

Exercise: Compartmentalized Life: PROs & CONs

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION: Leaders can be prone to compartmentalization during travel and/or deployment, in their internet/virtual world communications, and in the privacy of their own home. Specifically, travel destinations where the leader is out of uniform and his/her identity is unknown to others may present situations where values-based compromises are more likely to occur. Deployments also present such a situation, as family, friends, and other typical social relationships are not present.

Similarly, the false sense of privacy afforded by the internet/virtual world can lead one to say or do things that, if made public, could be perceived as unacceptable behavior for an Army leader. At home, leaders may feel their behavior does not have to meet the same standard of their public persona. In all three of these areas, one need only recall numerous accounts in which high-level politicians, military leaders, and professional athletes have compartmentalized their life in a way that was devastating for both their professional and personal lives.

EXAMPLE: Tiger Woods, an American golfer considered a role model in the game of golf, applied drastically different standards for himself in his personal life. A professional image built over years was destroyed in weeks as revelations about personal infidelities created unprecedented scandals.

INSTRUCTIONS: “Don’t take work home with you” is often cited as a healthy way to compartmentalize one’s life. Compartmentalization can be an effective defense mechanism against highly stressful situations, yet compartmentalization can also be a strategy designed to allow one set of behaviors to operate in a given situation (or compartment), while an entirely different set of behaviors are allowed to operate in another situation (or compartment). This can be problematic when, over time, you begin to rationalize the behaviors that are occurring in one of your ‘compartments’ even though these behaviors are inconsistent with your overall values and ethical leadership.

Complete this exercise to diagnose the degree to which you compartmentalize your life.

On the following page, create a graphical depiction of your life and its various ‘compartments’, for example—

- ❖ work life in the public eye.
- ❖ work life among peers.
- ❖ work life around subordinates.
- ❖ work life when traveling.
- ❖ down time when traveling.
- ❖ work life during deployments.
- ❖ home life.
- ❖ life with spouse/significant other.
- ❖ life with children/extended family.
- ❖ lifestyle when alone.
- ❖ lifestyle when relaxing.

To gain the most from the exercise, be sure to include those compartments that may be potentially problematic for you.

Exercise: Compartmentalized Life: PROs & CONs

Graphical Depiction of Your Life and Its Compartments:

On each line below, name each compartment in your day-to-day life and write a one-word description of your most prominent behavior when operating in it:

- Compartment name:
- Description of you:

- Compartment name:
- Description of you:

- Compartment name:
- Description of you:

Answer the following questions:

- In which compartment(s) am I my truest self?
- In which compartment(s) am I operating in a way that is not in alignment with my true self and values?
- What compartment and associated operating behavior puts me most at risk for a lapse in personal values or ethics?