The background of the page features a faded, grayscale image of several soldiers in full CBRNE (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and High-Explosive) protective gear. They are wearing helmets, goggles, and respirators, and appear to be in a field or training environment. The image is semi-transparent, allowing the text to be clearly visible over it.

CBRNE Leadership Rules

By Colonel Scott S. Haraburda

I have been assigned many different tasks—military and civilian—to accomplish throughout my career. As expected, some of these tasks were successful while others were not. I have seen successful leaders use the wrong management (or leadership) tools and unsuccessful leaders use state-of-the-art management tools. Management and leadership skills are key to success, whether developing and running a large-scale training exercise; decontaminating a chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-explosive (CBRNE) contaminated area; installing an innovative measurement system in a hazardous-chemical manufacturing company; installing new production equipment for a large international foreign company; or planning a family vacation.

One could easily ask “How does this happen?” In other words, how could a CBRNE leader become successful using the wrong management tools or unsuccessful using the best management tools? This question is contrary to the claims from management experts that management tools will revolutionize society and ensure the successful completion of tasks. Do not get me wrong; I believe that management tools are important. But using the best management tools while foregoing all other knowledge pertinent to accomplishing tasks will doom one to failure.

Because I wanted to successfully lead and manage CBRNE experts, I continually gathered information about what worked and what did not work. This was my personal lessons-learned, self-improvement program. I found that applying these leadership rules helped CBRNE leaders to successfully accomplish their jobs.

To be successful, a CBRNE leader must be able to command and control his unit. Leading a CBRNE unit is primarily a form of art associated with leadership; whereas, control is primarily a form of science associated with management. My leadership rules—divided into six groups—apply primarily to the art form of CBRNE leadership.

Task

Recognize that you cannot have all three: cheaper, better, and faster. When conducting a chemical reconnaissance, the objectives of accomplishing the task faster (days before needed) and with better results (more area occupied) than originally planned normally results in a higher cost—physically and monetarily (such as personnel, safety risks, decontaminants, and intelligence). When a leader directs Soldiers to accomplish a task cheaper, better, and faster, he had better understand that one of the requirements will result in a failed mission and confused troops. Do not make your Soldiers guess what must be compromised!

Realize that accomplishing the task is more important than the tools used. In a typical defensive operation, the CBRNE leader may be asked to provide personnel decontamination. He may spend valuable time and resources writing the best operations order to implement the best controls available. In his quest to develop the best tools for executing the operation, he may fail to accomplish the main objective—ensuring personnel safety through complete and timely decontamination. Using good planning and management tools does not always ensure a successfully completed task.

Plan and sacrifice now for the sake of the future. Command and other key military leadership positions are typically held for two or three years. It's difficult for leaders to establish programs that will improve the performance of CBRNE units or organizations several years beyond their tenure. It's better for unit leaders to establish priorities of unit readiness in lieu of bureaucratic requirements. For example, don't divert Soldiers from a scheduled weapons qualification exercise to improve unit paperwork in support of an upcoming command inspection.

Implement plans. General George S. Patton, Jr. once said, "A good plan executed today is better than a perfect plan executed at some indefinite point in the future." You may not always have the perfect plan, under the perfect conditions, but you must have decontamination operations in place to save Soldiers now!

Data

Ensure that you only use metrics if they are needed in the decision-making process. For example, don't create a metric to count the number of briefings a subordinate leader makes unless it is being used to improve the leader's communication techniques. Having a metric to measure the number of hours Soldiers in a unit work may be interesting information; however, it should not be used unless you make work-related decisions based on it. On the other hand, using a metric to determine the personnel readiness rate of a unit could be used to improve readiness or recognize cross-level resources available from one unit to another.

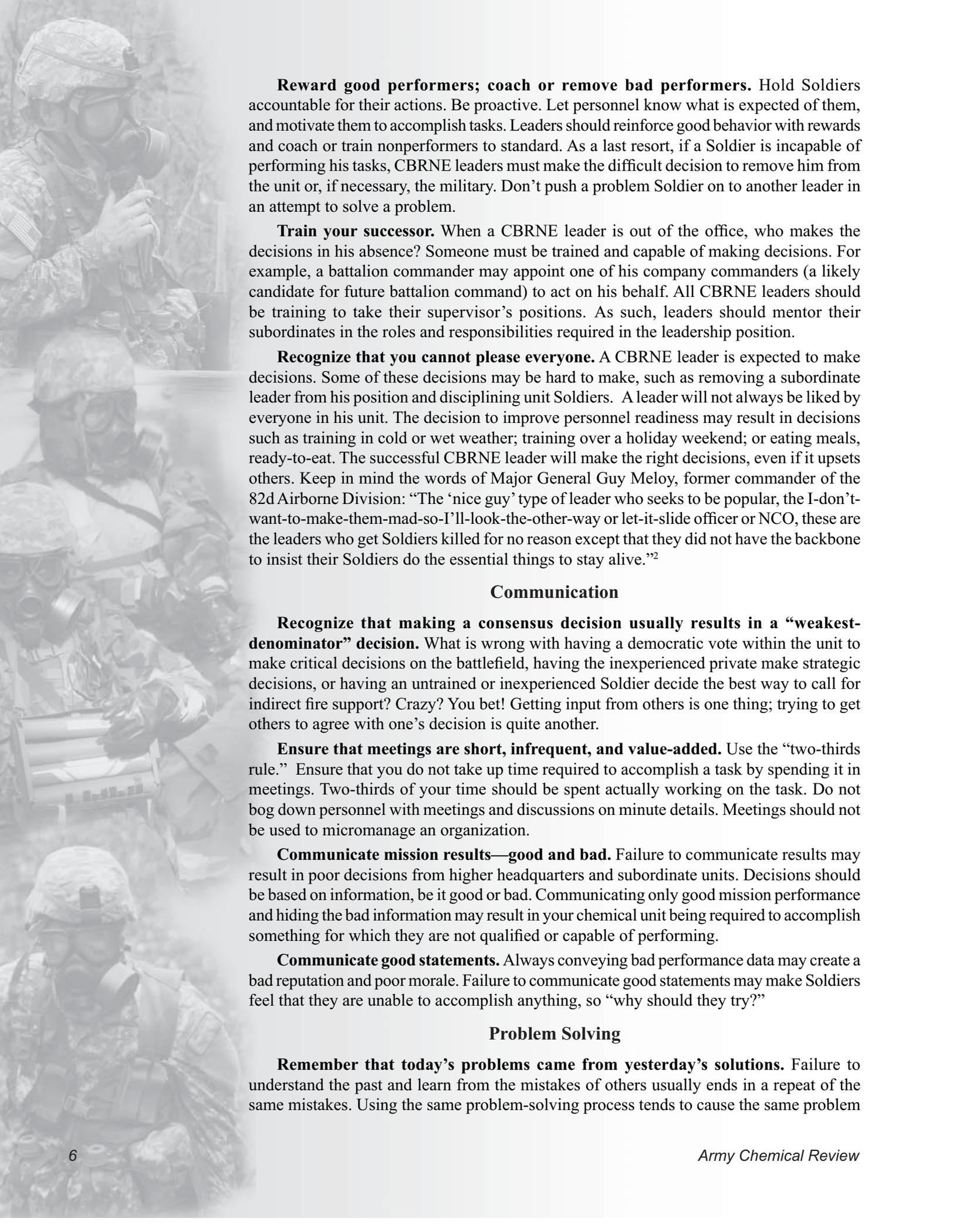
Understand the source of the data. It is unwise to make decisions based on data that is not known to be accurate or timely. Making decisions about unit schooling or training using military occupational specialty qualification data extracted from databases with obsolete or irrelevant information does not make sense. By the same token, a CBRNE leader should not make decisions in combat without understanding the accuracy and timeliness of his sources and the intelligence on the battlefield.

Avoid pursuing information to reach meaningless goals, even if the information can be easily obtained. For example, information on the number of rounds fired by Soldiers in a unit is an easy metric to obtain. However, with the exception of logistical or familiarization purposes, this information does not provide a leader with information that would improve unit readiness or indicate how well the unit is performing. Better data would be the number of targets destroyed rather than the amount of ammunition used.

Challenge your assumptions. A CBRNE leader may assume that subordinate Soldiers are incapable of making good decisions. How does the leader know whether this assumption is accurate? Mentoring Soldiers and providing them with decision-making opportunities allows you a glimpse of their abilities. In combat, a leader receives battlefield intelligence information to help him make informed decisions. To better understand the intelligence data, leaders should challenge whether the assumptions (and facts) are relevant to operations.

Personnel

Recognize that a mission begins and ends (and sinks or swims) with personnel. Noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and enlisted Soldiers mean everything! A unit is nothing without them. They run the equipment, fire the weapons, and make lifesaving decisions. Mentor and develop them. As for trusting them to accomplish tasks, take the advice of General Patton: "Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do, and they will surprise you with their ingenuity."¹ Remember, your missions cannot be accomplished without solid Soldier support.



Reward good performers; coach or remove bad performers. Hold Soldiers accountable for their actions. Be proactive. Let personnel know what is expected of them, and motivate them to accomplish tasks. Leaders should reinforce good behavior with rewards and coach or train nonperformers to standard. As a last resort, if a Soldier is incapable of performing his tasks, CBRNE leaders must make the difficult decision to remove him from the unit or, if necessary, the military. Don't push a problem Soldier on to another leader in an attempt to solve a problem.

Train your successor. When a CBRNE leader is out of the office, who makes the decisions in his absence? Someone must be trained and capable of making decisions. For example, a battalion commander may appoint one of his company commanders (a likely candidate for future battalion command) to act on his behalf. All CBRNE leaders should be training to take their supervisor's positions. As such, leaders should mentor their subordinates in the roles and responsibilities required in the leadership position.

Recognize that you cannot please everyone. A CBRNE leader is expected to make decisions. Some of these decisions may be hard to make, such as removing a subordinate leader from his position and disciplining unit Soldiers. A leader will not always be liked by everyone in his unit. The decision to improve personnel readiness may result in decisions such as training in cold or wet weather; training over a holiday weekend; or eating meals, ready-to-eat. The successful CBRNE leader will make the right decisions, even if it upsets others. Keep in mind the words of Major General Guy Meloy, former commander of the 82d Airborne Division: "The 'nice guy' type of leader who seeks to be popular, the I-don't-want-to-make-them-mad-so-I'll-look-the-other-way or let-it-slide officer or NCO, these are the leaders who get Soldiers killed for no reason except that they did not have the backbone to insist their Soldiers do the essential things to stay alive."²

Communication

Recognize that making a consensus decision usually results in a "weakest-denominator" decision. What is wrong with having a democratic vote within the unit to make critical decisions on the battlefield, having the inexperienced private make strategic decisions, or having an untrained or inexperienced Soldier decide the best way to call for indirect fire support? Crazy? You bet! Getting input from others is one thing; trying to get others to agree with one's decision is quite another.

Ensure that meetings are short, infrequent, and value-added. Use the "two-thirds rule." Ensure that you do not take up time required to accomplish a task by spending it in meetings. Two-thirds of your time should be spent actually working on the task. Do not bog down personnel with meetings and discussions on minute details. Meetings should not be used to micromanage an organization.

Communicate mission results—good and bad. Failure to communicate results may result in poor decisions from higher headquarters and subordinate units. Decisions should be based on information, be it good or bad. Communicating only good mission performance and hiding the bad information may result in your chemical unit being required to accomplish something for which they are not qualified or capable of performing.

Communicate good statements. Always conveying bad performance data may create a bad reputation and poor morale. Failure to communicate good statements may make Soldiers feel that they are unable to accomplish anything, so "why should they try?"

Problem Solving

Remember that today's problems came from yesterday's solutions. Failure to understand the past and learn from the mistakes of others usually ends in a repeat of the same mistakes. Using the same problem-solving process tends to cause the same problem

in the future. For example, using the military decision-making process for a given situation without the lessons-learned knowledge from a similar past decision has a high probability of failure. Understand history and how it can be used to solve problems.

Recognize that the cure may be worse than the disease. It is not wise to dedicate valuable resources to ensure that a simple task is accomplished. It does not make sense to take several officers and NCOs away from their jobs to supervise a single Soldier performing a task. When solving a problem, always consider the related expenses. Is it worth not accomplishing another task?

Dominate technology—do not let it dominate you. Do not spend all of your time behind the computer communicating by e-mail or with fancy PowerPoint® presentations. What happens if the computer goes down? Do you stop communicating?

Solve problems, not symptoms. I once had a Chemical company commander who investigated a vehicle accident. He determined that the Soldier driving the vehicle was the cause of the accident. When I asked him why the driver was the cause, he indicated that the driver had failed to maintain the proper distance in the convoy and had overcorrected when the vehicle in front of him slowed down. I asked the investigator why the driver did that, but he did not know. In my personal investigation, I found that the driver was not licensed to drive the vehicle. My next question was, “Why was a nonlicensed Soldier allowed to drive a vehicle in his company?” Never stop asking “why.” You need to discover the real cause contributing to the problem behind the initial story.

Decision Making

Remember that doing the right thing is better than doing things right. In an emergency situation, it may be better to begin decontamination operations at the right time (even though the plans may not be perfect) instead of spending valuable time planning and preparing. Otherwise, we spend time planning and rehearsing until we have a perfect solution with flawless movement—at a time long after Soldiers have died or the battle has been fought and won by the enemy.

Recognize that “better” is the enemy of “good enough.” Let’s wait until we have perfect Soldiers who perform perfectly before we go to war. Not a realistic statement! There is nothing wrong with improving a unit—but not at the expense of the mission.

Remember that resources mean nothing if they are not used. Having the best-trained, -equipped, and -qualified CBRNE Soldiers does nothing for our Army if we cannot get them into the fight.

Remember that if it “ain’t broke,” strive to maintain or improve it. A Soldier in combat needs to know that he can count on his weapon. He spends time maintaining it because failure to do so may cost him his life or the lives of his fellow Soldiers. The same is true with other equipment such as vehicles, protective clothing, and detection devices.

The rules outlined in this article are not all-inclusive, but they provide insight into what is needed to successfully accomplish a mission. CBRNE leaders should consider these rules a guide to success—success for leaders and success for Soldiers! ●●●

Endnotes:

¹George S. Patton, Jr., *War as I Knew It*, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947.

²Major General Guy S. Meloy, “Reflections of a Former Troop Leader,” *ARMY Magazine*, 1 August 2003.

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