



# American Legion Training Newsletter

National Headquarters Internal Affairs & Membership Division

Engage - Train - Empower

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## Leadership matters



Patricia A. Harris (NC)  
National Vice Commander

As a National American Legion College graduate and a past facilitator, the word leadership always sticks out to me. Why? Because leadership matters! A day before going on convention stage in Milwaukee for the election of national vice commanders, I remembered an impromptu meeting I had with a past national commander who was national commander when I was a district vice commander. We went down memory lane on leadership and membership. Everything that was said during my first encounter still to this day is true. The two ships sail together.

This year National Commander Vincent J. “Jim” Troiola has given us national vice commanders our charge in V.E.T.S.

**Veterans.** We are veterans in leadership, and we are responsible for being accountable to ourselves and those who place us in leadership roles. We are responsible for being the example by ensuring our walk reflects our position.

**Education.** Our leadership also requires that we educate and prepare ourselves in areas of responsibility. An example is The American Legion’s suicide prevention campaign, “[Be the One](#),” which encourages all of us to Be the One to save the life of a veteran by asking how they are, listening and reaching out when they are struggling. The VA also has a course called [VA S.A.V.E. Training](#) that is designed to help you with care and compassion if you encounter a veteran who is in crisis or experiencing suicidal thoughts. The acronym S.A.V.E. helps you remember the essential steps in suicide prevention: **signs** of suicidal thinking, **ask** the important questions, **validate** the veteran’s experience, and **encourage** treatment and **expedite** getting help. We need to know what to look for, especially as we move into the holiday season. Safety is the key for all of us. Training resources from The American Legion and the VA can provide the necessary tools we need in our toolbox.

**Teamwork.** There is no secret that working together works! As leaders, we can access our national staff for direction and guidance on any subject. We have access in our home departments with the VA that can team up with us for training. So together, we can effectively take a safe position in helping our fellow veterans with suicide prevention, crisis information and engagement. Our programs and advocacy on military and veteran issues sell our membership. Many times, our leadership affects the retention of our gains.

**Sponsor.** As our membership grows, sponsorship is paramount. Many of us remember sponsorship’s importance during a PCS (permanent change of station) move. There was nothing like having a member of your new unit welcome you, take you around and introduce you to your new team. Also, if you had family traveling at the same time, the support of everyone was pleasant and questions were answered. Welcoming new members should be met with the same enthusiasm when talking about our programs and posts activities. Care and genuine concern go a long way. We lead by example.

As we move forward in this membership year, remember that your leadership matters!

# The veteran service officer experience



The American Legion has been the leading voice for veterans, servicemembers and their families since its founding in 1919. Veterans needing assistance with benefits and programs provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and other military related matters, often turn to The American Legion for help. For most veterans, they turn to their local post.

Service officers play a vital role in fulfilling the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation pillar of The American Legion by advocating for claimants and helping them attain the myriad of benefits they rightly deserve.

*Antoine "Tony" Gordon (AR)  
Department Service Officer*

An American Legion post service officer is a volunteer position within an individual post. A post service officer serves as a link between the veteran or dependent and a representative holding American Legion accreditation. An effective post service officer understands benefits afforded to veterans and dependents; however, they are not authorized to file any claims on behalf of the claimant. Post service officers are a valuable resource to veterans in local posts to ensure that our veterans and their dependents receive their earned benefits. The post service officer must know how to access and utilize the expert services available through Legion channels and other community agencies. The job requires timely submission of information to full-time professionals so that every veteran and his or her dependents are adequately represented. The service officer's report should be a standard part of every post meeting.

You can view and [download the Leigon's Post Service Officer Guide](#) to understand the responsibilities of a post service officer.

Accredited American Legion service officers are specially trained to provide expert assistance, free of charge, to veterans and their families. While the majority of a service officer's work involves application for VA disability benefits, these compassionate professionals also provide information, referrals and resources on education, employment and business, death benefits and other important topics.

Department service officers can provide necessary claims forms. Additional information comes through department publications, National Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation bulletins, memorandums and VA pamphlets. Many departments conduct training for post service officers to add to their knowledge and contacts, and all have trained service officers in VA regional offices and hospitals. The American Legion also maintains a full staff of appeals representatives in both Washington, D.C., and Indianapolis.

As a service officer, one must be aware of policies and procedures that will increase the chances of a positive outcome for beneficiaries. The VA claims process is fluid and the information given to our claimants must be based upon the most recent guidance. Failure to act on this principle can cause delays in the claims adjudication process. Below are a few tips for success as an American Legion service officer. I call it the Three E Principle:

- 1: Eligibility: During the initial interview, ask the claimant to provide proof of service.
- 2: Entitlement: Determine if the claimant may be entitled to the benefit sought.
- 3: Execution: Formulate a plan to file a credible claim for the claimant.

I understand this is brief, but I hope to expand on the Three E Principle in the future. Until then, I will leave you with this – know what you don't know! It is not a good practice to advise claimants based upon what you heard. Advise based upon what you can show and prove.



## It's Buddy Check time!

### Why?

- Our most sacred responsibility is to look out for each other and our fellow veterans.
- It is what we do for our battle buddies.
- We need to reconnect with veterans who may need assistance but do not know where to go or who to ask.

### When?

- By resolution, at least twice a year around The American Legion's birthday (March 15) and Veterans Day (Nov. 11).
- As a regular part of our daily routine.
- Anytime throughout the year.

**How?** Download the [Buddy Check Toolkit](#) to conduct a successful Buddy Check.



Include all your Buddy Check activities on the Consolidated Post Report and share on [Legiontown](#).

## Communication training through TALMA



The American Legion Media Alliance (TALMA) provides valuable information and training tools to ensure effective communication to all your members and your community at large. [See the exclusive benefits TALMA members receive.](#)

American Legion Family members who handle public relations and other communication activities at their post reap the benefits of TALMA membership. The membership year runs Sept. 1 to Aug. 31 and dues are \$15 per year. A great incentive to renewing and joining TALMA now is a hard copy of The American Legion's [Public Relations Toolkit](#). Join or renew at [legion.org/talma/join](http://legion.org/talma/join).

TALMA held its Media Training Workshop during the 103rd National Convention in Milwaukee. The workshop presentations were recorded and are now available for viewing and promoting at the post, district and department level. [Access the eight video presentations here.](#)

### About this newsletter

This periodic and Legionnaire-driven newsletter, produced by the Internal Affairs & Membership Division, is designed to address best practices, ideas and training that every Legionnaire needs to know to engage our membership through effective training now and into the future.

Highlighting new training ideas and resources becoming available, it will also feature essays from successful leaders and training ideas of posts, districts, departments and individuals throughout The American Legion.