

Education Support Cell (ESC)/TLDE Tips & Strategies

The Coaching Mindset: Setting conditions for learning

In our last edition, we explored what is meant by the *Coaching Mindset*. We discussed that the role of cadre at the SOCoE includes developing our selected students and melding them into what we need in a SOF Soldier. Much like a professional coach develops his/her athlete, our cadre should possess a mindset to coach and develop their students (and soon to be peers).

Throughout the summer, the ESC will explore facets of a coaching mindset: setting the learning environment, providing feedback, and enhancing learning. The discussions will loosely follow what FM 6-22 (Leader Development) puts forth as *Fundamentals of Developing Leaders*, and really delve into developing the SOF capability.

Setting the environment

We are always learning. Some learning is the result of intentional lessons; some learning is a result of what we are exposed to unintentionally. Sometimes we learn by assessing what we *should* do, and sometimes by considering what we *shouldn't* do. Students absorb lessons by watching their instructors' example as well as through the lessons or experiences those instructors offer.

Bottom line: *learning occurs in response to the environment we set.* As instructional leaders and instructor/cadre, we are setting a very powerful environment; actually we are establishing a culture for developing the SOF mindset. The culture we set will suck in and transform all those who come in contact with it.

This organizational culture dictates the overall environment in which we work. Instructional leaders affect this culture through the things they model and celebrate. As cadre, we dictate the overall environment in which we teach. As an example, if I ask my students questions, and then answer them myself, the class will learn that if they are quiet, they won't have to answer. If I "red card" a student for trying an innovative approach to solving a



problem because the team wasn't successful, then I've taught the others not to take risks or think creatively. On the other hand, if cadre share a mindset that students are there to be polished, then students will shine. Optimally, we'd like to set conditions in which there are multiple opportunities for students to learn through their own mistakes and

reflections. In this environment, lessons and experiences will be purposeful, and cadre will be present to coach and assist students with processing their own experiences.

The ESC provides support for the uniform application of USAJFKSWCS educational processes across the Institution to include:

-Support to Curriculum & Instruction [Courses and Instructors];

-Support to Leadership & Professional Development Initiatives;

-Support to the development and implementation of program evaluation and assessment systems; and

-Support to the design and implementation of SOF Career Pathways.

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Consider the following table of instances.

When conditions for learning need improvement	vs	When conditions for learning are positive
Flipping through a slide deck in the style of “briefing” the information	vs	Using the slides’ information, but creating small groups in which students discuss the information and fill in a graphic organizer with the main ideas
For the class above, the presence of 1 cadre per 180 students when the resourcing states 2:180	vs	For the class above, the presence of 5 cadre per 180 students to allow for small groups to be monitored for discussions.
“Dressing down” a student team for providing an incorrect assessment of a site and assigning “red cards” for not having the <i>Integrity</i> to get the answer correct	vs	Having the team discuss their incorrect assessment with two other teams and then bring a comparison of responses back to the cadre member with a written team reflection on how/why they arrived at the incorrect assessment. Then having the team repeat the exercise.
Providing a “retest” for a gated event within 24 hours of the initial fail	vs	Providing a structured remedial experience for a failed gate, allowing students to identify the issue and retrain--- keeping them in cycle and with original class

But what can I do?

Setting conditions for learning is everyone’s task, and everyone from the CG to the newest cadre member needs to be aware of their own mindset and monitor it. Since cadre touch students more often, they have a very important, perhaps the most important, role in defining and building our future SOF force. Approaching this humbling task with a coaching mindset is as important as knowing the content you are about to teach. So, what can we do right now to achieve this endstate?

- **Be a role model for what is right:** Role models can be positive or negative. Don’t be the guy no one aspires to be. Set the example for what is valued in our organization. If you are an instructional leader, be sure to be explicit as to what is valued and monitor your organization’s culture. Ask *why* we do something as often as *what* we do.
- **Encourage development:** Be present and approachable. Know your students’ strengths and developmental needs. Inspire students to work on their deficiencies while providing them much needed guidance. Instructional Leaders: be sure your cadre have the resources and the time to develop students and remember to develop your cadre. Ask for external assistance in developing programs or make some noise to get the manning you need to make this most important mission.
- **Encourage learning:** Give feedback, but allow students to critique themselves and each other. Mistakes are great opportunities for growth. Approach them with this mindset and allow for learning and innovation. Instructional leaders: ensure you are using all your data points to determine if learning is occurring and if the conditions set for learning are positive. Look to SWCS PAM 350-70-7 to ensure you are tracking.

Tune in next month for Part III in the Mindset series—Providing Feedback--and as always, reach out to the ESC for assistance. If we can’t help you, we’ll find someone who can.