

Mission Command
Develops Better Leaders



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“Where’s the Chief?” This is a question I have heard a lot, and wondered myself from time to time. Recently I discovered how my own method of tasking and delegating may have contributed to why people ask the question above. All too often a leader’s actions and style of tasking do not support empowering our chiefs and subordinates. This directly leads to an ineffective Chief’s Mess, and a deep void in leadership.

The breakdown occurs when we task our subordinates without giving them the ability or freedom to make decisions and analyze various alternatives. When officers do not provide the chiefs the opportunity to make decisions on their own, we find ourselves asking, “Where’s the Chief?” In doing so, we have stripped them of all responsibility and authority, and the undesired result is an unproductive leader who is constantly asking for permission and guidance.

To help alleviate this, I encourage you to practice a technique the called Mission Command. Let’s say for example, you want the staff trained on a certain topic. You can tell your chief to use a specific Power Point to facilitate the training, and you will get a compliant chief. Or, you could tell the chief that you want everyone to understand a certain topic by a specified date. This way the chief can exercise their own judgment, maybe they know of newer, or a better way to teach. The second scenario allows the chief to make decisions; they are less constrained, and maybe as a result, will achieve a better outcome. This is a simple example, but the results and changes within your organization when practiced in conjunction with more strategic initiatives can be remarkable.

Mission Command is all about a shared understanding of the problem, purpose and the conditions at the desired end state. When this is clear, your staff is more empowered to solve problems. Mission Command consists of four primary processes or parts. First, understand the current situation. Second, describe the problem. Third, set the conditions (or boundaries), and finally, the intent. Your “intent” is a description of the conditions and the environment you want to exist at the end. By doing these four things, your staff will more clearly understand what your goals are, and often, they will achieve better results because of that understanding.

By following the principles of Mission Command, everyone up and down the chain of command has a better understanding of why they are doing things. They can make daily decisions based on their clear understanding of your intent. They will be more involved with the process, can exercise their own judgment, and most importantly they own it – and that is empowerment. Together, this builds a cohesive staff, committed to the tasks and allows them to make better future decisions.

I urge you to set a vision consisting of the conditions you want in the future. Next give your staff the freedom to execute and make their own decisions. Then encourage your subordinates to come to you with their own intentions, not questions. When all this comes together, you know exactly where the chief is, and they know where you want to be. They understand what is important to you, and can best bring you the options to achieve your goals. Your staff will be more engaged, and you will be less consumed with management. To learn more I encourage you to read, "The facets of Mission Command" by Dan McCauley, (<http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrn/art/the-facets-of-mission-command>), and watch a video called "Greatness" by David Marquet, (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqmdLcyES_Q)

Leadership competencies: Self Awareness and Learning, Team building, Management and Process Improvement