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23 February 2021

Reflection Week #5

The Crucibles of Leadership by Warren G. Bennis and Robert J Thomas was able to help me reflect on my experiences in Air Force Officer Reserve Training (AFROTC). The excerpt delves into stories of great tests or “crucibles” and how they work to shape phenomenal leaders. The ideas put forward were that the highly traumatic or impactful tests leaders face help them to make new personal discoveries, provoke self-reflection, and reach key conclusions about their leadership. I related the text to AFROTC with their field training requirement, with their instruction on how to be a leader, and with their emphasis on approaching problems with resiliency.

In AFROTC, field training in the summer before the cadet’s last two years of college is this big deployment simulation that I think might be the Air Force’s attempt to provide cadets with a crucible leadership experience. I’ve been contemplating why must cadets go into this deployment like simulation and go through training to prepare for it if the majority of our time in the military will be spent in a completely different type of environment. After reading Bennis and Thomas’ work, I began thinking that maybe the culture shock and slightly traumatic experience that field training is meant to be, is their attempt at building our leadership. Cadets are stripped of their worldly comforts, forced to perform with excellence at every step, penalized for all mistakes, and so much more. The expectations are high, the experience is difficult, and it is the only way to become an officer in the Air Force. Why? In the words of Bennis and Thomas, maybe it’s to allow cadets to “meet a challenge and become better because of it”.

Bennis and Thomas homed in on the idea of “prevailing over darkness”; meaning, using opposition and ridicule as an opportunity to self-reflect and study intensely on things like leadership values and initiatives. I couldn’t help but wonder how reflection and study is encouraged in my AFROTC courses. AFROTC is all about making us better leaders, which should mean that cadets are provided every opportunity to self-reflect and study leadership intensely right? That’s my perception at least. After some thinking, I guess we do leadership activities then debrief on how they went. We also get flight positions and debrief on how those experiences were, sort of. Actually, only the flight commander does that. Maybe I should propose an initiative to change things to incorporate a holistic flight and position debrief.

I was able to relate the topics of a crucible leadership experience and prevailing over darkness found The Crucibles of Leadership by Warren G. Bennis and Robert J Thomas to my experiences in AFROTC. Maybe the field training cadets must go through is the Air Force’s attempt to help cadets meet a challenge and become better because of it. Maybe AFROTC is lacking on the concept of self-reflection and leadership study; so, I should propose a debrief for all cadets at the end of the week to reflect on their leadership experience. Overall, I enjoyed the reading and the way it helped me think pensively about my own life experience in AFROTC.

Works Cited

Harvard Business Review, et al. *HBR’s 10 Must Reads on Mental Toughness (with Bonus Interview “Post-Traumatic Growth and Building Resilience” with Martin Seligman) (HBR’s 10 Must Reads)*. Harvard Business Review Press, 2017.