

## Education Support Cell (ESC)/TLDE Tips & Strategies

### ***The Coaching Mindset: Developmental Feedback***

Welcome back to our series on The Coaching Mindset. We are in the midst of discussing methodologies for developing capabilities in our students in order to develop an adaptive, professional SOF soldier. Our first two editions about this topic can be found at <http://www.soc.mil/swcs/esc.html>. This month we are going to look at the skill of giving developmental feedback to grow capabilities.....feedback during classes or event (not formal counseling).

#### **Remember, it's all about the culture**

Last month, we offered that the organizational culture dictates the overall learning environment and that leaders/cadre affect this culture by the attributes they model, the events they celebrate, and even the words they use. The mindset of developing student capabilities stems from a culture that encourages and rewards instructors/leadership who prioritize teaching and feedback, rather than those that embrace the *gotcha* mindset. Are students here for us to develop, or are they here for us to skim the cream off the top and discard the rest?

The ESC provides support for the uniform application of USAJFKSWCS educational processes across the Institution.

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#### **Feedback: what do you observe?**

The first step in providing developmental feedback to students is to legitimately be present to observe them. Working through role players or other indirect indicators does not replace direct cadre observation and interaction with students. The idea that being present can cause students to act differently is not enough to avoid direct observation. Student capability won't change with observation; they need the opportunities to learn from their mistakes, to learn from one another, and to learn from their cadre. Some schools of thought insist that students' attitudes may be altered in the presence of cadre. This may be true, but attributes aren't for grading. Attributes are for developing. This is why there are opportunities throughout our courses to gain insight into these intangibles. Students are selected into our qualification courses having the potential we desire. If we accept that selection works, then aside from an egregious act, a student should be developmentally assessed on attributes---but development can't occur without feedback. A student-leader doesn't adapt to an obstacle? Use it as an opportunity to have a team discussion on what options he had but missed. Cycles of feedback, delivered appropriately, can assist students in developing their own thinking, and help others learn vicariously from others' experiences. But the key here is for cadre to be present to observe, redirect and provide feedback; otherwise, none of this can happen.

#### **Feedback: how do you deliver it?**

There are ways to deliver feedback, and then there are ways to deliver **developmental** feedback. To get the biggest bang for our time and effort, we don't only want to deliver a traditional After Action Review. We want our students to think through what they did, why they did it and what they need to work on. Guided Discussions are effective for building critical thinking and reflective thinking skills in students. In a Guided Discussion, there are clear objectives or criteria to observe or evaluate, and then open-ended questions are used to guide students' thinking for reflection and

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improvement. It's a given that if there is a trust and respect between coach and pupil, there is more open dialogue for discussions. Students should feel that they can honestly and openly reflect on what occurred in a non-attribitional manner. If the culture of a phase or course supports a *gotcha* mentality, then students will be keen on hiding all weaknesses and mistakes, and will take the road-most-traveled to get to the "right" answer rather than working on developing their weaknesses and asking questions to truly learn and build strategies and capabilities. Leadership must reinforce the Coaching Mindset with instructors and cadre to optimize the learning environment.

### What can I do?

Chances are, you'll be seeing students shortly. What can you do to use developmental feedback methods to build capabilities in your own students?

- **Allow mistakes:** Sure, if a student blatantly ignores an order, that's not a mistake, it's an infraction. However, making "novice" mistakes in our courses is exactly where we need students to commit these errors. Take a Tactical Pause to enable students to process in the moment rather than wait for the end of an exercise. Make their errors learning points and help students grow from them.
- **Ask for self-assessments:** When speaking to students, use questions such as "How do you think that went?" or "Can you give me 3 other ways you could have approached <insert> (irate G-chief, choke point, broken antennae). If you need to be more direct, then identify the issue, but ask the student for the resolution. "In retrospect, what were the factors that would have indicated that was going poorly?" [Note: We will discuss development and self-assessment in an upcoming *Tips*.]
- **Embrace the silence:** When you ask a question like those above, be ready for the silence that will come. The more difficult or reflective a question is, the more difficult it is to answer, so allow some time for the students to think and wait for their response.
- **Build Question Banks:** Develop a pool of questions ahead of time aimed at eliciting critical thought. Depending on the performance of the exercise, pull from your bank of questions to begin a Guided Discussion or pull out salient learning points. Developing a bank of questions ahead of time allows for better and more thorough questions which when used across classes, also increases the consistency of learning across students, time and instructors.
- **Add your feedback last:** After getting the self- or team-assessment and giving time to fully explore your questions and their ideas, be sure to add in your observations. Build on what your students have already said to increase their self-efficacy, but be sure to give the feedback that is needed to guide students and to develop their understanding and awareness for future events. Also always try to give them the *so what*; the "*why this learning matters*".
- **Provide opportunities for growth:** Going back to our baseball analogy, if you have a shortstop who is shying away from ground balls that are taking a quick hop, what do you do? I would hit that athlete some one-hop line drives each day to enable him to gain some confidence and to assist with keeping his head down to see the ball into the glove. Don't just fire off the feedback and move on. Figure out ways to develop areas for improvement and pass on a student to the next phase that has grown in knowledge, skills, and attributes. Developmental feedback is aimed at development, so revisit, reinforce and look for growth.

***Tune in next month for Part IV in the Mindset series—Enhancing Learning. And as always, reach out to the ESC for assistance. If we can't help you, we'll find someone who can.***