

Incident Leadership Pre-Work Assignment

To effectively participate in *Incident Leadership*, it is important to be well grounded in the foundational leadership concepts and principles that form the basis of this program. In addition to applying these timeless leadership concepts to the incident environment, we discuss concepts that are unique to this context, such as creating a positive command climate and implementing effective command principles.

Incident Leadership uses a minimum of classroom presentation and instead relies on simulations, case studies, and team feedback to bring the concepts to life. The intent of the pre-work is to ensure that all *Incident Leadership* participants have a working knowledge of, and can apply, these foundational concepts.

The case study for this pre-work is *K-19: The Widowmaker*, a film that illustrates the human factors and leadership concepts directly applicable to the incident response environment, in particular, leadership qualities demonstrated by characters and the ripple effects of their behavior.

When using case studies to further learning, it is important to keep in mind that any case study offers only a limited perception of what actually happened. In this case, an event that was declassified after 40 years was turned into a Hollywood film. However, even though dramatic license affected both the story and characters of *K-19*, the production went to great lengths to reproduce the historical accuracy of the story.

We use this film acknowledging historical inaccuracies and character discrepancies—the truth is a variation of what we see in the film. Take it at face value, using the events as shown to provide a vehicle for learning. We'll discuss the film, its events, and the people involved in depth throughout the *Incident Leadership* course to illustrate concepts.

To complete the pre-work, view the film *K-19: The Widowmaker*. Our recommendation is to watch the film once; read the pre-work questions; then watch the film a second time while considering the questions. Organized chronologically, the questions follow the sequence in the film and are categorized according to the concept illustrated. DVD chapter and video time counter references are provided for each question.

Record your observations regarding questions as you watch the film. Reference your *Incident Leadership* Participant Reference Guide as necessary. These areas of focus areas are the basis for a discussion on the first day of class, and viewing the film with the questions in mind helps you prepare to participate fully in this discussion. You are not required to turn in written answers to the questions.

Topic	Focus Questions
Decision Making	<p>1. (Ch 1, :07:15) Clearly, the senior leaders on the Soviet general staff understood they were ordering the boat to sea to conduct the missile launch test before the installation of important backup safety systems and before the boat was tested.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How did the senior commanders weigh the values at risk to determine whether the potential risks were appropriate?
Command Climate	<p>2. (Ch 2, :10:07) How did the initial meeting between the two captains (Vostrikov and Polenin) demonstrate effective upward leadership by Captain Polenin?</p>
Command Presence	<p>3. (Ch 2, :13:34) What did Captain Vostrikov’s speech to the crew in formation upon his assumption of command do in terms of teambuilding for the crew and chain of command of the submarine?</p>
Team Effectiveness	<p>4. (Ch 3, :28:22) After Captain Polenin is relieved of command and appointed the boat’s executive officer, the political officer Commissar Suslov has a conversation in an attempt to sound out Polenin’s political reliability. Imagining yourself as Mikhail Polenin, how would the political officer’s approach in the discussion make you feel?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What kind of messages was he sending to Polenin? – Using direct communication and active listening questions, give an example of another approach where the political officer could have been more open and honest about the subject and still led upward more effectively.
Human Error	<p>5. (Ch 4, :33:00) During the torpedo reloading drill two crew members are injured. Vostrikov orders the drill to continue, even though Polenin raises objections. Polenin then goes forward into the torpedo room to assist the remainder of the sailors in the compartment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What leadership principles did Polenin’s actions demonstrate? Were his actions appropriate? – How did Polenin’s actions either support or detract from leading upward and unity of command?
Human Error	<p>6. (Ch 5, :37:18) When Captain Vostrikov orders the boat to near crush depth, Captain Polenin strongly objects, thinking it too risky and that it needlessly endangered the crew.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How could a risk-averse, zero-defect culture like the Soviet Defense Ministry affect a field leader’s ability to allow subordinates to explore their capabilities?
Human Error	<p>7. (Ch 7, :51:50) The reactor officer, Lieutenant Radchentko, had a tendency to be hesitant to report anomalies in the boat’s reactor performance. Describe any links between Radchentko’s hesitancy and Captain Vostrikov’s comment, “I’m counting on you...” and manner in which Vostrikov communicated this comment.</p>

Topic	Focus Questions
Effective Communication	8. (Ch 8, 1:02:57) What does Captain Vostrikov’s short briefing to the crew about the reactor problem accomplish?
Command Climate	9. (Ch 9, 1:03:19) Describe how the organizational structure and decision making of the leadership team of K-19 changes in response to the reactor incident. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What sources of power were being used by the people in the problem solving team? – What role did Captain Vostrikov assign himself during this time period?
Operational Tempo	10. (Ch 9, 1:07:28) When Captain Vostrikov gives his guidance about the organization of the reactor repair team, Captain Polenin exhibits a common leader reaction to stress. He has this tendency during the whole cruise. What was this reaction and how could it impact his ability to lead?
Team Effectiveness	11. (Ch 11, 1:27:42) Initially, Captain Polenin wanted to use the Americans to assist evacuating the crew off the submarine while Captain Vostrikov was dead set against it. What could have been the ethical reasoning behind the two opposing points of view? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – At the point of this conversation, who, in your opinion, had the larger leader’s intent in mind?
Command Climate	12. (Ch 11, 1:27:42) As tension and stress increases, so does unresolved conflict. When Captain Polenin confronts Captain Vostrikov about the boat’s situation, Vostrikov appears to default straight back to Cold War doctrine and values: “Under no circumstances will I abandon my boat or my crew to the enemy!” Vostrikov’s plan was to double back and be found by a Soviet ship. Polenin makes a sarcastic remark and leaves the conflict unresolved. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is it about Vostrikov’s leadership style that forces Polenin to ask him “May I ask then, what is your plan?” – What communications tools could Polenin have used them to influence Vostrikov more effectively?
Team Effectiveness	13. (Ch 11, 1:32:14) The discussion between Captain Polenin and Captain Vostrikov about abandoning and scuttling the boat is a good example of an ethical dilemma. What values were in conflict in their arguments?
Command Climate	14. (Ch 11, 1:34:45) One of the sailors reported to Captain Vostrikov that radiation readings are rising in every compartment. Vostrikov obviously did not want the crew or the boat to fall into American hands. However, apparently Vostrikov did not consider the possibility that radiation poisoning might incapacitate him and the crew before the boat could be scuttled, leaving it floating for anyone to tow it away. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What characteristics in Vostrikov’s leadership style prevented him from seeing all the possibilities and implement effective contingencies and trigger points?

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Effective Communication	15. (Ch 12, 1:42:35) How did the lack of communication from the K-19 to the Soviet high command affect the trust environment between the general staff and Captain Vostrikov?
Team Effectiveness	16. (Ch 13, 1:45:30) Before diving the boat, Captain Polenin urges Captain Vostrikov to transition to a different leadership style: “Don’t tell them. Ask them.” How did switching to the participating style and communicating the leader’s intent of the proposed course of action impact the cohesion of the leadership team and the crew? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What differences could it have made had that intent been communicated to the officers and crew much earlier?
Team Effectiveness	17. (Ch 14, 1:56:56) How was Captain Vostrikov’s decision to countermand Moscow and order the crew to evacuate to their sister submarine an effective example of leading upward?
Leadership Styles	18. (Ch 14, 2:01:22) Captain Polenin’s testimony at the inquiry was an effective example of leading upward. What were some of the risks involved in exerting that leadership? Were they justified?
Human Error	19. Using Reason’s Swiss Cheese Model for human error, at what level would you place these links in the error chain? For each link, describe the effect it had on later events and what might have been done to prevent it (break the chain) or mitigate it? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – (Ch 2, :15:50) Experience of reactor officer Lieutenant Radchentko. – (Ch 2, :16:53) Petty Officer Lotkev not speaking up about the reactor performance anomaly. – (Ch 2, 19:00) 1/2 degree list to the boat. – (Ch 2, :20:49) Unqualified doctor being assigned to the boat. – (Ch 9, 1:08:30) Fuel spill in the torpedo room being allowed to sit in open bucket.
Leader’s Intent	20. Consider the senior officers on the Soviet general staff, the two captains, and the crew, describe the flow of communication from the top levels to the lower levels (command). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Overall, was leader’s intent clear at every level? – Describe the flow of communication from subordinates to leaders (control). – Overall, did feedback regarding the effectiveness of operations reach the appropriate levels?
Leader’s Intent	21. Describe your perspective regarding how the two Captains (Vostrikov and Polenin) interpreted the higher leader’s intent of the K-19’s mission?