

Command Corner: Leader's intent

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In fast-moving, dynamic situations, top-level decision-makers cannot always incorporate new information into a formal planning process and redirect people to action within a reasonable timeframe. Incident commanders provide leader's intent so people closest to the scene of action can adapt plans and exercise initiative to accomplish the objective when unanticipated opportunities arise or when the original plan no longer suffices. Leader's intent is a crucial element of effective operations because it reduces internal friction and empowers subordinates, even when chaotic conditions prevent the chain of command from communicating effectively.


Leader's intent is a clear, concise statement about what people must do to succeed in their assignments. It delineates three essential components:

1. Task: the objective or goal of the assignment.
2. Purpose: why the assignment needs to be done.
3. End state: how the situation should look when the assignment is successfully completed.

Within the framework of the defined end state, leaders can develop plans that include incident objectives, priorities, strategies, trigger points and contingency plans.

Food for thought, discussion points:
Think about how you were most recently provided leader's intent.

Describe a situation where leader's intent was utilised to adapt and achieve the desired end state.

Describe a situation where leader's intent was not clear. Discuss how to gain leader's intent if it is not initially provided. 

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