

Leadership in Cinema



Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program

WE WERE SOLDIERS

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Studio: Paramount Released: 2002
Genre: Drama Audience Rating: R
Runtime: 138 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 We Were Soldiers and discuss leadership lessons learned with group members or mentors.

Basic Plot

In 1965, 400 American troops faced an ambush by 2,000 enemy troops in the Ia Drang Valley (also known as the Valley of Death), in one of the most gruesome fights of the Vietnam War. We Were Soldiers is a detailed recreation of this true story: of the strategies, obstacles, and human cost faced by the troops that participated. The story focuses on the lieutenant colonel that led the attack, Hal Moore (Mel Gibson), and a civilian reporter who accompanied them, Joseph Galloway (Barry Pepper), as well as a number of other soldiers who were involved. (Taken from [Rotten Tomatoes](#))

We Were Soldiers is the story of a group that trained and sweated with one another—connected together in a way that only those who have shared similar settings can be—that entered into a chaotic situation, relied on one another for support and survival, and who eventually emerged—bruised and battered, but successful nonetheless. Set in war, the lesson is not about war, but about followership, leadership, and shared values. (From Paul Summerfelt, FFD-FMO, Flagstaff, AZ).

Cast of Main Characters

Mel Gibson	Lt. Col. Hal Moore
Madeleine Stowe	Julie Moore
Greg Kinnear	Maj. Bruce 'Snake' Crandall
Sam Elliott	Sgt. Maj. Basil Plumley
Chris Klein	2nd Lt. Jack Geoghegan
Keri Russell	Barbara Geoghegan
Barry Pepper	Joe Galloway
Don Duong	Lt. Col. Nguyen Huu An
Ryan Hurst.....	Sgt. Ernie Savage

Facilitation Options

We Were Soldiers 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.

Obtain copies of the Crew Cohesion Assessment Tool, developed by Mission-Centered Solutions, from Toolbox on the [Wildland Fire Leadership Development website](#) for use with Guided Discussion, #9. If you have not used this tool, this might be an excellent opportunity to do so.

Reference tools are available on the official movie and Lt. General Moore’s and Galloway’s Web sites (see links below). References include maps, battle overviews, actual After Action Review, and other historical items.

We Were Soldiers Once ...And Young: IA Drang—the Battle That Changed the War in Vietnam (Moore and Galloway) is a selection in the Professional Reading Program in the Toolbox on the [Wildland Fire Leadership Development website](#).

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 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 *We Were Soldiers*.
5. Break. (Suggestion: After the “celebration” prior to deployment)
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 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 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 may have difficulty.
6. Wrap up the session and encourage students to apply leadership lessons learned in their personal and work lives.

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

References

- [We Were Soldiers Once ...and Young official website](#)
- Kouzes, James and Posner, Barry. [The Leadership Challenge](#).
- Moore, Lt. General Harold G. and Galloway, Joseph L. I. Random House Publishing Group. October 1992.

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

We Were Soldiers

The following clips illustrate 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

- During training, a soldier intercepts radio transmissions. Lt. Col. Moore identifies the soldier as his radio operator. (Consider individual skill levels and development needs when assigning tasks.)
- Lt. Col. Nguyen Huu An has many options to play off the American battle plan. (Develop a plan to accomplish given objectives.)
- Lt. Col. Moore tries to train the regiment for conditions they have never seen prior to the conflict. (Develop your subordinates for the future. Clearly state expectations.)
- Lt. Col. Moore and Sgt. Maj. Plumley get the sense of an ambush. (Maintain situation awareness in order to anticipate needed actions.)
- Mrs. Moore notifies of fatalities instead of receiving a telegram from cab drivers. (Take charge when in charge.)

Respect

- The soldiers are placed into a situation that they have never been in before with an enemy that has 20 years of experience. (Consider team experience, fatigue and physical limitations when accepting assignments.)
- 2nd Lt. Geoghegan recognizes his soldiers need to take care of their feet. (Take care of your subordinate's needs. Observe human behavior as well as fire behavior.)
- Mrs. Moore leads the soldiers' wives during a gathering to pool local resource knowledge. (Take care of your subordinate's needs.)
- Headquarters wants Lt. Col. Moore to return to Saigon for a debriefing during the middle of the conflict. Lt. Col. Moore ignores the command. (Conduct frequent debriefings with the team to identify lessons learned. Make yourself available to answer questions at appropriate times.)
- Reporter Joe Galloway is given a gun to protect himself during the conflict. (Take care of our subordinate's needs.)

Integrity

- Lt. Col. Moore selects Maj. Crandall as a team member. (Credit subordinates for good performance.)
- Lt. Col. Moore studies military history. (Know yourself and seek improvement.)

- Lt. Col. Moore tells the unit he will be the first on the ground and the last off. (Share the hazards and hardships with your subordinates.)
- When feeling doomed, a soldier comments that the platoon is not lost—just surrounded. (Don't show discouragement when facing setbacks.)
- Sgt. Maj. Plumley tells Lt. Col. Moore to take cover when he attempts to jump into the line of fire. (Actively listen to feedback from subordinates.)

We Were Soldiers

Guided Discussion – Possible Answers

1. Which of the characters in the movie appear to be leaders? How effective are they?
 - Answers will vary, but may include:
 - Lieutenant Colonel Hal Moore, Major Bruce “Snake” Crandall, Sergeant Major Basil Plumley, 2nd Lieutenant Jack Geoghegan, Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Huu An, Sergeant Ernie Savage, Major General Henry Kinnard, and Mrs. Julie Moore.
2. Lt. Col. Moore chose Major Bruce “Snake” Crandall to be a part of the air cavalry team. What reasons did he give for the choice?
 - Major Crandall's men trained on Sundays when they did not have to.
 - Although Army regulations dictated pilot height, Major Crandall, knowing Captain Ed “Too Tall” Freeman's pilot abilities, allowed him to fly.
3. Lt. Col. Moore makes the following statement: “Sgt. Maj. Plumley and I come from the paratroopers where the officer is always the first one out of the plane, because to follow your instincts and to inspire your men by your example you have to be with them where the metal meets the meat.” How does this statement relate to your perception as a leader?
 - Answers will vary.
4. During training, Lt. Col. Moore makes this statement, “A leader must remain cool and calm. And second, he must learn to ignore explosions, the heat and dust, the screams of the wounded; this is normal on the battlefield. Normal!” What is “normal” in the wildland firefighter environment? What, if anything, can be ignored by the wildland firefighter leader?
 - Answers will vary, but may include discussions regarding environmental factors such as dust and smoke and situational awareness. Refer students to the Risk Management Process in the IRPG.
5. How does the decision-making environment of the movie parallel that of the wildland fire service? What lessons will you take from the movie to make your team stronger?
 - Answers will vary, but may include:

- Wildland firefighters must make decisions that can ultimately affect the lives of others. Rushes to judgment/action can result in the loss of life. Individuals may not let their concerns be known for various reasons—not tough enough, administrative concerns, politics, etc. Wildland firefighters owe a duty to one another to talk about questions and concerns they have.
6. Prior to deployment, Lt. Col. Moore can be seen preparing himself for battle. What self-development tools did he use to prepare himself as a leader? What similar self-development tools are available for the wildland firefighter?
- Lt. Col. Moore studied prior battles of the French in Indo China. He familiarized himself with the battle strategies of Lt. Col. Nguyen Huu An. He also read about General George Armstrong Custer and his failures as a leader.
 - The wildland firefighter has the following references available: Toolbox on the [Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program website](#) (Professional Reading Program, Staff Rides, Tactical Decision Games/Sand Table Exercises, etc.), and the [Wildland Lessons Learned Center](#) (after action reviews, case studies, investigations, etc.)
7. Lt. Col. Moore makes a Crazy Horse reference stating that every woman in the tribe was called “mother” and every elder called “grandfather.” He also states, “The tribe fought as a family. Take care of your men. Teach them to take care of one another. ‘Cause when this starts, each other is all we’re gonna have.” What tool is available to wildland firefighters to assess the closeness of their “family?”
- Mission-Centered Solutions created the Crew Cohesion Assessment which can be found in the Toolbox on the [Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program website](#)). This may be a good opportunity to complete the assessment.
8. Even though the 7th Cavalry was put into a situation that had never been done before and had little information about the enemy, they undertook the assignment. Have you been in a similar situation? What was the outcome?
- Answers will vary. This may be a good opportunity to refer students to “How to Properly Refuse Risk” in the [Incident Response Pocket Guide](#).

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

We Were Soldiers

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.

What scenes from the movie relate to “Duty”?

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.

What scenes from the movie relate to “Respect”?

Integrity

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

What scenes from the movie relate to “Integrity”?

We Were Soldiers

Guided Discussion

1. Which of the characters in the movie appear to be leaders? How effective are they?
2. Lt. Col. Moore chose Major Bruce “Snake” Crandall to be a part of the air cavalry team. What reasons did he give for the choice?
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5. How does the decision-making environment of the movie parallel that of the wildland fire service? What lessons will you take from the movie to make your team stronger?
6. Prior to deployment, Lt. Col. Moore can be seen preparing himself for battle. What self-development tools did he use to prepare himself as a leader? What similar self-development tools are available for the wildland firefighter?
7. Lt. Col. Moore makes a Crazy Horse reference stating that every woman in the tribe was called “mother” and every elder called “grandfather.” He also states, “The tribe fought as a family. Take care of your men. Teach them to take care of one another. ‘Cause when this starts, each other is all we’re gonna have.” What tool is available to wildland firefighters to assess the closeness of their “family?”
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