DEBRIEF TO WIN

HOW AMERICA'S TOP GUNS
PRACTICE ACCOUNTABLE LEADERSHIP…
AND HOW YOU CAN, TOO!

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MISSION ESSENTIALS

WHAT IS A DEBRIEF?

"A debrief is the process of constructively evaluating the quality of the decisions everyone on the team made from planning through execution, in relation to the objectives the team set out to achieve."

BY THE WAY:

*A debrief is **not** a gruesome sport or a place of blame or shame. Quite the opposite, in fact—the debrief is **where we celebrate our victories** as well as **learn from our failures**. We do this in order to build cohesive teams and improve moving forward. A debrief properly run is an affirming, positive experience. It is also where we begin the practice of Accountable Leadership.*

CHAPTER 6

THE "RAPTOR" DEBRIEF

> FAILURE IS INSTRUCTIVE. THE PERSON WHO REALLY THINKS LEARNS QUITE AS MUCH FROM HIS FAILURES FROM HIS SUCCESSES.
>
> **John Dewey**

Overview

I was blessed in my career with being able to fly both the F-15 "Eagle" and the F-22 "Raptor," both absolutely outstanding aircraft. I became an Instructor and Evaluator Pilot in the "Eagle," and taught expert "Eagle" employment at the Weapons School. A little later on, I was privileged to be able to command a Raptor unit, where I led the outstanding men and women of the 7th Fighter Squadron. While my heart will forever remain with the Eagle (it's a truly magnificent machine, one that I consider myself extremely fortunate to have been deemed worthy enough to fly), the Raptor is a manifestation of the absolute best that current defense industry can produce, the same as the Eagle was in its day. The Raptor represents a technological leap in capability over the Eagle and performs brilliantly on every stage. Aside from its cost (approximately $154M per copy) and the related fact that our government only purchased 187 of these aircraft (far too few to replace the largely-retired Eagle inventory), in the Raptor our Air Force has a capability that is truly unparalleled.

I was extremely blessed to command a Raptor squadron, and the Raptor was the last military aircraft I ever flew. I'll therefore return to my time in the 7th Fighter Squadron for the naming convention we'll use to help us learn the mechanics of the debrief: The *RAPTOR Debrief.*

What's critical, and truly powerful about the RAPTOR Debrief methodology is that it's both simple and repeatable. Every debrief should have exactly the same structure. It's also critical to note that *each component can be practiced by every member of the team—from senior leaders and managers, all the way down to technicians and lower-level workers.* Importantly, the RAPTOR Debrief is not only a tool for high-performing teams to hold themselves accountable; it's a life skill that applies in ALL areas of human endeavor. Know that the six steps we’ll outline here are designed to be:

1. *Simple to understand,*
2. *Easy to implement, and*
3. *Immensely powerful when used correctly.*

A quick observation on the structure of this chapter: we’re now shifting to an explanation of how to *implement* the specific steps of the debrief—steps that build on everything else we’ve covered in the book thus far. A good way to approach this chapter is as if you were a student in a business training course. I’m going to identify how you can use these six steps for personal and organizational gain, which means that I’ll be offering a relatively academic approach in the coming pages. My recommendation is that you get a notepad and a highlighter. Be prepared to reflect on certain passages and connect the dots between the components and how you can use them to your benefit. Highlight the sections that either don’t make sense now, or that help the light bulb come on—in terms of how to apply them to meet your needs. Take notes and reflect on them. Come back to them. Don’t let them gather dust in a forgotten notebook. And if you have questions that the book doesn’t address, please feel free to write me directly. My *Debrief to Win* e-mail address is **feedback@debrieftowin.com.** My goal is to provide an appropriate and meaningful answer to your questions within a reasonable amount of time, usually a matter of days, and to use your questions to help refine future editions of this book. With that, here's how we're going to use the RAPTOR Debrief to efficiently and correctly improve ourselves and our organizations:

Step 1: Reconstruct What Happened

As I noted in Chapter 5, those of us in the flying world employ technology devoted to helping us reconstruct exactly what happened while airborne. The purpose is to ensure that we have precise "truth data" from which to extract our lessons. Whether we realize it or not, we have many of those same capabilities in business. Every company to whom I've provided consulting services is able to capture very accurate numbers on sales performance and other key metrics. Metrics are an excellent way of capturing *one component* of the "truth data" we seek, as the numbers themselves are only one aspect of what needs to be captured during the "Reconstruction" phase.

What's even more important is that we have an accurate capture of ALL of the key events / occurrences / statistics / etc. that affected our performance. It's critical that we marry the different perspectives of what these looked like from the standpoint of the various members of our team. I'll use our dogfighting example from Chapter 4 to demonstrate what I mean, and how we apply this approach in a fighter debrief.

The Tactical Debrief

You’ll recall, that the Flight Lead in our “dogfight” example finished the administrative portion of the debrief and transitioned to the tactical part of the mission, “the meat” of the mission. The first thing he needs to do is to ensure both pilots agree on what actually happened. He’ll do this by reconstructing the path each fighter flew. He’ll place special emphasis on times when the Offensive Fighter employed weapons, as well as those times where the two might have had a close pass, and where one was able to gain an advantage over the other. The challenge with manually reconstructing the flight paths of high-performance fighters is that what actually transpired in the air did so in three dimensions. The simplest forms of reconstruction—chalk boards, white boards, butcher boards—only allow for a two-dimensional reconstruction. That said, we always train to manually draw up our engagements <u>because we thereby learn how to ask critical questions of our teammates.</u>

To assist in our manual reconstruction, the Flight Lead will initially reconstruct the fight from what we call the “God’s-eye” perspective: as you might imagine, looking straight down from the heavens. The other perspective we use is the “Grandstand” perspective, where the fight is viewed as if from the bleachers or grandstand at a sports event.

My main purpose in this example is to highlight how the Flight Lead talks out loud during the Reconstruction phase, regularly gathering, depicting, and confirming data with his Wingman. The better the data capture, the more accurate the reconstruction, and the Flight Lead (FL) is centered on capturing accurate data. The only way to guarantee accuracy is to ask lots of pointed questions. There is no doubt who's in charge during the Reconstruction phase of the fighter debrief, and who is providing the source data against which everything is checked. But there's also no escaping the fact that the Wingman (WG) has important information to add—a perspective of the event that has to be captured for the reconstruction to be accurate. The process I'm trying to describe typically looks something like this, in the "God's-eye" perspective:

A Sample Reconstruction

*Please realize I am not trying to teach you how to debrief a fighter mission here. I'm also not trying to get you to debrief to this particular standard, or level of detail. Rather, I'm illustrating an example of the process that helps us quickly arrive at the truth. Please read this short section only to gain an appreciation for the questioning process used to arrive at the facts—and I promise we'll see how this applies in a practical, non-aviation example shortly.

FL: *OK, on our first engagement I'm showing you in a right-hand turn and at the "Fight's-on" you're heading approximately 040 degrees. Can you confirm your heading, as well as your airspeed at the Fight's-on?*

WG: *Absolutely. I'm heading 037 degrees and I'm at 376 knots.*

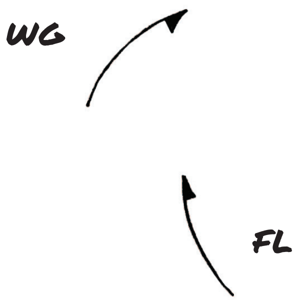


Figure 1: Each line represents the forward movement of a jet, the relative position of each jet to the other, and reflects a turning flight (positive G’s)

FL: *Perfect. What I’ll see from you is that you immediately go into what looks like a level tighten-down, as my nose starts to pull out in lead of you. Do you see my nose rotating out in lead? And do you indeed do a level tighten-down?*

WG: *Yes, I’m tightening down mostly level and as I’m watching you over my right shoulder I see your nose rapidly moving out in lead.*

FL: *OK, good. I’m tightening from the ‘Fight’s-on’ and am bleeding off my airspeed in the process. Right about the time I’m approaching a gun solution I’m down to 365 knots. I watch as your airplane rotates, and you quickly escape with what looks to me to be a vertical jink. It looks like you start this jink at a heading of roughly 140 degrees, and it looks to me like a pure vertical maneuver. Is this indeed what you do?*

WG: *Exactly. I feel threatened and I decide that my best option is to do a vertical jink to spoil your shot and to change the fight a bit. I enter at a heading of 135 degrees and start pulling.*

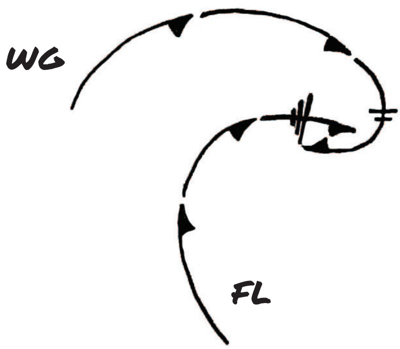


Figure 2: Here we see three "time slices" of movement. Ultimately, the wingman starts moving "into" the page, indicated by the shorthand: and the flight lead starts climbing, as indicated by the shorthand:

FL: *OK. Can you tell me your altitude and airspeed at the point where you begin your jink?*

WG: *Yep…I'm at 17.5 thousand feet and I'm at 342 knots.*

At this point you should understand what I'm trying to describe to you. We draw the lines on our board while we're gathering information, asking important questions and validating that the information we have is as accurate as possible. We'll often find that we've made mistakes along the way—during the rush of tape review we might have copied data incorrectly, missed information or somehow misled ourselves. If we can't figure it out between the two of us we'll return to the tapes, the truth data itself, and try again. The point is that at the end of this process we can look at the board to gain an extremely accurate depiction of what happened, so that we can then focus the debrief on those things that really warrant our attention. If we don't go through this process, we might each have our own different perspective of what actually took place. If we start our analysis with different versions of the truth, we set ourselves up to arrive at erroneous conclusions.

Reconstructing in a Business Setting

When it comes to reconstructing events that took place on the ground, and which may have taken place over many days, weeks and even years—fear not. The same basic methodology works.

It is just as achievable to execute a "tape review" by all participants to capture individual perspectives of key events, as well as to undergo a Reconstruction phase where those key events are listed on a board for all to see. We don't have tapes in the business context, of course; so, we use memory, e-mails and text messages, our notes, data spreadsheets and whatever else we use to capture information to help us reconstruct what actually took place. The key to success here is to combine clarity and brevity.

For example, let's say we have a driver transporting concrete—a substance that can only be kept tumbling for so long before it's unusable. He is delayed en route, and has been asked to perform a reconstruction of his challenges with a few quick notes. In doing so, he might capture the instructions he was issued, the route he took, his experiences along the route, the decisions he made based on the challenges he encountered, and end with the actual time it took him to get from point A to B. The process might look something like this:

* Destination address provided by management at 6 AM, no special instructions given
* Address entered into on-board GPS at 6:05 AM; did not check my traffic app for traffic patterns en route
* Departed HQ at 6:08 AM via I-25N
* ~30 minutes into trip, while on I-25, traffic was brought to a standstill because of construction—the entire North-bound side of highway was shut down
* At 7:53 I was finally able to exit highway at Peak Street, a total of 1.2 miles towards destination
* Traffic on Peak Street was backed-up due to traffic flow coupled with all of the highway traffic spilling out due to the construction

* A subsequent traffic jam caused by an accident led to a 40-minute halt on Bay Street
* Once the accident cleared, it took 3 hours 52 minutes to arrive at the destination

This is a clear capture of all the key data points and helps paint the picture of what actually took place on a challenging day. Armed with this information, the opportunity to figure out WHY this driver experienced these challenges becomes clear. Capturing the data in short sentences is an outstanding and productive way to move forward.

A Visual Capture of the Truth of What Happened

What's especially useful is that having the truth *in print* in front of us, prompts the problems we want to solve—and the answers to these problems—to jump straight out, especially if we're thinking critically. This is not to say that the answers are directly written on the board—often they're not. But if we've got the truth right, and we as leaders are always looking at the problem through the lens of, "Did I set my team up for success?" we can quickly figure out what we need to know to achieve success.

I used this approach while working with a client several months ago. In this particular case we were debriefing a special event we hosted which combined elements from all parts of the company (marketing and sales, operations, finance, etc.), as well as introduced an emerging non-profit entity to the world. I specifically captured the events that took place over the course of three weeks on one piece of flip chart paper as part of our debrief. I divided our reconstruction in weekly chunks, and further sub-divided the reconstruction into components that made sense to our team. These components included "Management Team", "Events", "Sales" and an additional sub-group. I also added a category called "Pressure Points" which were areas that gave us difficulties along the way. Here's what the end result of this particular Reconstruction looked like:

> **Pre-Event #1**

Events that pre-existed current program

> **Week 1**

MGT Team: Focus was on organizational development
Events: Building a plan + assigning roles
Sales: Refine project + sales are
Foundation: Understand the full-scope
Pressure points: Budgets / Expectations / Legal

> **Week 2**

MGT Team: Continue above / drum-beat / Prioirities
*Events: Action on planning / Fulfilling new duties
Sales: Awaiting words on license
Unclear on relationships + how to speak
Building project + sponsorship
Foundation: Awaiting further instructions
Pressure points: Resource constraints
Legal
Materials

> WEEK 3

MGT TEAM: SAME

EVENTS: SANDY ATL / CINDY W/FLU / MISSION BRIEF + RUN OF SHOW

NO GUEST LIST / DOSSIER / TIMING

INVITE LIST: WHO? WERE THEY THE RIGHT PEOPLE?

SALES: ORGANIZATIONAL DOCS DEVELOPMENT

EXTERNAL INPUT ON VA USE LATE FRI

FOUNDATION: ESTABLISHED

PRESSURE POINTS: MISSION BRIEF / LAST-MINUTE PREP /

HOW TO USE PARTNER EXPERTISE (LATE RESERVATIONS)

> MAY 6

PFA

UNDERSTANDING OF FACTS / PA IMPACT

DIDN'T FOLLOW SCRIPT

1ST BOARD MEETING

**Note: These are words captured in "short-hand", clearly understandable both to all debrief participants as well as to the organization at-large, using a language the entire organization comprehends. This is critical for the Memorialization step; we need the entire organization to be able to benefit from the Debrief.*

Of note, each line was written with approval from the full team. Nothing was pre-written, aside from what I captured in my own, personal notes. I solicited input, perspectives and observations from the full team, discussing each point verbally before committing it on the paper. In other words, I reconstructed this the same way as the “dogfighting” lines we saw previously.

Again, the “tape review” process can be facilitated by any existing data capture method available in any industry. Athletic coaches often have access to video recordings of what took place on the field or court; health care providers have data from their systems to determine how long, for example, it took from the placement of a prescription order to when the patient received medicine; sales teams track contact data, engagements made and kept, conversions and the like. The examples are countless, and the sources of data are plentiful. Indeed, almost every endeavor has some way of being able to capture what actually happened.

At the end of the day, taking the time to write what actually happened using short statements is well worth it. For one thing, the process helps fill in knowledge gaps for the leader, highlighting things he might have had no way of knowing.[82] Writing this data so that everyone in the room can see it, process it, analyze it, question it, and then maybe even add to it or otherwise use it—this is the fundamental point of the Reconstruction phase, and worth every minute. It’s also critical that one person, specifically the Leader, is the person who writes what needs to be written. He or she is in the best position to summarize long statements, to synthesize multiple statements that all sort of say the same thing, to adjudicate which points are worthy of inclusion and which are points the team can talk about separately/later, and so on. This fact-gathering process requires advance thought, and the leader should consider—at the latest, the night prior—everything from how to capture and summarize the data, to how he intends to utilize the available space (a flip chart is only so big) to represent the history of events.

> THEREFORE, WE START BY COMPARING THE RESULTS WE ACHIEVED WITH OUR STATED OBJECTIVES ”

When I'm working on a project for a client, I organize my notes of what transpired each day and each week to help me quickly recall the sequence of events during the debrief. Yes, it can be easy to get side-tracked during Reconstruction, or to want to skip quickly to performance evaluation and Root Cause determination. It is essential that Leaders be ready to advise a team that wants to charge ahead, “Hang-on… we're not there yet!” It's critical that leaders be ready to take command, keep the focus on accuracy, and to hold team members accountable for applying the tenets of the Team Charter for team success.

Reconstruction Timing

Let's take a quick minute to address time expectations. The degree of urgency, coupled with the "seriousness" of the issues we have to address, will drive how much time we spend on the Reconstruction phase. The context of the debrief will have a critical effect on our timing as well. In a business setting, the Reconstruction phase is where we will likely spend the bulk of our time, roughly half of the overall time for our debrief, especially early on in the transition to a debrief-focused flow. Eventually, this process will go increasingly faster as the organization adopts time-saving techniques and the team becomes accustomed to the process. Just know that taking the time to reconstruct effectively is one of the main tenets of successful debriefs; *do not* skip or short-change this process. You'll truly be amazed at what you learn.

Step 2: Agree on the Fundamental Question(s) & Focus Points

In the RAPTOR debrief, we take the facts we collect in the Reconstruction phase and then determine which portions merit further exploration. We do this in a way that recognizes that our time together is precious and finite. Therefore, we start by comparing the results we achieved with our stated objectives. Phrased another way, the RAPTOR Debrief centers on whether or not we achieved our stated objectives. The point is to determine if we had any deltas or gaps, both good and bad. If we didn't achieve our Objectives, our analysis starts there; if we did achieve our objectives, we need to figure out if this was because of something we did correctly or because we had good luck. Either way, our Objectives will drive our initial focus, and then the context of the debrief will define what else it is we need to review. The basic process is exceedingly logical and, with a little critical thinking, the RAPTOR Debrief is very easy to execute. Unfortunately, not everyone who practices a form of debriefing uses this process. Let’s take a quick moment to review a competing approach to better understand the value of the RAPTOR methodology.

An Example for Comparison: The Unstructured Debrief

A couple of years ago, I took part in a debrief led by a well-intentioned CEO whose purpose in calling us all together was exactly right—he wanted us to learn from our experience. We had just finished a product launch event, and the goal of the debrief was to determine—while the event was fresh in our minds—how we did and where we could improve in the future. We were fortunate that the event we had just hosted was fun, our team was in a good mood, it was a sunny day and our hotel was on the beach—giving us an exceedingly promising setup.

Unfortunately, the promise began to fade almost from the start. As a strong proponent of this debrief, I was shocked to learn that almost everyone who’d attended the conference was allowed to join. People who had only the loosest of affiliations with the organization were present; spouses and companions, as well as people who were strong supporters of our organization but who were not part of the core tactical planning team. Indeed, almost anyone who felt like spending some time debriefing was welcome and, to my absolute amazement—people came! This, of course, completely quelled our ability to tackle any difficult or controversial issues. Nobody on our core team was going to have those types of conversations in front of complete strangers, companions and "outsiders" in general, because the required psychological safety was absent.

We assembled in a big circle and the CEO started by saying something to the effect of, "I really just want to know what's on your mind on how we can improve for the next event. Let's go clockwise around the room and we'll just speak in sequence." With this as our structure—one similar to that used in other debriefs I've mentioned (effectively: "What went well?" "What didn't go well?")—and with a packed room gave everyone an immediate soapbox upon which to rant about whatever they wanted. As memory serves, we discussed the breakfast options at great length. We talked about all kinds of administrative points, from registration hiccups to speaker sequencing. We talked about a song one of the speakers played during her presentation (it turns out people really liked it). We talked about everything that anyone could think of, largely from the standpoint of criticism (except for the song), and without any focus. It was a full ***three and a half hours*** before we arrived at my place in the circle. By that point, I was more than a little frustrated, both with the process as a whole and with myself for letting it get to this point.

But instead of vocalizing my frustration I asked simply, "What was our objective this weekend?" The silence that followed showed the truth of the matter—no one knew the answer. I followed up with my summary of what I assumed we were trying to achieve (critically, we had never actually defined our objective for the weekend), and then my analysis of whether or not we had achieved it (I gave us a "pass" by stating it was "too early to tell"). My point was that our debrief should have been conducted to determine whether or not the weekend was a success and, if not, what steps we would need to take in order to ensure success at our product launch. As such, the breakfast options were irrelevant. The song was irrelevant. *MOST* of the things we talked about for three and a half hours were irrelevant, because they didn't answer the question of whether or not we had achieved our un-defined objectives. Our debrief was an absolute waste of time, despite being led with great intention, by very intelligent people who were truly looking to improve.

In hindsight, I hold myself fully accountable because I failed to speak up at the very beginning of the process. I should have saved us all a ton of heartache and wasted time by asking what our objectives were at the outset. I should have helped facilitate the debrief, starting out by making sure the right people attended. I failed my team that day and share this story with you in the hopes that you learn from my mistake.

The Effective Debrief Centers on Objectives

The take-away here is that our objectives should drive the debrief. If the objectives really matter (and they absolutely should), then they're our primary focus. Next in line are the coaching aspects we need to employ to improve team performance, which may or may not be intrinsic in our objectives. The nice thing about achievable, measurable objectives that are defined in time, is that it should be very easy to quantify whether or not we've achieved them. We simply ask "why" or "why not?" The formal title we'll use for this is developing the "Fundamental Question(s)" or FQ. Any additional items we want to review, based on the context of our debrief, we'll call "Focus Points" or FPs. Fundamental Questions are stated as questions. Focus Points are identified in whatever format makes the most sense; on a dogfighting mission I would circle these points on the board, for example.

Crafting the Fundamental Question

Let's return to our "dogfighting" example. If the Defensive Fighter was "gunned" ("shot down" by simulated bullets) by the Offensive Fighter, we would return to the objectives and do a quick comparison to determine our FQ. Remember, the Objectives for our "dogfighting" mission were to:

- *Defeat the Initial Attack*
- *Deny Subsequent Opportunities for the Offensive Fighter to Attack*

- *Escape from the fight, Neutralize the fight or Become the Offensive Fighter*

Where in time the Defensive Fighter was “gunned” drives which of these objectives we focus on—whether he was “gunned” during the initial attack or subsequent attacks affects how we address this specific lesson. Either way, our FQ would look something like this (where DF = Defensive Fighter and OF = Offensive Fighter):

* **WHY DIDN’T THE DF DEFEAT THE INITIAL ATTACK?**

  OR

* **WHY DID WE ALLOW THE OF TO SUBSEQUENTLY AND SUCCESSFULLY ATTACK US?**

Either of these questions would be valid based on the actual end result, compared with our objectives. Most importantly, by framing our question in relation to our objectives, the debrief now has an active purpose. We know as a team what question we need to answer, and what outcome we should seek—a hypothesis we can test the next time we fly this mission regarding how to avoid today’s poor outcome. Whether we choose to play games or follow a defined and repeatable methodology, we’re positioned to come away with something valuable and worth noting. Framing the FQ in this manner is also a very simple process; we look at the objectives, determine what the gap was between actual and desired performance, and then ask WHY. “Why didn’t we…?” or “Why did we…?”

Crafting Subsets of Fundamental Questions

Sometimes it becomes clear that we need to ask a couple of key questions, one a subset of the other, in order to maximize the debrief's effectiveness. In other words, by answering a particular question that may not even be directly tied to the objectives, we move towards the answer to our Fundamental Question. Going back to our dogfight example, we might ask something like this:

> **WHY DIDN'T THE DF DEFEAT THE INITIAL ATTACK?**
>
> > **WHY DIDN'T THE DF EXECUTE THE BRIEFED GAME PLAN?**

In this case, our questioning demonstrates an advanced understanding of the facts. Asking the question this way suggests that something about the game plan and its execution likely answers the question about defeating the initial attack. Perhaps it was apparent during our tape review, and certainly it was obvious no later than the Reconstruction phase, that the Defensive Fighter didn't do what he was instructed to do in the mission briefing. That said, if the maneuver he attempted will likely drive the answer to our Fundamental Question, this question can be listed as a sub-set of the FQ. A common example I recall from the larger, more demanding missions I flew looks something like this:

> **WHY DIDN'T WE ACHIEVE BOMBS ON TARGET ON TIME (BOTOT)?**

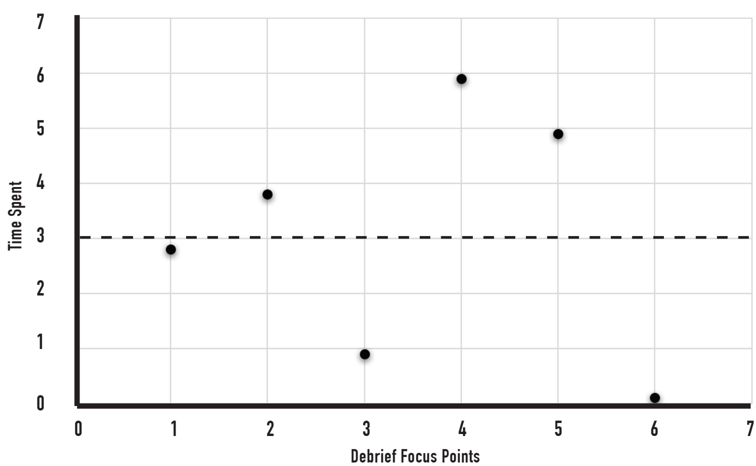
Why was the bomber "shot down" en route to the target area?

Again, the two questions are clearly related. On a bombing mission, it is obvious that the bomber must survive to the target area. If the bomber is shot down and can't perform its mission, then the overall question can be answered by figuring out how to keep the bomber alive both to and through the target area. Ultimately, we understand that by answering the second question correctly, we most likely answer our Fundamental Question, and so we combine the two to efficiently achieve our results.

Armed with our FQ(s), we can now scan the Reconstruction for any other areas we need to focus on, based on the context of our debrief. Because we're always time-limited, which means we need to be efficient. Leaders must make a mental note of how much time they're spending *throughout* the debrief, to make sure they have enough time to cover the most important items for team improvement.

Focus Points

While a concentration on the Objectives drives how a leader will focus the debrief, context determines whether additional learning is needed to improve individual and team performance. This additional learning might be outside the bounds of what's covered while answering the Fundamental Question, but for very good reason. It could be that today's Focus Point would have been tomorrow's Fundamental Question, had we not addressed it today. Think back to the extremely-close pass I described in the "Pre-Brief." Had we not debriefed immediately, we may have hit one another on a subsequent engagement. A major consideration is how much time we choose to spend addressing a Focus Point in contrast to a Fundamental Question (usually, but not always, less time), the same basic concern outlined above. Here's what I've learned from fighter mission debriefs throughout my career:



TWO APPROACHES TO TIMING IN DEBRIEF

When we treat each issue at the same level—that is, when we spend the same amount of time on each issue we highlight—*ALL* of the issues we're trying to address lose gravity—a point demonstrated by the dashed line on this chart. When, on the other hand, we treat each issue at an "appropriate" level (depicted by the dots), each one stands out accordingly. Teams pick up on this difference, and those who are in a position to witness the debrief unfold (the participants much more so than the leader), will absolutely appreciate this approach. In the same vein, they will absolutely NOT appreciate it when every issue is handled as though it carries the same level of weight.

In the end, how much time one assigns to the various issues in a debrief is a value judgment and is best done real-time and with help from the crowd. Here are my general rules of thumb for how I'll spend my time on items that aren't directly tied to the FQ:

- Is this an “Upgrade Ride”—a situation where we're training and evaluating an employee's ability to move to the next level? If the debrief is an Instructional debrief of an upgrade ride, I focus attention on areas that were previously listed as problems on previous grade sheets, as well as anything I noticed during execution that would likely be a potential problem area on a future mission.

- Is this a “Continuation Training” mission? And are there special emphasis items that need to be reviewed? If the debrief is of a Continuation Training mission, my focus is on answering our Fundamental Question, as well as anything else that stood out from a safety-of-flight or standards, tactics and checklists standpoint. If there are safety or execution highlights the squadron leadership wants emphasized, we'll also look at those points.

- Did something happen this go-around that could become a Fundamental Question next time? If so, this changes our approach. We might transition from a more laid-back approach to one where we acknowledge that while we were lucky today, we can't count on luck for success. We would make sure this won't happen the next time and extend the debrief accordingly.

- If the debrief is of a Combat mission or deployment, the focus is again on answering the question tied to the objectives, as well as anything tied to safety.

LEADERSHIP HIGHLIGHT

- The debrief leader is now in a position to help steer the initial vector of the conversation based on the context.
- Leaders should not abuse this privilege.
- This is another reason why we don't want outside facilitators coming in to lead our debriefs.

Remember that the focus is to determine how to gain as much knowledge as possible *on those subjects that really matter* in a reasonable amount of time. My counsel, especially when you first adopt the RAPTOR debrief in your organization, is to set aside enough time for this process so the focus can be on the mission, our achievement (or lack thereof) of the stated objectives, and how to improve our ability to meet or exceed our objectives next time. Free up your team’s schedule and don’t allow time to be the limiting factor. As time goes on, you’ll learn how to do this extremely efficiently, and you’ll also learn how to adapt the overall process to your organization’s needs.

The Pizza Shop Example: A Quick Introduction

Let’s end this section by reviewing the development of a Fundamental Question from the standpoint of a regular business, one that has nothing to do with fighter aviation. We’ll look at the example of a pizza shop owner, one we’ll touch on very briefly here and then carry through into the next chapter. We start with the following parameters:

OBJECTIVE: *100% on-time delivery of pizza*

RESULT: *25% of pizzas were delivered late*

We can see that the Fundamental Question jumps out—establishing the FQ is not typically a complicated process:

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION:

WHY WERE WE ONLY 75% EFFECTIVE AT DELIVERING PIZZAS ON-TIME?

By starting with objectives and then evaluating our performance in relation to them, we quickly get to the point of the debrief. Like anything, this process takes some getting used to, but the debrief leader can accelerate learning by making sure *from the start* that the team as a whole agrees that the correct question has been identified. And since we know nothing else about this scenario yet, we can't determine whether there are any Focus Points. More on this in a bit.

Returning to the question of perspective: often, those not leading the debrief may well have a better grasp on what the FQ should be, primarily because they are under less pressure and enjoy more space to think. The leader should consider this, evaluate the input coming from a different perspective, and decide whether to incorporate that perspective into the discussion. In a RAPTOR Debrief, it's ultimately the leader's call on where the debrief will go. He takes his team's input and decides how to proceed. He's forced to make a judgment call, one of many, that will take place during the debrief; that's part of the job of being an Accountable Leader. Despite the challenge here, this ends up becoming one of the many benefits of this important approach: Leaders having the opportunity, and truly be called to *lead*.

STEP 3: Present the Driving Factors (Explore Possible Answers to the FQ)

Armed with our Fundamental Question(s) and Focus Points, we know the focus of our debrief. Now we shift to considering all *likely* answers—the Driving Factors (DFs)—to the questions we've posed, within reason. We decide how much the data we've collected during the Reconstruction can help us. I assure you that our Reconstruction highlights will not, however, magically hold all of the answers —and here is where critical thinking really comes into play.

There is a tendency in a debrief, and especially early on in our practice of debriefing, to gravitate towards obvious answers. When we're stressed and pressed for time, it's especially compelling to go with what jumps out at us first, and an answer that seems “good enough” is awfully enticing. Sometimes this “good enough” answer is the last thing that happened prior to the mistake in question. But the “last thing” is an insufficient answer, however, because it is rarely the true Root Cause of our problem. Sometimes this “good enough” answer presents itself as the “Group Think” answer. Someone suggests it, the crowd picks up on it, and it's easy to run with because everyone supports it. But what happens when you know in your gut it's not sufficient?

In order to get to the correct answer, we have to apply critical thinking. According to the Foundation for Critical Thinking, Critical thinking “is that mode of thinking—about any subject, content, or problem—in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully analyzing, assessing, and reconstructing it.”[83] By applying critical thinking, we avoid the obvious mistake of looking at the last event prior to our issue, and identifying it as the answer to our question. Critical thinking compels us to gather as much data as possible before coming to any conclusions. To be sure, part of this data gathering took place during the Reconstruction, but not all. Believe it or not, we STILL don't have all of the details and the full perspectives we need to answer the Fundamental Question we just assigned. It took me a while to figure this out during my own development as a fighter pilot, as I'll illustrate here.

The Importance of Perspectives

The Air Force Weapons School is an extremely exclusive school. One of the ways the Weapons School F-15/F-22 squadron discerns who to admit is by providing prospective students with an "opportunity" to brief, lead and debrief a one vs. one mission—the "dogfight" I described earlier—with a current Weapons School instructor. This is a high-stakes, high-pressure mission that can make or break a prospective student's chances. We call these missions "look rides", and I remember my "look ride" vividly because of how much pressure I placed on myself to do well.

I spent the week prior solely focused on preparing and was incredibly nervous as the mission approached. The good news was that I was very comfortable briefing and I felt generally confident in my ability to fight a "dogfight" mission. That day, I'm happy to say, I had a really good day. On our last engagement, I was absolutely stunned when I was able to simulate using the F-15 gun to "shoot down" my Weapons School instructor in the first 30 seconds of the fight. Following this miraculous achievement, we were both out of gas and returned to base—I was beyond thrilled!

I led us through a debrief of our engagements, ending with the personal high note of my quick gun "kill." Once our debrief validated that I had, truly, achieved a valid gun “kill”, I spent roughly 30 minutes “teaching” my opponent everything I could possibly think of to help him avoid the same result in the future. I was on top of the world, and a fly on the wall would have thought I did a pretty good job of teaching my “student” powerful ways to do better next time. The best part was that I felt my performance absolutely validated that I was qualified and ready to be accepted to the Weapons School!

Once I finished my debrief, I turned the room over to the real instructor of the day, and he outlined in broad strokes how I did. He told me my briefing was good, and that my in-flight leadership and execution was fine. He said that I had done a good job generally with the debrief and that he was going to focus his instruction on how I debriefed our last engagement. Inside I was brimming with pride, confident that the day was ending extremely well.

Then he began his analysis by advising me that I completely missed the mark.

I was floored. How could I have missed the mark on an engagement where I CLEARLY beat him, and quickly at that? How could I have missed the mark when I had given him so many outstanding techniques to help him avoid a similar result in the future? I was jarred awake from my reflections by his comments that went something like this:

Him: *With all of the great data you provided me, you never asked me the basic, core questions. Do you know what those questions are?*

Me: *Uhhh…I'm not sure?*

Him: *Let's start with the most fundamental question of all, namely 'What did you see?' Let's try it—[pointing at the point on the board where I was gunning him] 'At this point here where I'm maneuvering into a weapons solution against you, what did you see'?*

Me: *Hmmmm…*

Him: *If you had asked me what I saw at that point I would have told you that I saw a 'Master Caution' light, along with an 'Engine Fire' warning.*

Me: *(internally) Oh, no…*

Him: *If you had gone to the next fundamental step you would have asked me the second basic question, which is 'what did you want to do based on this information?' I would have told you that I figured I could try to troubleshoot the fire while still finishing up the engagement with you.*

Me: *(thinking) Oh boy…I can see where this is going…*

Him: *Then you would have come to the third basic question, which would have been 'what maneuver did you choose in order to troubleshoot while still engaging me?' I would have told you that I continued with my vertical jink [defensive maneuver] while spending most of my time looking at my engine instruments and not at you. I had no idea you were in a guns solution on me because I wasn't paying any attention to you.*

Me: *(thinking) Today just went from super-awesome to not-so-awesome in no time flat.*

Him*:* *Now, armed with this knowledge, how would you have adjusted your debrief?*

Me: *(sheepishly) I would have asked you why you didn’t end the fight at the point where you saw the Master Caution and Engine Fire lights, recognizing that in training our priority is to not push the bounds of safety. The correct procedure would have been for you to call ‘Knock-it-Off’ [end the fight], me pointing our formation back towards the base, me giving you the lead and backing you up as we run the ‘Engine Fire in Flight’ checklist.*

Him: *Good call. In fact, the debrief would have had a completely different emphasis from the one you led if it had been done correctly. Most importantly, the conclusions we reached would have been just as dramatically different. As a bonus, we also would have saved about 25 minutes of our lives that we’ll never get back by having focused on the real problem, which was my decision to continue fighting while I was dealing with a potential engine fire. THAT, my friend, is what I want you to remember from today’s mission.*

Now remember, the Reconstruction I led was just fine—we had captured all of the correct information we needed to properly address our fight. My knowledge of the procedures was not at fault as I was well-primed to lead us through a quality debrief. The mistake I made was not probing enough, not gathering additional facts by way of eliciting the full perspective of what was happening in my opponent's cockpit. By not exploring my opponent's perspective of the issue in question I instinctively selected Driving Factors that made sense to me, were perfectly logical, answered the Fundamental Question brilliantly…and were all technically incorrect. I failed to elicit the ONLY Driving Factor that mattered in this case and spoiled the debrief in the process. Because my instructor was trying to advance my understanding of the methodology in play, he wasn't going to volunteer anything; he was going to make me work for data. I can promise you the quality of my debriefs went up exponentially thereafter, and I've clearly NEVER forgotten this fundamental lesson.

A quick exploration of this series of questions is boiled down to the following:

- "What did you see?": An exploration of our teammates' perspective. This is where we seek to understand a perspective of the events from the standpoint of someone other than us. It's a vital step in the debrief process, and one that we need to become accustomed to regularly asking of all our teammates.

- "What did you want to do?": An exploration of the decision-making process of our teammate. As author and poker player Annie Duke suggests, "What makes a decision great is not that it has a great outcome. A great decision is the result of a good process, and that process must include an attempt to accurately represent our own state of knowledge."[84]

- “How did you go about doing it?”: Allows for an analysis of the execution that stems from the decision that was made. Here we get into the technique and methodology, whereas the previous question gets to the core understanding and decision-making involved in a question.

The bottom line is that if we don’t approach the debrief armed with this body of knowledge, ready to ask these questions, we can absolutely miss the point of the debrief. This wastes time and generates the wrong conclusions—even if we’re working really hard and doing our best. *Most importantly, understanding the various team members’ perspectives allows us to lead them better, because we understand how they see the world.* There is no better source of leadership wisdom than the perspective of a follower by way of the debrief, plain and simple.

LEADERSHIP HIGHLIGHT

- This is where PERSPECTIVES become SO CRITICAL to success.
- With every separate individual involved in a process comes a separate, and often fundamentally different, perspective.
- We need to ask the critical questions before launching into a determination: What did you see? What did you want to do? How did you go about doing it?

Driving Factors and Focus Areas Guides

Armed with the knowledge of how important perspectives are, let's now look at sources of our answers to our FQs and Focus Points. One of the major areas to explore will always be the plan itself. And, given that the leader is ultimately responsible for the plan, he needs to be able to begin the process by looking inward to determine whether his approach, leadership, planning or other action (or lack of action) drove the results we're examining. It may well be that someone on the team didn't do what they were supposed to do, or didn't do their part well enough. That's fine, and is something that can be coached to. But if what they were tasked to do wasn't the right thing to begin with, their mistake is completely overshadowed. The leader holds full responsibility for the plan, its quality and its appropriateness. As such, the leader must be prepared to share responsibility for any negative outcomes resulting from the plan itself. This is the approach that moves us into the realm of "Level-3" debriefs, and Jim Collins' Level 5 leadership. The only honest way to get here is for the leader to lead their own debriefs, and for leaders to openly recognize their faults—IN FRONT OF THEIR SUBORDINATES.

What follows are a few suggestions to assist in the answer-development process, with recommendations for both Level 2 and Level 3 debriefs:

LEVEL 2 ANALYSIS DRIVING FACTORS / FOCUS AREAS

PLAN ADHERENCE	PROCESS	TEAM
Did we follow the plan?	Did we follow our established process?	Did every member of the team contribute as expected?
Did we accomplish/achieve the desired number of events/contacts/things?	Did we abide by our standards/check-lists/tactics?	Did every team-member achieve their part of the plan?
Did we achieve them on time?	Did we adhere to our training and repli-cate the established system?	Did the team mem-bers support each other?
Did we accomplish/achieve them within the budget?	Was there an op-portunity to deviate from the established process to benefit the team?	Did the plan support team development or promote individu-alism?

PLAN ADHERENCE	PROCESS	TEAM
Was there an opportunity to deviate from the plan in a positive way?	Does the process allow for judgement calls when it comes to process deviations? If not, should it?	Did awards/ competition/ standards of performance (or lack thereof) help or hinder execution?
Did the plan allow for independent decision-making?		Do the members of the team have the necessary skills to succeed?
		Are the members of the team making the right decisions?

LEVEL 3 ANALYSIS DRIVING FACTORS / FOCUS AREAS

GUIDANCE	COMMUNICATION	TEAM
Was the plan the right one?	Did I communicate the plan correctly/ in sufficient detail to enable success?	Was my leadership supportive to my team?
Was it sufficient to address the needs throughout?	Did I communicate on a frequency and with a language my team uses and understands?	Did I establish the correct culture to enable successful teamwork?
Did the plan include enough detail to address all the challenges?	Did I verify comprehension of my team members?	Was I inclusive in the planning process?
Did the plan sufficiently address contingencies?	Did I solicit team member input to improve understanding/improve the plan?	Did I provide the real-time guidance necessary to meet the OBJECTIVE(S)?

GUIDANCE	COMMUNICATION	TEAM
Was the plan executable based on the skills and expertise of the team?	Did/could team members provide active feedback during execution so leadership might deviate as necessary?	Did I make myself available to adjust the plan to changing circumstances?
		Was I responsive to my team during all phases of plan execution?
		Have I empowered my team to make independent deci-sions that support achievement of our OBJECTIVE(S)?

One of the keys to success in this phase of the debrief is that the leader captures the possible Driving Factors on the board for all to see. This will be especially useful when it comes to Root Cause determination, as either the Root Cause itself, or critical elements that help in determining the Root Cause, will stand out if the Driving Factors are on the board. In all cases, the team needs to critically analyze the selected Driving Factors to determine the reason for the gap between actual performance and stated objectives, both good and bad.

STEP 4: Thoroughly Agree on the Root Cause(s)

Root Cause determination is another opportunity for the leader to lead courageously. Armed with the facts, the proposed answers to our Fundamental Question, and our analysis of the various perspectives of why what happened did, we can arrive at a solid answer that meets our minimum standards. Here's where we really make our money as leaders because—assuming we've selected the correct Fundamental Question and Driving Factors—we're going to soon pinpoint exactly where we went wrong, if we failed to meet our objectives. We must apply the lessons of my Weapons School "look ride" to do this correctly. I propose the following two key questions to help guide this process:

- Does our selected Root Cause *honestly* answer the question we asked?

- If so, does it answer our question *sufficiently*?

The Level-1 standard of sufficiency says that if we have an answer, almost any answer, we've done our job. This is DANGEROUS. False Root Cause identification drives "false learning"; we can ruin our organizations by training our teams to do things the wrong way, by implementing the wrong "fixes" and by allowing our teams to believe that we're on the right track when we are not.

The Level-2 standard of sufficiency says that if we identify an area—potentially THE area—where our performance started to fall apart, we've done our job. Here we arrive at answers like, "The reason why ship two sank is that ship one turned into and hit ship two." This is a fact and seems pretty obvious. It answers the question, to some degree. But the answer is insufficient. WHY did the ship turn into the other one? WHO is responsible for the decision that led to the outcome? WHO might have prevented this mistake, and WHY didn't they? WHO had the critical information at the time decisions were made, and did they share that information appropriately? These are some of the questions that really matter.

"5 Whys"

One method for getting to the Root Cause is to ask the question "Why" until you stop getting useful responses. The technique is known as the "5 Why's" and traces its roots to Sakichi Toyota. According to the website "mindtools.com," this technique "is most effective when the answers come from people who have hands-on experience of the process being examined. It is remarkably simple: when a problem occurs, you drill down to its root cause by asking "why?" five times. Then, when a counter-measure becomes apparent, you follow it through to prevent the issue from recurring." Furthermore, this methodology is highlighted as being useful "for troubleshooting, quality improvement and problem solving, but it is most effective when used to resolve simple or moderately difficult problems."[85]

George Koenigsaecker talks about this process in his book, Leading the Lean Enterprise Transformation. He offers, "From personal experience, I suggest that about 90 percent of all quality problems can be solved just by getting the work group together, at the exact time of the quality incident, and then asking why five times. (After the work team asks why five times, you will have found a root-cause solution for 90 percent of daily quality issues. The next 10 percent of quality problems get progressively harder to solve.)"[86]

The point of this process is to again avoid jumping to the conclusion that the last thing to happen before our highlighted question is the Root Cause. Drilling down into a subject as deep as the team can go helps ensure the process is clean. That said, it takes effort to follow through with this kind of analysis. Says Koenigsaecker, "As simple and powerful as this is, most people almost never do it…This makes for an interesting cultural dilemma: We have, by far, the most efficient quality problem-solving tool and the easiest to learn, but it is very difficult to get people to practice it."[87] Thus it is that the leader has the mandate to apply this approach, and to do so correctly, to ensure the results are valid.

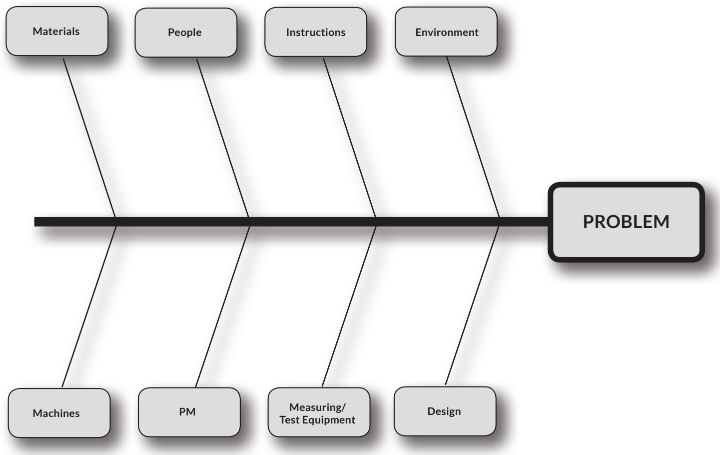
"Appreciation"

Another approach to Root Cause analysis is called "Appreciation". This approach was developed by the U.S. military and was designed to help commanders understand facts, problems or situations in battle. Returning to mindtools.com, "Using Appreciation is easy. Starting with a fact, you first ask the question "So what?" – in other words, what are the implications of that fact? Why is this fact important? You then continue asking that question until you have drawn all possible conclusions from it."[88] We'll explore an example of Appreciation applied in the next chapter under the section titled, *Mr. Smith's (Former Equifax CEO's) Testimony to Congress.*

The idea behind both techniques is to not be satisfied with the first answer that springs to mind, but to keep digging. Ultimately, by continuing to ask the key, probing questions, the quality of the answers improves to the point where the answer is deemed sufficient to be labeled as the source of the problem.

Ishikawa or Fishbone Diagram

The Fishbone Diagram is described as such because the effect or issue under analysis is shown at the end of a series of lines that look much like a fish skeleton:



THE FISHBONE DIAGRAM

Structure as outlined at http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/nasa/root_cause_analysis.pdf

The lines are so drawn because the structure of the tool is designed to help identify a range of causes that ultimately lead to the Root Cause.

The website pmstudycircle.com offers the following overview of the approach: "The fishbone diagram uses a brainstorming technique to collect the causes and come up with a kind of mind map which shows you all identified causes graphically. Sometimes it happens that the most obvious cause turns out to be minor and the cause thought to be a minor one was causing the issue. This diagram gives you an opportunity to think more thoroughly about the root cause of the problem, which leads to a robust resolution. The fishbone diagram forces you to consider all possible causes of a problem instead of focusing on the most obvious one. Here causes are grouped into several categories to easily identify the correct source of the variation."[89]

Your team can capture potential causes of whatever problem you're exploring based on the industry at play. The fundamental approach is one that is both intuitive and powerful. As long as the team is clear on the methodology and the leader is versed in how to lead the brainstorming session, the Fishbone Diagram approach can be an outstanding tool to arrive at the correct Root Cause of a given problem.

Taking Accountability to the Next Level

The Level-3 standard of sufficiency for leaders always returns to the questions, "How could I have planned better, briefed better, led better? Ultimately, how could I have done a better job of setting conditions for my team's success so that they could have won, or won bigger and better?" With the privilege and associated perks of leadership comes the FULL responsibility for the decisions made.

Let's further explore Level-3 sufficiency, especially when it comes to the issue of responsibility. When I was a cadet at the Air Force Academy, I awoke one day to the horrific story of the accidental shoot-down of two U.S. Blackhawk helicopters by two U.S. Air Force F-15Cs. Everyone aboard the helicopters was killed; 26 lives were lost as a result of a series of mistakes. The Air Force charged one officer, the controller responsible for airspace control at the time, with dereliction of duty. One of the F-15 pilots was charged with negligent homicide and dereliction of duty, as were four other members of the controlling crew aboard the Airborne Warning and Control

System (AWACS). The captain was eventually acquitted of the charges and, following an investigation, the charges against the others were dropped.[90]

The Chief of Staff of the Air Force at the time, General Ron Fogleman, declared that he was satisfied with the results of the court proceedings and investigations. Specifically, he noted:

> *“...the outcome was appropriate and just; no one was court-martialed who should not have been, or vice-versa, or issued letters of reprimand, Article 15s, and so forth. But I was appalled...when I asked the question, ‘let me see the evaluation reports on the people.’ I discovered that none of what they had done was in those reports.”* [91]

General Fogleman went on to personally issue “letters of evaluation describing their failure that became a permanent part of each individual’s record. For the two F-15 pilots, three officers on the AWACS aircraft, and two generals in the chain of command, this action effectively ended their careers in the Air Force. General Fogleman also grounded the pilots and AWACS crew members, and disqualified them from duties in flying operations for three years.” [92]

The point here is that leadership means bearing tremendous responsibility. I would argue that it is common for outgoing military commanders who have successfully completed their command tours to breathe a huge sigh of relief after the change-of-command ceremony. I’ve seen it in person and felt it myself. The fact of the matter is that commanders carry a burden with them everywhere they go, one that lasts until the command tour is complete.

That said, the more willing you are as a leader to accept blame for failure—legitimate acceptance, not forced, coerced or pretend—the more likely your team is going to be to respect you. This humble and accepting approach sets the conditions for psychological safety. I repeat—this effort cannot be fake. Your team will see through any insincerity immediately, thereby ruining your credibility as a leader. Owning your faults and assigning personal blame for areas where you could and should have done better is truly the mark of an accountable leader. That's what we're really looking for in accountable leadership.

At the same time, you must always give credit for success to your team. They're the ones doing the heavy lifting, they're the ones in the trenches. They're the ones you depend on to get the job done, and the ones who have ultimately done it. I witnessed this in the hospital I volunteer at: a nurse leader was publicly lauded for having achieved a critical and difficult benchmark in patient safety. Without ANY hesitation, she immediately deflected the recognition to her team, lauding their perseverance and highlighting how awesome it was to see them celebrate their success. That nurse understands Accountable Leadership, and is a personal role model for me!

LEADERSHIP HIGHLIGHT

As a leader, you bear the responsibility for the decisions that are made at every level of the company. As such, you're likely going to be the person who did make the mistake, which is all the more reason why you should take responsibility publicly.

A Way of Thinking About Root Cause Establishment

Functionally speaking, assigning the Root Cause is on-par with making a case in a court of law. I've personally practiced this process as if I were presenting a case to a jury of my peers; the decision I'm about to make as to the Root Cause(s) of our experience has to be convincing to “the jury.” If it isn't, I'm probably wrong in my assessment. This approach forces the leader to think critically, go beyond the obvious, and to really seek the truth. Only when the entire team agrees that they have the correct result can the leader rest.

The leader must strive to get at least a *majority* of people to agree on the Root Cause. I'm not arguing for 100% buy-in, as there will often be detractors who aren't yet at a level (experience, process understanding or otherwise) where they can appreciate the conclusion. There may also be times where the Root Cause hurts a bit, and those who are hurt don't appreciate it. This is all part of growth and team development.

Again, this approach is centered on honesty and truth, two values that cannot be compromised in this process.

Quantifying Root Causes—Sharing Responsibility

I will also say that where judgment and subjectivity come into play, there can be differing views of what caused the issue. This is OK and doesn't need to interrupt the process. The discussion leading up to Root Cause establishment is probably the most valuable part of the process. This is also where leaders have the flexibility to assign differing levels of responsibility, to suggest or decide which of the Root Causes is the most important. It's perfectly acceptable to say that 50% of the Root Cause is due to X and the other 50% to Y. It's also perfectly acceptable to say that 20% is due to Nancy's error and 80% due to poor leadership. This isn't an exact science, nor will anyone ever ask for mathematical proof. The numbers say that blame is being shared, and that a couple of different factors led to the result. What is important is that everyone can see on the board in front of them what the Root Cause(s) is or are, and how much weight the leader assigns to each.

STEP 5: Organize a Plan to Improve or to Maintain Success

Once we've assigned the Root Cause we must then either 1) Develop the appropriate "Fix" in the case of poor performance, or 2) Determine the way-ahead in the event we met or exceeded our objectives (how are we going to replicate our good performance?). ***This is the whole point of the RAPTOR Debrief.*** I firmly believe that the debrief process serves NO PURPOSE if our team walks out of the room without a clear understanding of how we’re going to proceed.

I’ve been leading incredibly focused debriefs for over two decades now—and I’ve developed a few pet peeves in the process. One of these is hearing people say, “We learned a lot of important lessons today!” My question is always, “Really? What is your *proof* that you’ve learned something?” In my experience, unless we change a plan, a policy or a procedure, I firmly contend we haven’t learned anything. In fact, we’re bound to go forward *making the exact same mistake the next time around*… because we haven’t changed a thing. The only way to demonstrate learning is by making active changes to the way we think and behave.

Determining the Fix is the process of making these active changes, of arming ourselves with the game plan for how we can improve our performance, even if things went well. And because we’re going to define the “correct” way to move out next time, we have to take the time to craft this step appropriately.

How We Address Poor Outcomes

If our execution was poor, and if things didn’t go as well as planned, we either emphasize how we should have properly executed the plan as it was crafted (human error), how we should have made better decisions (human error), or how we will develop and implement the required change(s) to our plan, policy or procedure (process error). In all cases, the fundamental point is to capture IN WRITING how we're going to make a change to improve. We do this both to reinforce our conclusions (there's something powerful about capturing information in writing), as well as to have these conclusions readily available for future planning. We want to be able to reference our growing library of debrief conclusions to avoid repeating mistakes *across our entire organization* in the future. Key Point: As noted in the previous chapter, if our outcome was positive—if we achieved our objectives—but it wasn't because of our good work, we treat this almost as if the outcome was negative, at least from a process standpoint. Winning through luck, or because our opponents had a bad day, is not the way we want to win.

Before we go through the process of "Fix" determination, however, let's think about this concept a little deeper. A "Fix" is what we believe will correct behavior or adjust performance and drive better results. But because we don't have proof of those improved results until we actually implement our "Fix," our "Fix" is really just a hypothesis. Please don't get me wrong—the "Fix" is probably the best mental model we have to address our need, but *until we act on it—until we've tested our theorem—we really haven't learned anything.*

That said, we should be collaborating with our team members in every scenario to determine what needs to change to prevent a recurrence of the problem. The one partial exception is when the problem lies with the leader and his performance. It's only partial because the leader needs to lead with his or her best recommendation on what needs to happen, but still remain subject to the collective wisdom of the team to make certain his recommendation makes sense.

“The Fix” has to be something with teeth. It can be anything from the implementation of a correct procedure that wasn’t followed, to a change in plans, policies, or procedures that will likely enable future success. A generic statement like “we’re going to do better” or “we’ll win next time” is NOT a fix, but rather a meaningless platitude. “The Fix” is ultimately that thing which, had it been done at the time of execution, would have prevented our mistake. We’ll look at an example of what this looks like in the next chapter.

How We Address Positive Outcomes

One of the trials we face as leaders is dealing with success. This may sound odd, but it’s a fact. Achieving success carries with it the responsibility for positioning the organization to be able to replicate it. Hitting the mark once, and then failing to repeat, offers only temporary joy; the expectation for a winning organization is that it continues to win. Any quality organization faces this challenge; it’s why it’s almost easier for a new leader to come into a failing organization. Expectations are low, and the leader has a lot of room to win by achieving ever-increasing levels of success.

A properly applied debrief allows a team to quickly determine the Root Cause of why it achieved success, so that the team can then determine how to *maintain* its success. If the team determines that their success is due to good luck or co-operative competitors, we follow the process outlined in the previous segment. It the team determines that its success was legitimate, if it properly determines a Root Cause, then the team can determine what it will take to continue to win. Codifying what the necessary steps are to achieve this, and capturing these steps in a way that the team understands what to do are key to future success. The answer must be just as clear as in the case of mission failure; there should be no question in the minds of the team members what it will take to keep winning.

Finishing with the Fix

We conclude our Fix determination process by confirming agreement with the rest of the team. This isn't always about getting their buy-in as much as it is about ensuring comprehension. If we're talking about an "upgrade" scenario, where we're teaching a new member of our tribe how "we" do things, it's especially important that the "student" understands why you're coming to the conclusions you're reaching.

The litmus test I always used when I was leading flying debriefs was to ask myself, "If we had done what we now propose as The Fix while airborne, would we have achieved our desired result?" If I could reasonably and honestly answer "yes" then I was comfortable with our Fix. If not, we would keep analyzing until I reached the level of comfort necessary to continue. The exact same technique applies in business.

In all cases, we end with a statement to the effect of: "If we had done X in this way, we would have achieved our objectives.” Everyone on the team should see it, feel it, and believe it for the process to have worked.

STEP 6: Rapidly Improve by “Memorialization”

Arguably the second-most important part of this process is documenting the findings and conclusions of the debrief. Documenting our outcomes allows us to file them away somewhere accessible, enabling us to review them prior to planning our next mission. This was a particularly useful technique I learned way back when I was originally qualifying on the F-15. At the squadron, we kept a binder with a record of the previous missions’ outcomes—notes taken by students and instructors on what to expect on certain missions. This binder was incredibly useful, because it helped new students avoid repeating the mistakes of those who had gone before. In the process, it helped advance my understanding of what I was about to do immeasurably. I learned so much just trying to not make someone else’s mistakes, rapidly accelerating my learning and helping me perform better. This process developed into the habit of referring to my notes from previous missions as part of my preparation for the next day’s flight.

Part of what drives the necessity of this approach is that life is going increasingly quickly. If we don’t sit down and focus, really focus on what we need to do to achieve success, it is highly likely we’ll have a hard time doing so. We’re pulled in so many different directions, and it's a fundamentally bad assumption that we're going to be able to "pull it all together" and execute well without really thinking through our plan in advance. We flew so many different types of missions during my days as a fighter pilot that unless we sat down and truly focused on the mission we were flying next, we ran the risk of underperforming. And nobody likes to underperform.

> "IF WE DIDN'T SUCCEED TODAY, FOCUS ON HOW CLOSE WE WERE TO ACHIEVING SUCCESS. FIND A WAY TO MOTIVATE THE TEAM TO DO BETTER NEXT TIME, EVEN IN THE FACE OF A HORRIBLE DEFEAT

I saw several different versions of debrief memorialization, some better than others from the standpoint of pure learning. My favorite is the student binder version that I described from my early F-15 days. I also found that the F-16 Weapons School community practiced this process exceedingly well: they made their students write a one-page summary of the results of every debrief. They added these summaries to a master binder that anyone could refer to in support of their mission planning efforts. The key is that *everyone* had access to this data for mission planning, meaning that *everyone* stood to benefit from the learning of *any* individual pilot. This was a best-practice, and something I offer to companies and organizations everywhere.

Clearly, if there are any “to-do’s” that stem from the debrief, it’s essential that someone be assigned the responsibility to follow-up and ensure completion. Few things are more personally frustrating coming out of a debrief than everyone shaking hands, smiling, and doing NOTHING about anything that was just decided. It’s critical that someone take on the responsibility for “closing the loop” on any open tasks.

CONCLUSION

And that’s…*almost* it. We’ve now learned the RAPTOR Debrief in a nutshell, but now comes the time when we have to apply one of the lessons identified earlier: be positive! If we didn’t succeed today, focus on how close we were to achieving success. Find a way to motivate the team to do better next time, even in the face of a horrible defeat. And when we do succeed, ***celebrate the victories***! Highlight team and individual successes. Make the Debrief a process the team looks forward to repeating in the future. This isn’t easy, and it goes against the grain in many cases, but it can have a game-changing effect on your organization.

Otherwise, the RAPTOR Debrief is a very simple framework—one that’s even easier to accomplish once you’ve started internalizing and practicing it. I recommend starting with simple, everyday issues. Debrief those to a level of sufficiency and then move on to bigger, more challenging problems. Then, when you're comfortable with the process, bring the debrief into your company or organization and start changing your organizational DNA. And then make sure to watch as your teams start to gel, and you start to produce consistently better performance! This is the whole point.

SUMMARY

STEP 1: RECONSTRUCT WHAT HAPPENED

- Reconstruction examples.
- Reconstruction done correctly is a visual capture of the truth.
- The timing of a reconstruction.

STEP 2: AGREE ON THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION(S) AND FOCUS POINT(S)

- An example of the unstructured debrief.
- Everything debrief-wise centers on the objectives.
- How to craft a Fundamental Question.
- Crafting subsets of the Fundamental Question.
- How to develop Focus Points.
- The pizza shop example.

STEP 3: PRESENT THE DRIVING FACTORS (EXPLORING THE POSSIBLE ANSWERS)

- The importance of perspectives.
- Guides for developing Driving Factors and Focus Areas.

STEP 4: THOROUGHLY AGREE ON THE ROOT CAUSE

- A way of thinking about Root Cause establishment.
- How to quantify Root Causes.

STEP 5: ORGANIZE A PLAN TO IMPROVE OR MAINTAIN SUCCESS

- How to address poor outcomes.
- How to address positive outcomes.
- Finishing with the Fix.

STEP 6: RAPIDLY IMPROVE BY MEMORIALIZATION

- Always end on a positive note!

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