

Leadership in Cinema



Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program

COACH CARTER

(Based on a true story)

Submitted by: Pam McDonald E-mail: pmcdonal@blm.gov
Phone: 208-387-5318
Studio: Paramount Pictures Released: 2005
Genre: Drama Audience Rating: PG 13
Runtime: 136 minutes

Materials

VCR or DVD (preferred), television or projection system, Wildland Fire Leadership Values and Principles handouts (single-sided), notepads, writing utensils

Objective

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

Basic Plot

"In 1999, Ken Carter, a successful sporting goods store owner, accepts the job of basketball coach for his old high school in a poor area of Richmond, CA, where he was a champion athlete. As much dismayed by the poor attitudes of his players as well as their dismal play performance, Carter sets about to change both. He immediately imposes a strict regime typified in written contracts that include stipulations for respectful behavior, a dress code and good grades as requisites to being allowed to participate. The initial resistance from the boys is soon dispelled as the team under Carter's tutelage becomes an undefeated competitor in the games. However, when the overconfident team's behavior begins to stray and Carter learns that too many players are doing poorly in class, he takes immediate action. To the outrage of the team, the school and the community, Carter cancels all team activities and locks the court until the team shows acceptable academic improvement. In the ensuing debate, Carter fights to keep his methods, determined to show the boys that they need to rely on more than sports for their futures and eventually finds he has affected them more profoundly than he ever expected."
(Synopsis from amazon.com)

Cast of Main Characters

Samuel L. Jackson	Coach Ken Carter
Rob Brown	Kenyon Stone
Channing Tatum	Jason Lyle
Ashanti.....	Kyra
Texas Battle.....	Maddux
Robert Ri'chard.....	Damien Carter
Nana Gbewonyo	Junior Battle
Mel Winkler.....	Coach White
Sidney Faison	Ty Crane
Rick Gonzalez	Timo Cruz
Antwon Tanner	Worm
Denise Dowse	Principal Garrison

Facilitation Options

Various avenues can be pursued depending upon the facilitator's intent. At a minimum, students can identify the Wildland Fire Leadership Values and Principles that are illustrated in the film. 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 in their self-development as a leader.

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

The DVD version of the film includes a 20-minute interview with Coach Carter.

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. Advise students to document instances within the film that illustrate/violate the Wildland Fire Leadership Values and Principles on the handout provided.
3. Break students into small discussion groups.
4. Show students Coach Carter.

5. Break. (Suggestion: After Coach Carter announces to the team that they will be playing in the Bayhill Holiday Tournament and right before the dance—counter approximately 1:00:40)
6. Begin the guided discussion.
7. Provide a short synopsis with some “ticklers” to pay attention before beginning the rest of the film.
8. Resume the film.
9. 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.
10. Wrap up the session and encourage students to apply leadership lessons learned in their personal and work lives.

Clip Facilitation Suggestion

1. Review the Wildland Fire Leadership Value or Principle(s) targeted for discussion. (May be given or ask students to identify the value or principle being illustrated after viewing the clip.)
2. Show the clip.
3. Facilitate discussion regarding the clip and corresponding value and/or principle.
4. Break students into small discussion groups.
5. 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.
6. Wrap up the session and encourage students to apply leadership lessons learned in their personal and work lives

Possible Clip Usage

The following clips may assist facilitators with leadership discussions. All times are approximate.

8:45 – 15:17	Coach Carter introduces himself to the team and expresses his intent and expectations to the team.
20:12 – 21:47	Coach Carter holds a contract meeting with players and parents.
32:42 – 36:11	Timo wants back on the team. “What do I have to do. . .?” Coach Carter gives what seems to be an impossible task. “What is your deepest fear? Inadequate?”
40:55 – 43:23	Timo fails to perform the required drills to get back on the team. The team members step up and do the drills for him. “One person struggles; we all struggle. One player triumphs; we all triumph.”

- 45:39 – 47:47 Coach Carter confronts the team about their attitudes—humiliating opponents and taunting after every score.
- 48:59 – 53:17 Coach Carter speaks with the team about the insulting use of the term “nigga.” Tells the senior players he feels they can play at the college level but the classroom comes first.
- 1:18:21 – 1:19:41 Coach Carter talks to players on the way home from winning the Bayhill Holiday Tournament and the party that ensued thereafter. Timo gives Coach Carter feedback on what he thought was the coach’s intent.
- 1:21:29 – 1:23:41 Coach Carter locks up the gym and cancels practices since many students are failing academically. “We have failed. We’ve failed each other.”
- 1:23:41 – 1:24:47 Interaction between Coach Carter and Principal Garrison regarding the removal of the lock and the principles behind his actions.
- 1:27:06 – 1:29:48 Team meeting in the library.
- 1:39:17 – 1:44:15 School board meeting to determine if the lock on the gym should be removed. Ethical dilemma between winning and learning. “Consider the message you are sending to these boys. Same as sending to pro athletes—they are above the law.”
- 1:44:15 – 1:47:33 Coach Carter and Principal Garrison discuss his leaving due to the message that is being sent. Players support Coach Carter. Team realizes that they had a contract and must become student athletes in order to get into college and have a better life. Timo gives his rendition of Marianne Williamson’s *Our Deepest Fear* from *A Return to Love*.
- 2:04:35 – 2:05:04 Motivational speech from Coach Carter to players at state game. “But gentlemen, just because you deserve this doesn’t mean they’re gonna give it to you. Sometimes you gotta take what’s yours.
- 2:07:39 – 2:09:47 Coach Carter’s acknowledgement of a job well done. Thank you. “I had a plan. That plan failed. I came to coach basketball players, and you become students. I came to teach boys and you became men. And for that I thank you.”

Mentor Suggestion

Use either method presented above. 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 Leadership Toolbox items that will contribute to the overall leadership development of the student.

Hyperlinks have been included to facilitate the use of the [Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program website](#). Encourage students of leadership to visit the [website](#).

Coach Carter

The following clips illustrate the Wildland Leadership Values and Principles (a support or violation of). These are only guidelines and may be interpreted differently by other views; they are presented as a guide for facilitation.

Duty

- Coach Carter wants to coach Richmond players with the intent of instilling values—to change their outlook on the future. (Be proficient in your job, both technically and as a leader.)
- Coach Carter has each player sign a contract before they can be on the team. (Develop your subordinates for the future.)
- Coach Carter attempts to get progress reports from the teachers prior to students getting into academic trouble even though the teachers fail to submit until the players are in trouble. (Maintain situation awareness in order to anticipate needed actions.)
- When the students grades do not meet the specifications of the contract. Coach Carter locks the gym and cancels games. (Adhere to professional standard operating procedures.)
- Coach Carter is willing to cancel important games if the players cannot bring up their grades. (Develop contingencies and consider consequences.)

Respect

- Coach Carter has each player sign a contract before they can be on the team. (Provide early warning to subordinates of tasks they will be responsible for.)
- Damien Carter wants to be coached by his father. His father would like him to stay at St. Francis but allows him to join Richmond's team. (Know your subordinates and look out for their well-being.)
- Coach Carter tells the senior players that they have the ability to compete at the college level if they can perform academically.
- Coach Carter takes Timo into his home after Cousin Renny is killed. (Know your subordinates and look out for their well-being.)
- Coach Carter locks the gym to all players even though some have high academic marks. (Apply disciplinary measures equally.)

Integrity

- Coach White admits that he needs to turn over coaching responsibilities to someone else. (Know the strengths/weaknesses in your character and skill level.)
- Coach Carter informs Principal Garrison of the need for contracts and the locking of the gym. (Keep your superiors informed of your actions.)

- Coach Carter locks the gym after many players fail to meet the academic portion of their contract. (Choose the difficult right over the easy wrong.)
- Even though the school board votes to remove the lock, the players choose to meet in the library until their grades improve. (Accept full responsibility for and correct poor team performance.)
- Coach Carter disagrees with the school board's decision and lack of teacher support—sending the wrong message to the players. He is will to resign. (Set the example.)

Coach Carter

Guided Discussion – Possible Answers

1. What does Coach Carter do the first day that sets the stage for the season?
 - Answers will vary but may include:
 - Institutes a player/parent contract.
 - Allows the previous year's top scorers to quit the team when they won't take the contract.
 - Identifies the consequences for actions.
 - Identifies his expectations for player conduct and performance—where to sit in class, what to wear on game day, what time to be at practice.
2. What is Coach Carter's intent? Did he accomplish what he set out to do?
 - Answers will vary but may include:
 - To win both on and off the court
 - To be student athletes
 - Carter accomplished more than he intended. "You've achieved something that some people spend their whole lives trying to find. What you achieved is that ever-elusive victory within. . . I had a plan. That plan failed. I came to coach basketball players and you became students. I came to teach boys and you became men. And for that I thank you."
3. What message did the principal, school board, teachers and parents send to the player and community with regard to Coach Carter's enforcing the consequences of the contract? How important is the message that a leader sends to peers, superiors and subordinates?
 - Answers will vary but may include:
 - Winning was more important than education.
 - The players are above the "law."
 - His method was just a scare tactic.

- Basketball is all that the boys have.
 - Communication is one of the most important tools that a leader uses. The message that is given and received is vital for successful leadership. Leaders should ensure that the message sent is the one received—feedback.
4. Coach Carter’s leadership style requires that the players show each other respect—one of the Wildland Fire Leadership Values. Identify at least two ways Coach Carter required his players to show respect.
- Answers will vary but may include:
 - Use the term “sir”
 - Refrain from using the term “nigga”
5. Discuss Timo’s speech adapted from Marianne Williamson’s A Return to Love.
- “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We were all meant to shine, as children do. It’s not just in some of us, it’s in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”*
6. Principal Garrison and Coach Carter have a discussion regarding what each believes is the other’s leadership role. What does each believe is the other’s role? Is Coach Carter stepping beyond his area of responsibility? Discuss chain of command and when it is appropriate to act outside one’s responsibility on the fireline.
- Answers will vary but may include:
 - Principal Garrison believes that Coach Carter’s job is to win basketball games.
 - Coach Carter believes that Principal Garrison’s job is to educate kids.
7. Is Coach Carter’s leadership decision to allow Timo back on the team twice fair to the other team members? Have you experience a similar situation during your career in the wildland fire service? If so, how did you handle the situation?
- Answers will vary.
8. Give an example(s) of team cohesion in the film. What tool does the wildland fire community have to assess team cohesion?
- Answers will vary but may include:
 - Timo is unable to complete the necessary sit ups and suicides to get back on the team. The other team members do them for him.

- The team unifies behind Coach Carter when the school board orders the removal of the lock. The players note that the school board can cut the lock but can't make them play.
 - Mission Centered Solutions developed the Crew Cohesion Assessment Tool ([Click here: http://www.nwcg.gov/wfldp](http://www.nwcg.gov/wfldp))
9. Coach Carter uses himself as a bad example of exhibiting human behavior when the team begins to humiliate and taunt the other teams. He asks the team to show some class and act like a champion. Does this type of behavior exist within the wildland fire community? What can be done to stop this from occurring?
- Answers will vary but may include:
 - Duty, Respect, and Integrity are the foundation of the Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program.
 - Committing to developing one's self at all leadership levels (new leaders, leaders of people, leaders of leaders, leaders of organizations and senior leaders) is critical to developing a professional wildland fire service—one in which agency, team, crew, etc., affiliation is secondary to completion of the mission.
 - Leaders at all levels of the organization should abide by and promote the Wildland Fire Leadership Values and Principles.
10. Coach Carter truly believes that his duty is to develop his subordinates for the future. As a leader, how can you help develop your subordinates for the future?
- Answers will vary but may include:
 - Clearly state expectations.
 - Delegate those tasks that you are not required to do personally.
 - Consider individual skill levels and development needs when assigning tasks.
 - Assist subordinates with an Individual Development Plan (IDP).
 - Avoid micro-management.

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

Coach Carter

1. Document film clips illustrating the Wildland Fire Leadership Values and Principles.
2. Discuss leadership lessons learned from the film with group members or mentor.

Duty

- Be proficient in your job, both technically and as a leader.
- Make sound and timely decisions.
- Ensure that tasks are understood, supervised and accomplished.
- Develop your subordinates for the future.

Respect

- Know your subordinates and look out for their well-being.
- Keep your subordinates informed.
- Build the team.
- Employ your subordinates in accordance with their capabilities.

Integrity

- Know yourself and seek improvement.
- Seek responsibility and accept responsibility for your actions.
- Set the example.

Coach Carter

Guided Discussion

1. What does Coach Carter do the first day that sets the stage for the season?
2. What is Coach Carter's intent? Did he accomplish what he set out to do?
3. What message did the principal, school board, teachers and parents send to the player and community with regard to Coach Carter's enforcing the consequences of the contract? How important is the message that a leader sends to peers, superiors and subordinates?
4. Coach Carter's leadership style requires that the players show each other respect—one of the Wildland Fire Leadership Values. Identify at least two ways Coach Carter required his players to show respect.
5. Discuss Timo's speech adapted from Marianne Williamson's *A Return to Love*.
6. "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were all meant to shine, as children do. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."
7. Principal Garrison and Coach Carter have a discussion regarding what each believes is the other's leadership role. What does each believe is the other's role? Is Coach Carter stepping beyond his area of responsibility? Discuss chain of command and when it is appropriate to act outside one's responsibility on the fireline.
8. Is Coach Carter's leadership decision to allow Timo back on the team twice fair to the other team members? Have you experience a similar situation during your career in the wildland fire service? If so, how did you handle the situation?
9. Give an example(s) of team cohesion in the film. What tool does the wildland fire community have to assess team cohesion?
10. Coach Carter uses himself as a bad example of poor human behavior when the team begins to humiliate and taunt the other teams. He asks the team to show some class and act like a champion. Does this type of behavior exist within the wildland fire community? What can be done to stop this from occurring?
11. Coach Carter truly believes that his duty is to develop his subordinates for the future. As a leader, how can you help develop your subordinates for the future?