

The Foxhole Test¹

“Be miserable or motivate yourself. Whatever has to be done, it’s always your choice.” — Wayne Dyer

To start today, get in a place where you are comfortable and can let your mind go to imagine you are in a foxhole. It’s an experience hundreds of thousands of Armed Forces members experienced in World War I and World War II. This lesson uses mental imagery to consider a scenario hopefully none of us will ever experience.



You are in the Armed Forces engaging in a combat zone, defending a position on the front line. The defensive position you have created must be solid, because your life depends on it. You have spent hours digging a hole about five feet deep and eight or nine feet in diameter. This hole is intended to act as a buffer against enemy fire and shrapnel.

You share this fighting hole, or “foxhole” as it came to be known, with someone amidst a war. Your life depends on the soundness of the foxhole you have prepared, your life is even more dependent upon the person in the foxhole with you. When you are attacked, what will you do? How will you conduct yourself? How about the person in the foxhole with you? How about the others in nearby foxholes?

The strongest of all of us can crumble sometimes. Fear or pain can cause people to make choices that haunt them for the rest of lives; regretting what they should have done, but failed to do. Some may cower; others may drop their weapons and flee to safety, leaving you alone to fight in the foxhole. Others may even throw up a white flag of surrender, leaving your fate to chance or the mercy of the enemy.

But there are those that will keep a cool head and have your back, fighting bravely, shrewdly, and with a contagious positive spirit. That does not mean there is an absence of fear; it just means they act in spite of the fear.

Soldiers spend a great deal of time learning to fight as a unit. They do this by training hard and sharing hardship and victories together. In a very different, much safer environment, our teams have similar bonding experiences.

Being part of a team means that you put others before yourself, and they do the same for you. Everybody draws strength from each other. The best teams and teammates share these ethics. One way to test team culture and what kind of teammate you are is through the Foxhole Test.

How does a teammate handle the stress and adversity of completion? Ask yourself, “Could I trust this person in the foxhole with me?” Here is a test legendary basketball coach Don Meyer created.

¹ A product of the SAVHS Character Education Program. Content inspired by: The Foxhole Test by Don Meyer <https://www.coachmeyer.com/> and *Can Your Small Business Withstand the Foxhole Test*, by James Chittenden <https://yfsmagazine.com/2013/09/25/can-you-small-business-withstand-the-foxhole-test/>

- In your heads, imagine you are in a foxhole. You are at the front of the foxhole. Pick the teammates you would want with you at the back, left, and right of the foxhole. These three teammates are who you would want in your foxhole if they were fighting a life and death battle.
- The position to your rear is the most valuable and is awarded to your most trusted, courageous, and tough teammate. The position to your left protects your blindside and is awarded to the second most trusted teammate, and the position to your right goes to a third teammate you also trust and would help save your life.
- This test cuts through all the friendships, cliques, and is a true measure of how you value your teammates – and what some of the most important traits and attributes for team success.

“When you’re sharing a foxhole with another [person], you don’t worry about what color [they are], just whether or not [they] will protect your back.” — Lee Benson

Nobody gets it right at all times. Everybody has moments of weakness and we all fall short of each other’s hopes and expectations from time-to-time. When struggling teammates do this, they feel no responsibility and blame others. On the other hand, strong teammates learn from it, profits from it, and will act to repair the damage.

The foxhole test is a personal measure of character, and can be applied equally regardless of gender, race, culture, or background. It is a way to check to see if your mind and instincts are in agreement.

[Ask:] The opening quote for this lesson is about mindset. What obstacles get in the way of choosing a mindset built on optimism and motivation?

What were the characteristics of the teammates you chose to join you in the foxhole – and why?

Take a moment to reflect, what characteristics do you believe others would use to describe you – and why? How many foxholes do you think you were invited into?

War can be an awful comparison to real life. It can also be illustrative. How does this foxhole metaphor apply to life on a team and our personal lives with the friends we choose?