After Action Reviews (AARs)

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NERC HP Conference, March 2014, Atlanta, GA
“There’s a big difference between 20 years of experience and one year of experience...”
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...repeated 19 times.”
What IS the difference?
An After Action Review (AAR) is...

...a step by step procedure for extracting learning from experience, especially in teams.
How did AARs get started?
“At the National Training Center the principal learning experiences were the after action reviews (AAR) that took place as soon as possible after each force-on-force and live-fire mission and at the end of a unit's rotation.”

From
Electric Utility Reports generated from AARs (see p.3)

Electric Utility Reports generated from AARs (see pp.i, 26)


Hurricane Irene
Electric Response Report
12-14-11
What's the step-by-step procedure for leading an AAR?
Four Questions of an AAR

1. What did we set out to do?
2. What did actually happened?
3. Why did it happen that way?
4. What will we do differently next time?
What are some common mistakes & tips for leading successful AARs?
Common Mistakes

1. Fixing the blame instead of fixing the problem.
2. Leading a “critique” instead of a discussion.
4. Leader not being able to articulate or model the behaviors they want (e.g., “I know excellence when I see it.”)
5. Not assigning a moderator, or facilitator to keep discussion on track and get through all 4 questions.
7. Waiting too long to hold an AAR. 24 hours max.
Tips for Great AARs

a. Agree on a mechanism to resolve disagreements.
b. Spend 25% of time on Qs 1&2
c. Ensure participants speak 75%+ of the time
d. Use the most skilled facilitators – NOT the highest ranking or most experienced people.
e. “Mistakes admitted in the AAR cannot be used against soldiers later on.”
f. Use an easel pad, projected Word doc, or other viewable medium to take notes so all can see them. Assigning a scribe – different from leader.
g. Read what’s not said – body language, and other nonverbals.
Hands-on Challenge

a) Turn to a neighbor.

b) Person with the darkest eyes is chooses a recent event to AAR briefly within the next 6-8 minutes.

c) Other person facilitates the AAR and ensures that partnership uses all four questions below and as many tips, etc. as practical.

1. What did we set out to do?
2. What did actually happened?
3. Why did it happen that way?
4. What will we do differently next time?
Resources

Best overall resource - 9pp article from Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center
http://www.wildfirelessons.net/documents/Garvin_AAR_Excerpt.pdf

Good video that explains and demos AARs
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74Afb8qLujo
(see part II as well)