            As I departed for South Korea, my first duty station in the US Army, my father said, “Don’t forget – Mission First, Team Always.” It was welcome, but unnecessary. He had said it countless times since my childhood and I had adopted “Mission First, Team Always” as my leadership philosophy. Months later, those words echoed in my head louder than ever before. To certify our air defense unit, each of the 12 crews I managed would have to certify on its system as well. This was more than just our job; in the case of a North Korean missile attack, it meant the defense of South Korea. As one crew fell behind in their training, my Commander ordered me to defy everything that my mantra, and I, represented.

At that time, my top Soldier was on leave in Texas with his wife and infant daughter for his sister’s wedding. His back-up, brand-new both to the unit and to the Army, struggled to fill my Soldier’s place. With the mission in mind, our unit Commander ordered me to return the Soldier to Korea immediately to ensure the certification of the crew and the unit.

         Commanders revoking leave due to mission constraints was nothing new. Three months earlier, I had planned to visit my cousin while she was temporarily in Hong Kong. My travel became contingent on my personal crew’s certification. Ultimately, my trip was cancelled. By the time we certified, my cousin had already returned to the US. Though I respected prioritizing the mission, the loss of rare time with family stung. My Commander’s words, “Sorry, but Hong Kong will still be there,” provided little solace.

Prematurely ending my Soldier’s hard-earned leave seemed heartless. He had never requested leave before and consistently outperformed. He had even sent his family to the US early to focus his full attention on preparing other crews. I understood the disappointment of planning time with family only to have it ripped away, but this was different. I lost a puddle-jumper fare, quickly recouped with an Officer’s salary. In contrast, this order commanded an enlisted Private to purchase three last-minute, trans-Pacific airplane tickets. It would have rendered the young family unable to pay their bills.

My explanations to the Commander and exhortations to reconsider fell on deaf ears. The certification was crucial, but I was stunned. “Mission First, Team Always” was *the* foundation of leadership in my mind. It was inextricably intertwined with my leadership identity and I naively assumed that my fellow Army leaders would share a similar philosophy. It was disheartening to discover my ethos had transformed to represent an unfortunate Venn diagram: Mission Leaders or People Leaders. My Commander clearly was the former.

Though discouraged, and intimidated by the grave potential consequences of disobeying orders, “Mission First, Team Always” echoed in my mind. I was determined both to keep my Soldier with his family and to pass the certification. I rallied my direct reports and we strategized how to rapidly develop the back-up crew. Achieving the level of proficiency required to certify would normally take a crew at least 30 days. Through intense instruction and rigorous drills, our back-up crew certified after 72 hours. As a result, our unit fully certified and my Soldier’s family time continued uninterrupted. More personally, “Mission First, Team Always” no longer existed solely in my head; it had become a practice.

         My time in Korea amplified the importance of balancing “Mission First,” and “Team Always,” for leaning too heavily on either undermines organizations. Achieving results *while* supporting those around me matters most to me. With MBA core classes like *Organizational Behavior* and *Ethics in Management*, Stanford clearly emphasizes that it develops its students to be ethical, self-aware leaders. I’m excited to join an institution and a community that shares my values.