

Leadership in Cinema



Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program

CAPTAIN PHILLIPS

Submitted by: Ben Eby E-mail: BLM_FA_Leadership_Feedback@blm.gov
Studio: Sony Pictures Released: 1987
Genre: Drama Audience Rating: R
Runtime: 134 minutes

Materials

VCR or DVD, television or projection system, Wildland Fire Leadership Values and Principles handouts (single-sided), Incident Response Pocket Guide (IRPG), notepad, writing utensil

Objective

Students will identify Wildland Fire Leadership Values and Principles illustrated within Captain Phillips and discuss leadership lessons learned with group members or mentors.

Basic Plot

Captain Phillips is a multi-layered examination of the 2009 hijacking of the U.S. container ship Maersk Alabama by a crew of Somali pirates. It is - through director Paul Greengrass's distinctive lens - simultaneously a pulse-pounding thriller, and a complex portrait of the myriad effects of globalization. The film focuses on the relationship between the Alabama's commanding officer, Captain Richard Phillips (two time Academy Award®-winner Tom Hanks), and the Somali pirate captain, Muse (Barkhad Abdi), who takes him hostage. Phillips and Muse are set on an unstoppable collision course when Muse and his crew target Phillips' unarmed ship; in the ensuing standoff, 145 miles off the Somali coast, both men will find themselves at the mercy of forces beyond their control. (Written by Sony Pictures Entertainment)

Cast of Main Characters

Tom Hanks.....	Captain Richard Philips
Catherine Keneer.....	Andrea Phillips
Barkhad Abdi.....	Muse
Barkhad Abdirahman.....	Bilal
Faysal Ahmed.....	Najee
Mahat M. Ali.....	Elmi
Michael Chernus.....	Shane Murphy
David Warshofsky.....	Mike Perry
Corey Johnson.....	Ken Quinn

Facilitation Options

Captain Phillips illustrates an abundance of leadership values and principles. Students should have few problems identifying those that correspond to the Wildland Fire Leadership Values and Principles. The objective is not to identify every leadership principle but to promote thought and discussion. Students should be less concerned with how many principles they view within the film and more concerned with how the principles they do recognize can be used to develop themselves as a leader.

A Captain's Duty: Somali Pirates, Navy SEALs, and Dangerous Days at Sea by Richard Phillips and Stephan Talty is a selection in the [Professional Reading Program \(https://www.nwcg.gov/wfldp/cinema\)](https://www.nwcg.gov/wfldp/cinema)

The film can be viewed in its entirety or in parts, depending on facilitator intent and time schedules. Another method is to have the employee(s) view the film on his/her own and then hold the discussion session.

Full-film Facilitation Suggestion

When opting for the full-film method, the facilitator should determine a good breaking point near the middle of the film.

1. Review the Wildland Fire Leadership Values and Principles with students.
2. Review Guided Discussion questions with student
3. Break students into small discussion groups if necessary.
4. Show students Captain Phillips.
5. Begin the guided discussion.

Facilitator Reference

6. Have students discuss their findings and how they will apply leadership lessons learned to their role in wildland fire suppression. Facilitate discussion in groups that have difficulty.
7. Wrap up the session and encourage students to apply leadership lessons learned in their personal and work lives.

Mentor Suggestion

Have students view the movie on their own, then hold a discussion session(s) as time allows.

The mentor should be available to the student to discuss lessons learned from the film as well as incorporating them to the student's leadership self-development plan.

Encouraging individuals to keep a leadership journal is an excellent way to document leadership values and principles that are practiced.

Suggest other wildland fire leadership toolbox items that will contribute to the overall leadership development of the student.

Other References

Official film [website for Captain Phillips \(http://www.captainphillipsmovie.com/site/\)](http://www.captainphillipsmovie.com/site/)

Phillips, Richard with Talty, Stephan, *A Captain's Duty: Somali Pirates, Navy Seals, and Dangerous Days at Sea*. Hyperion Books. Reprint January 2011.

Phillips, Richard, *Captain Richard Phillips: Lessons in Leadership*, The Walker Agency/[FORA.tv \(http://www.hulu.com/watch/109527\)](http://www.hulu.com/watch/109527)

Hyperlinks have been included to facilitate the use of the Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program website. Encourage students of leadership to visit the [website \(http://www.fireleadership.gov\)](http://www.fireleadership.gov).

Captain Phillips

Guided Discussion – Possible Answers

1. Which of the characters in the movie appear to be the main leaders? How effective are they?
 - **Captain Phillips, Muse**
 - **Answers will vary.**
2. Compare leadership style of Captain Phillips and Muse.
 - **Answers will vary.**
3. Early in the movie, Captain Phillips walks in to the break room and says: “About done with that coffee?” How does this statement affect your perception on his leadership style/ability?
 - **Answers will vary.**
4. Captain Phillips maintained situational awareness using multiple methods. Checking the boat security features personally, email alerts about pirates, checking the radar, etc. How did this allow him to make sound and timely decisions?
 - **He knew they were going into an area with a pirate issue; so he heightened security on the boat and performed drills. This allowed him to prepare the crew for an attack as well as let him know where his crew is as far as their capabilities.**
5. Once he realized the two boats were approaching and that they may have a real situation, how did Captain Phillips utilize his second in command, Chief Mate Shane Murphy?
 - **Answers will vary, but could include delegation, trust, and employing subordinates in accordance with their capabilities.**
6. What leadership values/principles/styles does Captain Phillips exhibit in the break room following the initial run-in with the pirates? (Clip time – 27:18) How would you respond to a similar leadership style on the fireline?
 - **Answers will vary.**
7. What was Captain Phillips’ rely when asked “Why don’t we get just get out of here?” (Clip time – 27:18) Where do you think this reasoning originated? Have you ever had a similar situation in your work environment?
 - **He replied that there are five pirate bands. Even if they run out farther, there will be more pirates out there. Our job is to move the cargo as fast as possible. Could this be pressure from above?**

Similar to upper management putting pressure to meet targets, or maybe take unnecessary risk to suppress a fire or protect a house? Cost/Accomplishments versus safety?

8. In the scene in the bridge where the pirates are threatening to shoot Ken Quinn, Captain Phillips says to shoot him instead. (Clip time – 45:30) Do you see this as a good or bad leadership moment? Explain.
 - Answers will vary. Integrity – responsibility and set the example? Abandonment of command? Is this a sound and timely decision for a captain (or IC or DIVS) to make?
9. The ability to keep calm, think clearly, and act decisively—especially in a stressful situation—is more than just a Fire Order. It is also a leadership trait. List examples where Captain Phillips stayed calm and thought clearly. Can you think of any situations where you were able to react similarly, or witness other doing this, on the fireline under less than ideal conditions?
 - Examples for Captain Phillips
 - Faking radio traffic with a coalition warship.
 - As the pirates were boarding he was radioing his crew instructions on to hiding and the non-duress word.
 - Telling the Navy interpreter to let his family know he was in Seat 15.
10. As a leader, how do you develop this in yourself and your subordinates?
 - Training, running scenarios, developing and adhering to SOPs.
11. At one point, Muse says “I come too far Irish. I can’t give up.” (Clip time – 1:33:00) As a leader, what happens when you get too attached or too committed to an individual plan, tactic, or method?
 - Answers will vary but talk about getting tunnel vision, “my way or the highway” mentality, thinking outside the box, and/or the snowball effect.
 - A couple quotes come to mind:
 - “The more seniority a mistake gets, the harder it is to fix.”
 - “If you live with a bad situation long enough, you wear it.”

DUTY

Be proficient in your job, both technically & as a leader.

- Take charge when in charge.
- Adhere to professional standard operating procedures.
- Develop a plan to accomplish given objectives.

Make sound & timely decisions.

- Maintain situation awareness in order to anticipate needed actions.
- Develop contingencies & consider consequences.
- Improvise within the commander's intent to handle a rapidly changing environment.

Ensure that tasks are understood, supervised, accomplished.

- Issue clear instructions.
- Observe & assess actions in progress without micro-managing.
- Use positive feedback to modify duties, tasks & assignments when appropriate.

Develop your subordinates for the future.

- Clearly state expectations.
- Delegate tasks that you are not required to do personally.
- Consider individual skill levels & developmental needs when assigning tasks.

Know your subordinates and look out for their well-being.

- Put the safety of your subordinates above all other objectives.
- Take care of your subordinate's needs.
- Resolve conflicts between individuals on the team.

Keep your subordinates informed.

- Provide accurate & timely briefings.
- Give the reason (intent) for assignments & tasks.
- Make yourself available to answer questions at appropriate times.

Build the team.

- Conduct frequent debriefings with the team to identify lessons learned.
- Recognize accomplishments & reward them appropriately.
- Apply disciplinary measures equally.

Employ your subordinates in accordance with their capabilities.

- Observe human behavior as well as fire behavior.
- Provide early warning to subordinates of tasks they will be responsible for.
- Consider team experience, fatigue & physical limitations when accepting assignments.

Know yourself and seek improvement.

- Know the strengths/weaknesses in your character & skill level.
- Ask questions of peers & supervisors.
- Actively listen to feedback from subordinates.

Seek responsibility and accept responsibility for your actions.

- Accept full responsibility for & correct poor team performance.
- Credit subordinates for good performance.
- Keep your superiors informed of your actions.

Set the example.

- Share the hazards & hardships with your subordinates.
- Don't show discouragement when facing setbacks.
- Choose the difficult right over the easy wrong.

RESPECT

INTEGRITY

Captain Phillips

Guided Discussion

1. Which of the characters in the movie appear to be leaders? How effective are they?
2. Compare leadership style of Captain Phillips and Muse.
3. Early in the movie, Captain Phillips walks in to the break room and says: “About done with that coffee?” How does this statement affect your perception on his leadership style/ability?
4. Captain Phillips maintained situational awareness using multiple methods. Checking the boat security features personally, email alerts about pirates, checking the radar, etc. How did this allow him to make sound and timely decisions?
5. Once he realized the two boats were approaching and that they may have a real situation, how did Captain Phillips utilize his second in command, Chief Mate Shane Murphy?
6. What leadership values/principles/styles does Captain Phillips exhibit in the break room following the initial run-in with the pirates? (Clip time – 27:18) How would you respond to a similar leadership style on the fireline?
7. What was Captain Phillips’ rely when asked “Why don’t we get just get out of here?” (Clip time – 27:18) Where do you think this reasoning originated? Have you ever had a similar situation in your work environment?
8. In the scene in the bridge where the pirates are threatening to shoot Ken Quinn, Captain Phillips says to shoot him instead. (Clip time – 45:30) Do you see this as a good or bad leadership moment? Explain.
9. The ability to keep calm, think clearly, and act decisively—especially in a stressful situation—is more than just a Fire Order. It is also a leadership trait. List examples where Captain Phillips stayed calm and thought clearly. Can you think of any situations where you were able to react similarly, or witness other doing this, on the fireline under less than ideal conditions?
10. As a leader, how do you develop this in yourself and your subordinates?
11. At one point, Muse says “I come too far Irish. I can’t give up.” (Clip time – 1:33:00) As a leader, what happens when you get too attached or too committed to an individual plan, tactic, or method?