**Guided Discussion**

The following are recommended ways of addressing your breakout groups. They are just that, recommendations to help drive the conversation. It is essential that you facilitate the discussion, but that you allow the participants to conduct it. They should hear each other more than they should hear you. Comments from one individual should spark you to look at another and say… “What do you think of that?” It is imperative that you reinforce the SYSTEM as it is not part of the “Marines and Ethical Behavior” slides. The “Developing Ethical Leaders” presentation is meant to educate/inform you on the role of the Leader as it relates to the elements of the systems. Elements you and those you are facilitating the discussion with are familiar.

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1. My Lai. Still relevant today--yes or no? Discuss. Also discuss the below as they relate to My Lai and today's environment;

- age issue

- training and education

- leadership failure at multiple levels

- dehumanizing the enemy---is it unavoidable?

- boredom

- control and challenge

- mental, moral, and physical cohesion

2. Could it happen today or has training, education, and battlefield scrutiny evolved to the point where it could never happen again? Discuss.

- What can we as leaders do to ensure our Marines are not part of the next moral and ethical breakdown?

- It is not a matter of degree...any movement towards the attitude...whether it be one inch or one mile, it doesn't matter...it is a step towards bad things happening...it is zero tolerance...one death versus one thousand deaths makes no difference. Environments and systems can be understood and come together at any given moment that can lead to good men doing bad things.

- Ask them to comment and discuss the following quote; "On any given battlefield at any given moment, there is a Marine that is one heart-beat away from committing a war crime." How is he stopped?----Leadership!

3. What can/should we learn from My Lai as it relates to the three elements/contributing factors to a leaders decision making---the individual, the situation/environment, and the system? Discuss My Lai through this 3-part lens.

4. Talk about what we can learn from My Lai in light of the "leaders system"; obedience, cohesion, discipline, training and education, and culture. What is the role of the leader in keeping these in balance? Discuss.

5. Discuss the clear rationalization and justification that is evident in the soldiers interviewed for the documentary.

6. Discuss how bad ethical and moral decisions ripple through and destroy lives beyond those killed or injured in the event. It is the gift that keeps on giving.

7. Based on your experience, when and why do good men do bad things? Bring My Lai forward to the groups Iraq/Afg experiences.

8. We, the Usmc, need to spend less time talking about "leadership" and more time talking about moral and ethical behavior in leaders. There is a difference.

9. Talk about the "black swan" in your unit. That bad person who is a natural leader who will fill the leadership void if you allow it. Absence of leadership that is moral and ethical is as bad or worse than bad leadership by the actual person in charge.

10. Discuss, "if an act is evil in and of its self, it is always evil in war". No amount of justification relative to environment and system can make evil acts justifiable. Rape, murder, killing of the innocent, and torture are always evil and wrong and perpetrators of same should be held accountable. If I see my best friend blown up by a suicide bomber and I go out and gun down the family of the bomber, I am not justified in my actions. My crazed state of mind may contribute to considerations of "extenuation and mitigation"---but not to my guilt or innocence. I am guilty of a unethical and immoral act in war!

11. Talk about ACCOUNTABILITY and moral and ethical behavior in leaders and led.

12. What is the role of the moral and ethical leader as it relates to;

- setting the example

- social energy and leadership

- building heartiness in one's self and others

- the leaders "emotional and spiritual flakjacket" is thicker than those we lead. Sharing their burden and lightening their emotional load.

- building resiliency in one's self and others. How?

- physical and mental toughness and doing the right thing

13. What have we learned today?

- good men can be driven to do bad things by the environment and the system.

- your role as the leader to ensure you and those you lead understand this and are trained and educated to meet the challenge to our moral and ethical foundation as men and marines!

\* Are you going to Lt Caley or CWO Thompson? Decide now!

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**Guided Discussion on My Lai Documentary**

*Questions are followed by potential answers that leader can provide*

Questions about the **individual (perceptions of responsibility and motives for behavior)**

* Soldiers who identified their actions as right OR wrong were interviewed – do they seem different to you? Do the people who justified their actions as carrying out orders or that they did their job, do they seem like “bad apples” or “evil”? Explain.
  + Whether portraying themselves as loyal soldiers following their duty or soldiers who felt they did something immoral but could not explain why, none of these soldiers expressed any contentment about what occurred at My Lai. They did not try to express that it was morally justified to kill civilians, only that they perceived their actions as against the (perceived) enemy at the time.
* Hugh Thompson, the aeroscout helicopter pilot, was an example of someone who saved people at My Lai. Varnado Simpson, the rifleman, openly discussed the number of people he killed and how he killed them, even taking war trophies. How were they similar in recounting their experiences? How were they different?
  + Similar: Both were very emotional and full of remorse
  + Different: Simpson talked about “programming” to kill and also having a mental break after his first kill. Thompson never mentioned anything about training that led him to help the few civilians he managed to save. In fact, he doesn’t appear to try to justify his actions (to his credit).
* What did Hugh Thompson do to underscore his comment that the Americans “were the enemy at that time”? How did he feel about that?
  + He ordered his teammates to return fire if he was fired upon in attempting to rescue the civilians from the bunker
  + While he said that at the time he likely would not have hesitated to defend himself from his compatriots, in the present, he appears to dread the thought of that actually happening. He is clearly relieved that did not occur.
* Why do you think Hugh Thompson does not portray himself as a “hero” for saving some civilians?
  + He is very distraught about what we, as Americans, committed there and also wishes he could have saved more people. Being a hero seems to be the last thing on his mind – he is still hurting to this day over this incident and what “we” did. Despite his role, he really does not appear to try to separate himself from the other Americans involved.
* Lt Calley, the only one convicted in My Lai, testified that his only crime was valuing his troops’ lives over the enemies’. If you believe him, why do you think he felt morally justified in his actions?
  + He might have felt there was morality in following orders and connect following orders with protecting his troops, regardless of the environment.
  + Alternatively, he could truly regard the civilians at My Lai as “the enemy.”
* What did Lt Calley do that might lead you to think that he was possibly more responsible than he let on regarding his actions at My Lai?
  + He said he never gave orders to kill – according to the interviewees, however, he was very clear in his orders to kill everyone. People who killed civilians and those who refused concurred that he gave this order repeatedly.
  + (Follow-on question: So is he lying or telling the truth?)
    - It is possible, from a psychological point of view, that Lt Calley is suffering from delusional rationalization. He could have been so stunned at his own behavior at My Lai that he simply has convinced himself that he acted otherwise.
    - It is also possible that Lt Calley is lying to save himself/career/self-image.
* How does USMC arm you with a response to such orders that involve killing innocent civilians?
  + This would be justifiably illegal and demand disobedience from a Marine.

Questions about the **situation (how the conditions were conducive to violence)**

* What were the conditions prior to My Lai or leading up to it that made this an “atrocity-producing situation”?
  + They’d suffered casualties to an unseen enemy – booby traps and snipers (“mostly booby traps”). They rarely got the opportunity to return fire.
  + Charlie Company was told that My Lai was HQ for a VC battalion.
  + Brigade CDR was frustrated and wanted them to be more aggressive. Passed down this sentiment to Captain Medina and Lt William Calley. According to those interviewed, the order was to kill everyone – because even if they weren’t VC, they were sympathetic to VC. “They weren’t helping us” was reason enough to consider these people the enemy. They were told “we’re going to kick some ass” and “nobody was going to be left.”
* Did the company experience hostile fire when they landed at My Lai before 0800? Did they ever experience hostile fire?
  + No
  + No
* Why do you think they started killing people without experiencing hostile fire?
  + Their leadership had consistently portrayed everyone there as the enemy or sympathetic to the enemy. They painted a very clear picture with very clear orders. No room for ambiguity. We see things as WE are.
* What does Lt. Calley do today? And what does that say about the capabilities of many human beings?
  + Runs a jewelry store.
  + So if a person who runs a jewelry store is capable of ordering the death of hundreds of civilians and defending the morality of it, what does that say about the capabilities of many human beings?
    - That many are capable of committing acts that might seem completely out of character under the right conditions.

Questions about the **system** **(leadership, training, orders = part of military system)**

* Why would the leadership have believed that killing these civilians was the right thing to do?
  + The orders about My Lai originated with intelligence about the area and therefore was regarded as valid. Obedience to orders was perceived a valid and expected response.
  + It is possible that Lt Calley and others believed then and believe to this day that they were following orders, orders are not to be questioned, and that, by definition, is WHY what they did was moral, was right.
* What did Sgt Kenneth Hodges believe would happen to someone who disobeyed orders? Why?
  + Court martial, shot.
  + (Why) “They were ALL considered the enemy”
  + His rationale speaks to his belief that the orders were given in good faith, focused on enemy fire, whether it was actually present or not. His rationale implied a strong faith in the military system.
* Sgt Kenneth Hodges seemed to express that he felt his actions were not immoral; the rifleman, Varnado Simpson, engaged in similar actions yet regards them as immoral. How were they *similar* in explaining their actions?
  + They mentioned their *training* to kill
  + They had also been *trained* to obey
  + They had *not* been trained how to discern innocents from the enemy.
  + Simpson specifically highlighted the training as “programming’