an institution of higher education (community college/university/vocational school), do you know the percentage of veterans in attendance? And/or if said institution is veteran friendly?
 3. Local Business
 - a. Are you aware of local business trends?
 - b. Do you know/have a relationship with the local business leaders in your area?
 - c. Have you thought about areas of mutual interest?
-
2. **What is the diversity measure or your network?** *Great leaders understand that having a more diverse network is a source of pattern identification as well as solutions because you have surrounded yourself with people who are thinking differently than you are.*

- a. Expand your capacity to develop relationships with people and organizations that are very different than you; find shared goals; and work together.

- i. Name 3 other non-profit organizations in your area. (i.e. local Homeless Shelter or Food Pantry)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

- ii. Now, in 5 words or less, write 3 common goals you have with each organization above. (i.e. preventing Veteran Homelessness/ feeding veterans and their families/ providing family assistance)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

- iii. Have you already established a working partnership in a community project?

Think how you might incorporate other organizations to expand the impact of that effort.

3. **Are you courageous enough to abandon the past?** *Brave leaders dare to be different: they just don't talk about taking risks they actually take them. The most impactful development comes when you have built the emotional stamina to withstand others who tell you that your new ideas are naïve or stupid. Courageous leaps are joined and supported often by people who think differently than you.*

- a. When challenging the status quo, it's easy to say "we can't change that because it's tradition!" or "why change when we've always done it this way?", but in order to succeed and to grow we must not only be willing to change we must embrace it.

- i. Think of 3 practices within your organization that have made you successful in the past. Now, re-examine these practices by asking the following questions of all three.

1. Does this practice still work? (Does it still serve its original function?)
2. Does this practice impede my efforts? (Is it holding me back or preventing me from trying something new?)

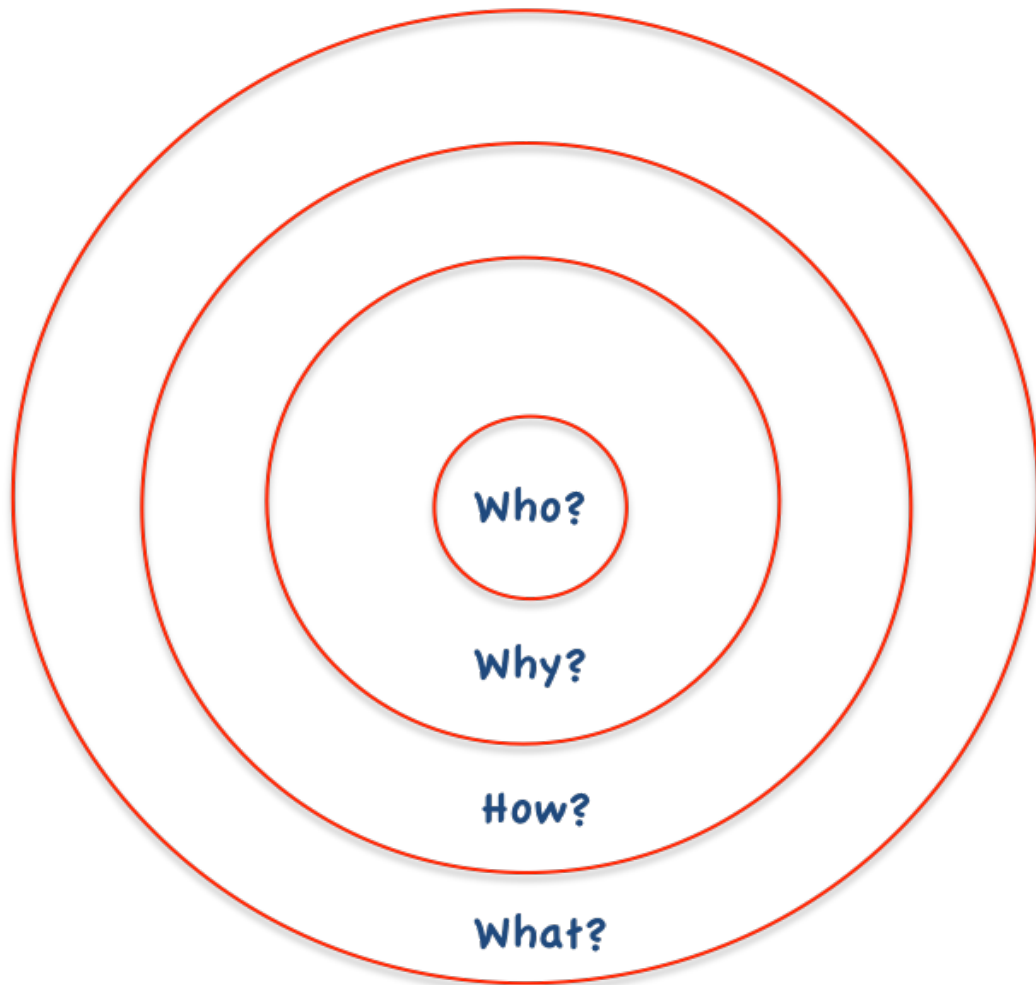
3. Is this practice marginalizing and excluding those who I'm trying to reach? (Am I unable to work with certain groups simply out of tradition- am I limiting my network and sphere of influence because of the past?)

It is undoubtedly hard to let go of practices that have made you successful in the past. As long as circumstances do not change, there is no reason to; however, changing times call for changing practices, and in our dynamic society this inevitably means the failure to change is the failure to thrive.

How Great Leaders Inspire Action: Who? Why? How? What?

[Simon Sinek: “Start with why”]

1. **People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it**, and great leaders are able to communicate why they do what they do in order to inspire action in others. The goal is not to do business with people who need what you have; the goal is to do business with people who believe what you believe.



2. **Who, Why, How, What, and why should anyone care?** No one is going to want to be a part of what you do if you can’t tell them why you do it or give them a reason to care. The first step in successfully communicating what you believe is by working from the outside in and communicating from the inside out.

a. **What** does your Post do?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

b. **How** does your Post do what they do?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

c. **Why** does your Post do what they do: what's your cause, your purpose, your belief-why does your organization exist?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

d. **Who** does your Post serve?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

e. Now, distill this into a mission statement that conveys what you believe and why anyone should care. Example:

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States believes America is defined by how it treats those who sacrificed to protect it; we believe in protecting and fighting for those who were brave enough to fight for us. Whether on Capitol Hill or in our communities, the VFW fights and defends the rights of America's veterans by lobbying for veterans' rights, helping veterans get the benefits they deserve, and assisting veterans further their education with scholarships and living assistance for them and their families. To do less, would be an unconscionable

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Great Leaders Are Prepared, Informed, and Polite but Firm

1. Great leaders are prepared with great questions. [*Good Leaders Ask Great Questions: John*

C. Maxwell]

- a. Too often as leaders, we get fixated on our own point of view and spend our time trying to convince others of our opinions instead of trying to find out theirs. As English novelist and politician Edward Bulwer-Lytton asserted, “The true spirit of conversation consists in building on another man’s observation, not overturning it.” That’s where questions come into play. By asking questions and listening carefully to answers, we can discover valuable perspectives other than our own. This is valuable because we often make faulty assumptions about other people:

- i. **We believe people are good at the same things we are good at— they aren’t.** Do you know your members? What are their backgrounds, skills, and hobbies? How can you utilize their strengths to accomplish the mission?
 - ii. **We believe people are energized by the same things that energize us— they aren’t.** Are you dismissing your member’s ideas because they are not in line with your own? Instead of dissuading your members, focus their energy in activities they’re interested in.

- iii. **We believe people see the big picture in the same way we do— they don’t.**

After presenting your mission statement to your members, ask them to tell you what it means in their own words. How does their big picture differ from yours? This may give you invaluable perspective into how your members perceive the mission.

Great leaders are informed and utilize the resources available to them.

- a. VFW tools and training.
 - i. Commander-in-Chief General Orders, National Headquarters Bulletin
 - ii. Department, District, and Post Bylaws
 - iii. VFW Podium Edition (Congressional Charter, Bylaws, Manual of Procedure, and Ritual)
 - iv. VFW Training and Support (*vfw.org*)
 - v. Department Training Programs (Schools of Instruction)
 - vi. *VFW* magazine and National Publications (Checkpoint, Action Corps Weekly)

1. Great leaders are polite but firm: how to deal with difficult people. Part of being a leader is having a thick skin, patience, and understanding when dealing with difficult people. *[John F. Gwizdak, Past Commander-in-Chief]*
 - a. The 4 members of every Post.
 - i. **Comrade Helen Hammer** – Sits in the back of the meeting and complains about every piece of business.
 - ii. **Comrade Billy Bylaws** – Favorite question, “Is that in the Bylaws?” Wants to disrupt your meeting by challenging parliamentary procedure.
 - iii. **Comrade N.O. Change** – Favorite phrase, “We’ve always done it like that.” Adverse to any and every change proposed – refuses to abandon the past.
 - iv. **Comrade Henry Give ‘em Hell** – He wasn’t at the meeting, but won’t hesitate to voice his disapproval of the business conducted. Wants to subvert any progress made with gossip and misinformation.
 - b. How do you handle these people? Be professional, be polite, have character, but be speak up and be firm.

Conclusion and Review

The answers to the following questions can be found in reading above.

1. What are the 3 major focal points of change?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
2. How do you handle difficult and disruptive people? **(circle one)**
 - a. Yelling and screaming at them until they're quiet?
 - b. Ordering them not to speak unless spoken to?
 - c. Cursing them behind their backs with other members?
 - d. Politely and professionally speaking to them in a firm manner?
3. Working with people who think differently than you do... **(circle one)**
 - a. Can cause problems within your organization.
 - b. Expands the partnership capacity within your community.
 - c. Limits your ability to accomplish your goals.
 - d. Doesn't work because they don't share your values.
4. What does a mission statement convey? **(Circle one)**
 - a. Who you serve.
 - b. Why you do what you do.
 - c. How you do what you do.
 - d. What you do.
 - e. All of the above.

The difference between successful and unsuccessful leaders is intent: successful leaders understand they are part of a team and make it their mission to lead their team through inspiration and education in order to help them accomplish a shared goal. Once the goal is accomplished, successful leaders recognize their team – they say “thank you.” **This organization is only able to accomplish its mission with your help and your leadership. Thank you for serving our country and thank you for continuing to serve through the VFW.**

Answers: 1) Government, Education, Business; 2) d; 3) b; 4) e

Any question, please contact Department HQ at 717-234-7927

***Thank you for your service to our Nation, and all you do for the VFW
and in your communities!***