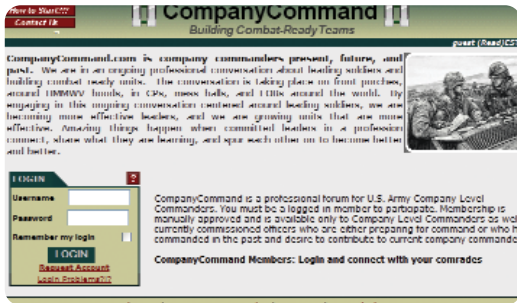


INTELLIGENCE

/IN PRACTICE/

Learning at War Speed

When training's too slow, call in an online community.



By Eva Kaplan-Leiserson

FOR ANY ORGANIZATION, sharing experiential knowledge and lessons learned is crucial. But the practice can literally mean the difference between life and death in the military.

In wartime, cycling information back to training developers and instructors can take too long, especially when the enemy changes tactics so rapidly that knowledge becomes obsolete within days or hours. What's the solution? Sometimes, it's cutting out the middleman.

Formal training still develops U.S. Army leaders and gives them the foundational knowledge they need. But experiential knowledge is being transferred via two new tools in the Army's arsenal: websites developed in peacetime by past company commanders wanting to pass on what they know to the next generation of leaders. During ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, CompanyCommand and PlatoonLeader are serving to connect past, present, and future leaders to learn from each other.

Developed at the grassroots level to replicate the front-porch conversations of two of their founders, the CompanyCommand and PlatoonLeader websites lack instructors, classrooms, curriculums,

or manuals. Captains and lieutenants log on with a password to

- post questions and receive answers
- read interviews about commanders' experiences in the field
- find contacts with specific expertise
- take polls and read others' answers
- discuss and apply principles from relevant books they're reading.

Robust "dog-tags," descriptions attached to each person's online profile describing his or her experience, put information in context so others can judge whether the knowledge shared applies to their own situation.

Threaded discussions are broken into categories according to various job functions and facilitated by a topic leader who approves each posting, as well as other new content in his or her area.

A company commander deploying with his troops to Iraq can log on to read the latest lessons learned on convoy operations from another commander who's been there. That informal knowledge converts to formal instruction as the leader puts together a class on what he has learned for his soldiers.

The communities' nonhierarchical, nonvetted nature has caused less trouble among the Army establishment than one might think. The sites' founders stress that their purpose is not to provide one answer or approach, but rather to create conversations and cross talk about what has worked.

That clearly defined purpose helps shield the websites from criticism that they're not providing "official" answers.

Besides, says Major Nate Allen, founding team member of the sites, "by the time [they] gained visibility, [they were] really doing something cool. These are exactly the kind of conversations we want people in our organization to have."

The small amount of resistance the team did experience from Army top guns disappeared when they met and "humbly laid [the sites] out and the impact ... [they] can have." The advice that leaders have received has saved lives in several cases.

Once small, unofficial, and under the radar, the sites now have more than 11,000 members and are fully funded by the Army. The group running them, deemed the CompanyCommand Support Team, operates out of the United States Military Academy, better known as West Point. But to Allen and his colleagues who define the Army as the people within it, "It's always been the Army's."

Not just the Army's, though. Knowing a good thing when they see one, Marine officers are using the sites as well, and Navy intelligence officers are creating a similar forum.

Read All About It

Want to know more about CompanyCommand as a learning community? The site's founders partnered with Nancy Dixon, president of consulting and research firm Common Knowledge Associates, to write *CompanyCommand: Unleashing the Power of the Army Profession*. The book is available on Amazon.com or via the Common Knowledge website.

[MORE/www.commonknowledge.org](http://www.commonknowledge.org)

Q+A: Creating Successful Online Communities for Rapid Learning

We caught up with Majors Nate Allen and Pete Kilner, founding team members of Company-Command and PlatoonLeader, to ask about their team's lessons learned and best practices.

T+D: *How do your online communities work with traditional training?*

Kilner: Traditional classroom training can't prepare leaders for every situation. By connecting leaders who face similar challenges, our communities help to fill the knowledge gaps. Online communities nurture the ongoing conversations that make traditional training's content more meaningful.

T+D: *How hard was it to get the Army to accept these sites as valuable and legitimate ways of educating leaders?*

Kilner: We wrestle with, How do you institutionalize innovation? How do you facilitate and resource it without becoming too hierarchical? There is a spectrum with the field at one end and the formal organizational hierarchy at the other. We try to be in the middle. When we feel tension from both camps, we know we're where we need to be.

If the community is too institutionalized, it's a corporate bulletin and no one wants it. If it's too emergent, the conversation may not be aligned with organizational values or strategy. So, we're trying to stand in the middle ground and bring formal and informal learning together. Powerful, effective learning occurs when the formal and informal align.

T+D: *What were some of your assumptions in building these communities?*

Allen: We assume that the expertise and knowledge of the profession reside in the



Major Nate Allen



Major Pete Kilner

mind of the practitioner and he or she has the responsibility to maintain and build on that knowledge, as well as to pass it on to the next generation.

If a community like this is forced from the top down in an organization, it's less likely to be successful. In our model, the people doing the work create the resource. Our mantra is, "If they build it, they will come."

T+D: *What else is key to getting leaders to participate in your communities?*

Kilner: Participation must be worthwhile for members; the experience must add such value to them and their work that they're compelled to be involved. When

members have experienced value for themselves, they're more likely to contribute. Also, people have a desire to make a difference. That's a powerful principle to have at work at any organization, but especially in the Army.

T+D: *In your opinion, is there anything military training—or training in general—can do to adapt faster to changing realities?*

Allen: Some timeless principles must be shared and learned, but formal training is moving towards collaborative learning. The [Army] instructors on the ground two years ago are teaching people who just got back [from service overseas]. So, it's less about the instructor passing on knowledge; the knowledge is being created within a community. I've heard a couple of senior leaders [in the Army] talking about that topic. It's not all there yet, but it's starting.

GOTO/tdmagazine.astd.org for more of this Q+A.

SOURCES/Majors Nate Allen and Pete Kilner; "Battle Lessons," *The New Yorker*; "Soldiers Record Lessons From Iraq," *The Washington Post*

/GLOBAL 360/

Telecommuting Increasing in Europe

TELECOMMUTING is gaining popularity in Europe, reports trendspotters The Herman Group. The European Union's Emergence Project found that by 2010, 27 million Europeans will work from home at least part of their work week, with employees in the United Kingdom leading the trend. (For comparison, 2.2 million Europeans worked from home in 2001.)

Of the countries surveyed, Germany currently holds the record for the most people telecommuting at least part time, at 60 percent. France and the United Kingdom have the lowest numbers right now, at 43 and 48 percent, respectively.

More than half of U.K. workers said flexibility would influence their choice of employer. However, three-quarters of managers don't have a good understanding of why staff would want to work remotely, a University of the West of England report found.

That's a discrepancy that will have to be remedied in the years ahead, or companies are in for a rude awakening—especially with the coming labor crisis.

GOTO/"Mind the (Talent) Gap" April *T+D*

/TECH TIP/

Smarter Email

This tip comes from Jason Womack of The David Allen Company. Allen is the author of the best-selling book Getting Things Done.

YOUR EMAIL INBOX probably contains a collection of old and new messages of varying priorities. Here's one way to cut down on the clutter and manage the information: Change the subject lines of the emails you receive to the action you need to take next.

You can do that in Microsoft Outlook and Lotus Notes by opening the message, highlighting and deleting the original subject line, and then typing your new subject. When you close the message, it will show the revised subject line in your inbox.

Review your messages as they come in and change the subjects to actionable tasks. For example, you might change the subject "Re: budget meeting" to "draft initial presentation overview re: budget for Q3."

As you look through your inbox, you're able to tell at a glance the steps you need to take, instead of opening and reading the same messages over and over again.

By appropriately identifying the action that each email requires, you can purge, sort, and organize much of your inbox, cleaning the clutter and making it easier to get work done.

Jason Womack delivers workflow management seminars to organizations including General Mills, the U.S. Navy, and Credit Suisse First Boston. He has written for the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Executive Committee*, and *T+D* (July 2002).

/SURVEY SAYS/

Results Roundup

The Intelligence desk receives an inbox-full of survey results each month. Here are the most newsworthy recent findings:

Poor management hinders productivity. According to workers, the number 1 factor negatively affecting their productivity is poor management (58 percent of responses).

SOURCE/Society for Human Resource Management

Overemphasizing affiliation can backfire. Executive teams that put a premium on people and relationships may not make necessary tough decisions or exclude people from a team that's too large to be effective.

SOURCE/Hay Group

Diversity gains an executive champion. CEOs are more involved in diversity efforts: 30 percent of diversity officers now report to the president or CEO.

SOURCE/Novations/J. Howard and Associates

An MBA is good to have, but not critical. Only 26 percent of executives said having an MBA was "very important"; 57 percent said it was "a nice addition, but not necessary."

SOURCE/TheLadders.com

GOTO/<http://tdmagazine.asted.org> for links to more on each item.

T+D Blog

Want the hot news faster? Read the T+D Blog between magazine issues to get the latest news, trends, links, and commentary.

GOTO/<http://tdmagazine.asted.org> and click on the blog link.

/EXECUTIVE UPDATE/

Team Success Solutions

TAKE A FEW top leaders, put them in a room together, and get them to work effectively as a team. That can be a challenging task, as men and women who are accustomed to being bosses must transition to a more collaborative mindset.

But an executive leadership team can be a great asset to a company, as long as the team goes beyond presentations and policy setting to true collaboration and collective problem solving. So says Nancy Brown-Johnston, author of *The Driving Force: Lessons in Teamwork From Saturn and Other Leading Companies*. Brown-Johnston offers these tips for successful executive teams:

- Limit membership to eight to 12 executives for better discussions and to enable personal relationships to mature.
- Invest time in developing the relationships between team members.
- Build in interdependence and a working knowledge of other departments. Eliminate competition for resources.
- Focus on strategic and tactical issues, delegating operational matters.
- Define the decision-making process and follow it religiously.
- Never punish team members for ex-

pressing unpopular opinions.

- Strive for consensus and alignment on all critical decisions. Leave minds open to new ideas, practices, and people.
- Track implementation of decisions and actions to promote accountability.
- Address inappropriate behavior. Expect executives to leave their egos at the door and to work together as a peer group.

Brown-Johnston says many executive leadership teams fail because they turn into committees making mostly operational decisions. That can cause the organization's productivity to lag as the company waits for team consensus. However, effective executive leadership teams with clear expectations and discipline are invaluable for strategic planning, she says.

/HOW TO/

Putting Performance Into Practice

YOU'VE HEARD THE MESSAGE before: Success in the training world should be determined by job performance and changed behaviors, not participant numbers or smile sheets.

"The primary goal of the training department should be to provide products and services that directly impact the business results of the organization," says Ann Parkman, president of the Center for Effective Performance in Atlanta.

But knowing and doing are two different things. For a department to be considered truly performance-based, t&d professionals should strive to align its goals with those of the organization.

The CEP recommends that training managers assess their departments in terms of these five best practice areas, taking the following steps:

Results. Conduct a thorough analysis to be certain that training is the appropriate solution for performance improvement.

Methodology. Adopt a criterion-based design methodology so that training focuses solely on the skills needed to meet expectations.

Measurement. Standardize performance measures. Align major business goals with hiring assessments, training, skill checks, and performance reviews.

Structure. Promote and support strong relationships with appropriate business leaders through effective department structure.

Roles and responsibilities. Ensure that trainers use the proper skills and processes to improve job performance throughout the organization.

—Josephine Rossi

/REALITY CHECK/

Million Dollar Mentor

WHO SAYS TRAINING doesn't pay? It does—especially if you're "The Donald." The real estate phenom Donald Trump, who gets more TV face time than Regis Philbin, will earn a record-breaking \$1 million an hour to make three presentations of "How to Succeed in Real Estate" for the adult education company The Learning Annex.

Company founder Bill Zanker said in the *Palm Beach Daily News* that Trump is worth every penny of that \$3 million. Why? Because when Trump taught the class in 2004, 20,000 students signed up.

Founded in New York City in 1980, The Learning Annex has molded a place for itself in the competitive workshop and seminar arena by featuring such celebrity teachers as Robert Kiyosaki (author of *Rich Dad, Poor Dad*), Camryn Manheim (actress on "The Practice"), and Tony Robbins (best-selling author and life coach).

Zanker, in the January 2005 issue of the New York City real estate magazine

Mann Report, says that his "goal has always been to bring lifelong learning to the masses in any medium, whether it is classes, books, or...expos."

Lifelong learning: That's an idea that workplace learning and performance professionals can get behind. But can they get behind it to the tune of \$500 to attend a weekend workshop? That's what it costs to purchase a VIP weekend pass (excluding hotel and transportation costs) to attend The Learning Annex's Real Estate Wealth Expo in the city of their choice: Los Angeles in May, New York in October, or Chicago in November. The more cost-friendly weekend pass goes for \$149, but without the privileges of VIP check-in and VIP seating at the sessions of the keynote speakers.

—Sabrina E. Hicks

MORE/www.learningannex.com

/FUN AND GAMES/

The End of Boring Meetings

Have to sit through another tedious, never-ending meeting? Print out one of four Lingo Bingo cards from Working-Wounded.com and only you and your playmates will know why you're suddenly paying such rapt attention.

Mark off boxes when you hear such terms as *bottom line*, *paradigm shift*, *team building*, *deliverable*, and more. If you get five across, you win!

Note: T+D staff are not responsible for any firings that may result from this pastime.

MORE/<http://workingwounded.com/games/lingobingo>



/NEWS FLASH/

Great Places to Work = Great Market Gains

THINK A FEEL-GOOD WORKPLACE can't be competitive? Think again. During the last seven years, stocks of public companies on *Fortune's* "100 Best Companies to Work For" list produced gains of more than three times those on the broad market.

The "100 Best" portfolio provided a cumulative return of 176 percent, com-

pared with 42 percent by the Russell 3000 and 39 percent by the S&P 500.

Companies on the list were selected by the Great Place to Work Institute based on the organization's criteria of credibility, respect, fairness, pride, and camaraderie.

MORE/www.greatplacetowork.com

The image is a screenshot of a webpage titled "about the Great Place to Work Institute". The page features a header with the "GREAT PLACE TO WORK INSTITUTE" logo and a date of "April 22, 2006". The main content includes a sub-header "my Company Can Create a Great Workplace for Mission is to Help Them Do It" and several paragraphs of text. A "Register Now!" button is visible on the right side of the page.

/TREND/

Good Writing is Good Business

THE COST OF POORLY WRITTEN, vague email, letters, and other business communications is difficult to measure. But it's significant enough for leading U.S. companies to spend more than \$3 billion annually to provide remedial training to employees. A recent survey of 120 leading firms by the College Board found that a third of employees were not adequate writers.

What are the solutions? Steve Gladis, associate dean at the University of Virginia's School of Continuing and Professional Studies, is the author of *Survival Writing for Business*, which was released this month. He answered a few questions from T+D—in writing—about the challenges of remedial training.

T+D: *What are the hidden costs of bad writing in the business world?*

Gladis: Some cost estimates for a typical business communication are set conservatively at \$20 per page. Thus, you want your writing process to be quick and efficient and the final product to be accurate, succinct, and understandable—or your company and your readers pay dearly. If you multiply the millions of emails, letters, and reports written every day in business and government by \$20, you can see the expenses that can be saved by trimming back the flow of unnecessary words.

T+D: *Does remedial training help most employees?*

Gladis: Yes. Companies that invest the time and money to offer writing and communication workshops not only help their employees polish skills that improve business, but they also send a clear message: Good writing is good business. Also, employees believe that the company cares about them, and they also get the message that good writing is important loud and clear.

T+D: *Would annual writing refresher courses improve communication skills at most companies?*

Gladis: I have consulted for a number of organizations on a recurring basis and have found such refresher workshops healthy for both the employee and employer. In fact, if you really want to

embed good writing in an organization, it takes more than a one-time workshop of helpful tips.

T+D: *How do you convince an otherwise successful manager or executive that her writing skills need improvement?*

Gladis: Ask this question: "If you could do one thing to make your writing even better, what would that be?" That question often leads to fruitful discussion. Also, I believe strongly in the power of reading-writing work groups where group members review each other's writing before sending it to the target audience. Such collaborative groups help writers identify their strengths and weaknesses and motivate change, which ultimately has to come from within the writer.

U.S. companies spend more than \$3 billion annually to provide remedial writing training.

T+D: *Why should an organization not accept bad writing on internal documents and email?*

Gladis: It should not for the same reason a parent should not accept bad behavior from a child. Passive

acceptance implies agreement. And the lower the standard becomes, the lower it goes. It's a bit like the broken windows theory: If you allow a vacant building to have a few broken windows, before long they're all broken. Take care of the little things, the details, and the big things will fall in line.

T+D: *If you could eliminate one key from the keyboard, what would it be? Why?*

Gladis: The exclamation point drives me nuts! It's like someone YELLING AT ME or someone who's had way too much caffeine! And people who use exclamation points get addicted to them—exclamaddiction! Stamp out the exclamation point!!!