

ONLINE EXCLUSIVE: UPDATE: AME Hosts Leadership Development Event at West Point

By Adam Madison

The U.S. Military Academy (USMA) at West Point is a national landmark overlooking the Hudson River and often is considered the pinnacle of leadership. It therefore served as the perfect location for AME's "Developing Leaders for Tomorrow—Today" event March 21-23.



Lt. Col. Dave Jones led the AME Leadership Development tour of West Point then held a discussion on leadership and character development concepts.

The leadership workshop was the first in a series developed by the AME Institute with the help of the Northeastern and Mid-Atlantic Region affiliates. AME Institute Chairman Kenneth McGuire said the Institute plans to conduct as many as five workshops a year. He said there was a growing concern that AME events focused more on tools, such as 5S or overall equipment effectiveness (OEE), but said these workshops focus solely on personal development.

"We are trying to develop better leaders and do it quickly," McGuire said. "We have come out of a terrible time for manufacturing where all we have been doing is managing costs. We are coming out of that now, and we need infrastructure in our organizations that can grow. In order to do that, we need leaders."

The Academy served as the ideal launch for the series, as West Point presents a monument to seven values — loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage — that easily translate to the leadership required to drive a successful business in manufacturing. Key speakers included McGuire, who focused on leadership versus management. Training Modernization Group (TMG) Inc. President Joe Barto discussed frontline leadership development; and author Steven Spear shared tips from his book *High Velocity Edge*.

The two and a half days of education began with a tour guided by Lt. Col. Dave Jones. He explained the symbolism and history of the Academy. Afterward, participants engaged in informal discussions with select cadets during West Point-provided meals.

“The purpose was to show participants that these young people are pretty damn talented,” Barto said. “These kids aren’t any different than they were in our generation.”

Too often, manufacturers blame their shortcomings on the incoming workforce’s lack of talent, he said. The dinner became a jumping-off point to illustrate that it is ineffective leadership, not the ignorance of new employees, that limits a company. This is the root of the workshop, Barto said.

The second day started with Barto’s presentation, “Leader-Powered Lean: Heartbeat Leaders First.” It’s an organization’s responsibility to mold leaders who have the skill set required to achieve a high performance level, he said. West Point is explicit about the behaviors it wants cadets to emulate. This includes what Barto described as a mission-essential task list. Also, it is critical for organizations to identify the dysfunctional behaviors that should be eliminated.

“We get so focused on the process side; fixing changeover time and reducing scrap,” he said. “We never spend much time thinking about what waste is in our people.”

The “heartbeat leaders” — the foremen, team leaders or managers — are the first-line supervisors who could gain the most from this workshop because they are closest to the production line, Barto said. However, he added, these leaders usually receive the least amount of investment — a discovery that helped lead to the development of this program.

“Train these people right,” he said, “and so much of your business becomes easier.”

Barto, a former cadet and Desert Storm veteran, spent much of the day discussing his experiences at West Point and how he applied them later in life. He was first recruited from high school to play basketball. Competitive sports are a requirement for cadets, and his presentation illustrates the need to be “ready to play.”

“When I was in the army, specifically in combat, if I wasn’t ready to play every day, I was putting my team at risk,” Barto said. “We are not trying to imply that working at XYZ manufacturing company is taking your people to war, but there are a lot of things that you can learn from that process to apply to your daily operations.”

The event concluded with author Steven Spear presenting “Greatness is Possible, but Rare.” Spear said certain organizations achieve levels of performance in development, design and delivery that make their rivals competitors in name only.

“Creating far more value with far less effort, and faster to do so, they secure disproportionate rewards for themselves,” he said, “while providing disproportionate delight to their customers — even in some intensely competitive sectors.”

Spear said sustained leadership can’t be accomplished by using particular technologies or applying particular tools and techniques that are widely available. This may be necessary, but isn’t a differentiator, he said.

“Rather,” Barto added, “the leaders outpace the field in improvement and innovation; they outlearn their rivals while discovering their way to greatness.”

See full offering of photos from the event [here](#).