

Leadership in Cinema



Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program

COURAGE UNDER FIRE

Submitted by: Pam McDonald E-mail: pmcdonal@blm.gov
Phone: 208-387-5318
Studio: Twentieth Century Fox Released: 1996
Genre: Drama Audience Rating: R (inappropriate language)
Runtime: 117 minutes

Materials

VCR or DVD, television or projection system, Wildland Fire Leadership Values and Principles handouts (single-sided), [Leading in the Wildland Fire Service](#), [Incident Response Pocket Guide \(IRPG\)](#), notepads, writing utensils

Objective

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

Basic Plot

While investigating Captain Karen Walden's candidacy for a posthumous Medal of Honor award, Colonel Nat Serling finds inconsistencies in the stories told by the late pilot's crew members. Serling is also forced to deal with his own disillusionment and guilt surrounding personal involvement in a friendly fire mishap that resulted in the death of his best friend. Leadership lessons focus on leading in a high-risk operational environment, female leadership, conflict, and moral leadership.

Cast of Main Characters

Colonel Nat Serling	Denzel Washington
Captain Karen Walden	Meg Ryan
Monfriez	Lou Diamond Phillips
Ilario	Matt Damon
Altameyer	Seth Gilliam
Rady	Tim Guinee
General Hershberg.....	Michael Moriarty
Tony Gartner	Scott Glenn
Bruno.....	Bronson Pinchot

Facilitation Options

The framework for the Leadership in Cinema program allows facilitators to tailor the program to fit local leadership development needs and time frames. Facilitators are in no way bound to ask every question or utilize every part of the lesson plan.

Creation of this lesson plan focuses students on [Leading in the Wildland Fire Service](#). Facilitators are encouraged to provide each student with a copy of this document. Bound copies can be ordered through the [NWCG National Fire Equipment System Catalog](#) (NFES 2889).

Participants and facilitators of the program are encouraged to submit suggestions regarding the program of specific lesson plans to the Leadership in Cinema coordinator at leadership_feedback@nifc.blm.gov. Local units are also encouraged to add to the Leadership in Cinema library as well.

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 employees view the film on their 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. 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 Courage under Fire.

5. Break. (Suggestion: After the scene where Serling is watching his family from afar; approximately 0:50:29)
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 experience difficulties.
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 leadership concept 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 selected clip and leadership concept.
 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 may have difficulty.
 6. Wrap up the session and encourage students to apply leadership lessons learned in their personal and work lives.
1. Clip times listed are approximate!

Mentor Suggestion

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 concepts that are practiced.

Incorporate the use of [Leading in the Wildland Fire Service](#) (PMS 494-2, NFES 2889) into your mentoring program.

Encourage students to take the fireline leadership challenges found at the end of this lesson. These can be done as a group or individually in a self-paced environment.

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

References

- [Courage and leadership go hand in hand](#). Staub, Robert "Dusty." The Business Journal. June 2003.
- ["Courage leadership: how to claim your courage and help others do the same."](#) Walston, Sandra Ford. Training Development. March, 2009.
- [Developing Ethical Leadership](#). Freeman, R. Edward and Stewart, Lisa. Business Roundtable Institute for Corporate Ethics. 2006.
- [Five Standards of Excellence Practiced by Ethical Leaders](#). Haughey, Laurie. Workforce Management Online. January 2005.
- [The Leadership Series: Courage and Risk Taking](#). IdeaBridge. The IdeaBridge White Paper Series. 1999-2002.

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

COURAGE UNDER FIRE

The following clips illustrate/violate the Wildland Leadership Values and Principles. These are only guidelines and may be interpreted differently by other views; they are presented as a guide for facilitation.

Duty

- (+/-): Walden issues clear instructions to her crew about what she wants them to do to drop the auxiliary fuel bladder. She fails to tell them up front what they are doing. (0:25:41)
- Issue clear instructions.
- Clearly state expectations.
- (+): Walden tells Monfriez to go easy on the ammunition because they might be there a while. (0:33:37)
- (-): Hershberg removes Serling from the investigation when his own personal ambitions are at risk. (1:11:42)
- Adhere to professional standard operating procedures.
- (+): Serling tells Hershberg that he is going to finish the report even if it is on his own. (1:11:42)
- Be proficient in your job, both technically and as a leader.
- (+): Walden takes control when Monfriez attempts to overrule her authority. (1:27:33)
- Take charge when in charge.
- (+): Serling orders that all tanks turn on their lights. (1:37:51)
- Improvise with the commander's intent to handle a rapidly changing environment.

Respect

- (+): Gartner puts his honor as a Ranger above that of a reporter and offers to listen off the record. (1:07:12)
- Make yourself available to answer questions at appropriate times.
- (+/-): Walden will not risk Rady's life or the lives of others to evacuate and won't surrender to Iraqi troops. (1:27:33)
- Put the safety of your subordinates above all other objectives.
- (+): Serling realizes there is tension among Walden's crew after he begins his interviews—Ilario goes AWOL and Altameyer is moved and unable to contribute

to the investigation. Monfriez kills himself. Serling vows to get to the bottom of the conflict.

- Resolve conflicts between individuals on the team.
- (+/-): The Army buries Serling in medals after the Al Bathra incident. (Prior to full disclosure, this can be viewed negatively but more positively after disclosure.)
- Recognize individual and team accomplishments and reward them appropriately.

Integrity

- (-): Hershberg does not want to address Serling's refusal to submit a complete and accurate report. (1:11:42)
- (+): Serling steps up after he realizes he has just destroyed Boylar's tank. (1:37:51)
 - Don't show discouragement when facing setbacks.
- (+/-): Serling hounds Patella as to whether or not he has an enemy target in sight before giving the order to fire. (1:37:51)
 - Ask questions of peers and superiors.
- (-): Monfriez and Ilario lie about the course of events surrounding Walden's command and death. (basic premise of the movie)
 - All integrity principles.
- (+): Serling admits to Boylar's parents that he lied and that he was the one that gave the order to fire on their son's tank. (1:44:04)
 - Seek responsibility and accept responsibility for your actions.

The Difference Between Strength And Courage

It takes strength to be firm.
It takes courage to be gentle.
It takes strength to stand guard.
It takes courage to let down your guard.
It takes strength to conquer.
It takes courage to surrender.
It takes strength to be certain.
It takes courage to have doubt.
It takes strength to fit in.
It takes courage to stand out.
It takes strength to feel a friend's pain.
It takes courage to feel your own pain.
It takes strength to hide feelings.
It takes courage to show them.
It takes strength to endure abuse.
It takes courage to stop it.
It takes strength to stand alone.
It takes courage to lean on another.
It takes strength to love.
It takes courage to be loved.
It takes strength to survive.
It takes courage to live.

~ Author Unknown ~

Courage Under Fire

Courage is the strength to stand up
When it's easier to fall down and lose hold.
It is the conviction to explore new horizons
When it's easier to believe what we've been told.
Courage is the desire to maintain our integrity
When it's easier to look the other way.
It is feeling happy and alive, and moving forward
When it's easier to feel sorry for ourselves and stay.
Courage is the will to shape our world
When it's easier to let someone else do it for us.
It is the recognition that none of us are perfect
When it's easier to criticize others and fuss.
Courage is the power to step forward and lead
When it's easier to follow the crowd; their pleas resound.
It is the spirit that places you on top of the mountain
When it's easier to never leave the ground.
The foundation of courage is solid,
The rock that doesn't roll.
Courage is the freedom
Of our mind, body, and soul

~ Author Unknown ~

Courage Under Fire

Guided Discussion – Possible Answers

1. What is your definition of courage?

- **Merriam-Webster defines courage as “mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty”**
- **Read to students the following excerpt from “Art of Leadership” in Leading in the Wildland Fire Service:**

“The leadership challenge in the wildland fire service is to influence people to accomplish tasks and objectives under confusing, dangerous, and ambiguous conditions. Leaders balance the risks against the potential gains of any decision and action. Because of the inherent complexity of this world, many times they face morally difficult decisions—with high-stakes consequences—alone, unable to receive guidance from a chain of command.”

What is your definition of ethical leadership?

- **The Center for Ethical Leadership defines ethical leadership as “knowing your core values and having the courage to live them in all parts of your life in service of the common good.”**

2. Read and discuss “Wildland Fire—A High-Risk Operational Environment” and “Courage in the Face of Danger” on pages 10 through 12 in Leading in the Wildland Fire Service. Give a personal example of where you maintained courage in the face of danger.

3. Ask students the following questions regarding moral courage. Compare and contrast student responses with those found in “Moral Courage” on pages 63 and 64 of Leading in the Wildland Fire Service.

How do wildland firefighters demonstrate moral courage?

- “Wildland fire leaders demonstrate moral courage by adhering to high ethical standards and choosing the difficult right over the easy wrong.”

How do wildland firefighters avoid ethical dilemmas?

- “We avoid ethical dilemmas by directing team members to operate in ways that are consistent with our professional standards and by directing them only to actions they can achieve ethically.”

How do wildland firefighters handle mistakes?

- **“When we make mistakes, we handle them in honorable and effective ways, fixing the immediate problem then searching for root causes. Leaders with moral courage look for causes, not scapegoats,**

learning and improving, looking for ways to turn weaknesses into strengths.”

What does moral courage enable us to do?

- **“An outgrowth of strong character, moral courage enables us to build trust with our teams and gain respect from peers. Although some may judge that leading ethically compromises short-term gains, leading ethically allows us to accomplish more than our mission.”**

What should weigh heavily in any ethical decision?

- **“Because the consequences of ethical decisions can be great and those who make such decisions may be asked later to justify their conclusion, following a careful and thorough process is a wise approach in situations with ambiguous courses of action. The values of duty, respect, and integrity should weigh heavily in any ethical decision.”**

4. Review “Operational Leadership” in the Incident Response Pocket Guide. Give examples of where Colonel Serling, General Hershberg and/or Captain Walden either “measure up” or fail to “measure up” to the IRPG’s statements of what a good operational leader will do.

- **Take charge of assigned resources.**

(+): Walden stands up to Monfriez when he attempts to rule by majority. (1:27:33)

- **Motivate firefighters with a “can do safely” attitude.**

(+/-): Walden will not risk Rady’s life or the lives of others to evacuate and won’t surrender to Iraqi troops. (01:27:33)

(+): Serling orders that all tanks turn on their lights. (1:37:51)

- **Demonstrate initiative by taking action in the absence of orders.**

(+): Serling is determined to finish his report, even if it is on his own. (1:11:42)

- **Communicate by giving specific instructions and asking for feedback.**

(-): General Hershberg gives orders to Serling that his is to tell Boylar’s parents he died in action as a hero. Does not want feedback. (0:12:51 and

(+): Serling orders that all tanks turn on their lights. (1:37:51)

- **Supervise at the scene of action.**
(+): Both Serling and Walden were operational leaders and shared the hazards and hardships with their subordinates.
- 5. Read the “Moral Courage” example on pages [63](#) and [64](#) of [Leading in the Wildland Fire Service](#).
 - **Reading “Moral Courage” at the end of your facilitation may be a powerful and silent way to conclude this lesson.**

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.

DUTY

RESPECT

INTEGRITY

Courage Under Fire

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

Duty

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

Respect

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

Integrity

1. Know yourself and seek improvement.
2. Seek responsibility and accept responsibility for your actions.
3. Set the example.

Courage Under Fire

Guided Discussion

1. What is your definition of courage?

What is your definition of ethical leadership?

2. Read and discuss “Wildland Fire—A High-Risk Operational Environment” and “Courage in the Face of Danger” on pages 10 through 12 in *Leading in the Wildland Fire Service*. Give a personal example of where you maintained courage in the face of danger.

How do wildland firefighters demonstrate moral courage?

How do wildland firefighters avoid ethical dilemmas?

How do wildland firefighters handle mistakes?

What does moral courage enable us to do?

What should weigh heavily in any ethical decision?

3. Review “Operational Leadership” in the Incident Response Pocket Guide. Give examples of where Colonel Serling, General Hershberg and/or Captain Walden either “measure up” or fail to “measure up” to the IRPG’s statements of what a good operational leader will do.
4. Read the “Moral Courage” example on pages [63](#) and [64](#) of [Leading in the Wildland Fire Service](#).

Fireline Leadership Challenge #1

Engaging the Professional Reading Program

1. Become familiar with the [Wildland Fire Leadership Development](#).
2. Read one or more books recommended in the Wildland Fire Book on Books that relate to leadership lessons found within Courage Under Fire.
 - Ethics 101, John Maxwell
 - Friendly Fire, Scott A. Snook
 - Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson and the Opening of the American West, Stephen E. Ambrose
 - We Were Soldiers Once...and Young, Harold G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway
3. Read one or more articles below that deal with courage and leadership.
 - [Courage and leadership go hand in hand](#). Staub, Robert "Dusty." The Business Journal. June 2003.
 - ["Courage leadership: how to claim your courage and help others do the same."](#) Walston, Sandra Ford. Training Development. March, 2009.
 - [Developing Ethical Leadership](#). Freeman, R. Edward and Stewart, Lisa. Business Roundtable Institute for Corporate Ethics. 2006.
 - [Five Standards of Excellence Practiced by Ethical Leaders](#). Haughey, Laurie. Workforce Management Online. January 2005.
 - [The Leadership Series: Courage and Risk Taking](#). IdeaBridge. The IdeaBridge White Paper Series. 1999-2002.

Fireline Leadership Challenge #2

US Airways Flight 1549—Competent Courage

Real-Life Case Study

Few will forget events that unfolded on the waters of the Hudson River on January 15, 2009, when Captain Chesley B. “Sully” Sullenberger III safely landed his US Airways Flight 1549 jet on the Hudson River with no loss of life and few injuries.

This online case study is intended to share a successful true story of courage under fire and how experience plays a vital part in how individuals act and react under pressure. Feel free to lead yourself through this case study or partner up with other students of fire or wildland fire mentors.

Students should watch the videos and read the articles keeping in mind that the accuracy of the information has not been validated. The purpose of this case study is not to dispute accuracy but to analyze and synthesize information that can be applied to your personal leadership development as a wildland firefighter.

(Disclaimer: Some of the clips below may become outdated and unavailable. If you find an inactive link, please notify the [Leadership in Cinema Coordinator](#). Realize that some videos may be blocked due to local IT security settings.)

Video Clips to Watch

- Watch [I Was Sure I Could Do It](#) (a 60 Minutes interview of Captain Sullenberger by Katie Couric, February 8, 2009; the transcript is also available).
- Watch [Saving Flight 1549](#) (a graphical representation of crash with air traffic control radio communications with Flight 1549. CBS News, February 5, 2009).
- Watch [Saving 155 Lives](#) (a 60 Minutes interview with the flight crew of Flight 1549 by Katie Couric, February 8, 2009; the transcript is also available).

Articles to Read

Read the following articles:

- [6 Lessons on Decision-Making from Captain Sully](#). Lamar Hamilton blog site. February, 16, 2009.
- [Competent Courage from an American Hero](#). Maness, Tom. Leadership Business blog site. January 20, 2009.
- [How Sullenberger Really Saved US Airways Flight 1549](#). Newman, Rick. US News blog. March 10, 2009.
- [Lessons from Flight 1549](#), an article by John Hollon in Workforce Management.

Questions to Answer

From the videos you have watched and the articles you read, answer or discuss in groups the following questions:

What type of leader was Captain Sullenberger? What did he do that contributed to his successful landing?

What Wildland Fire Values and Principles did he exhibit during this crisis?

What lessons learned from this actual event can be applied to fighting wildfire?

How did the flight crew's team cohesiveness affect the outcome of this event?

How did multi-agency cooperation "make or break" the rescue of passengers?

How is this incident similar to experiences you have had in your wildland firefighting career?