

After Action Reviews (AARs)

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***“There’s a big difference
between 20 years of
experience and one year of
experience..._____”***

***“There’s a big difference
between 20 years of
experience and one year of
experience...”***

...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

http://www.history.army.mil/html/books/069/69-3/CMH_Pub_69-3.pdf



NEW HAMPSHIRE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

AFTER ACTION REVIEW
DECEMBER '08 ICE STORM
FINAL REPORT



DECEMBER 3, 2009

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

<https://www.puc.nh.gov/2008IceStorm/Final%20Reports/PUC%20IceStorm%20After%20Action%20Report%2012-03-09.pdf>

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

<http://nj.gov/bpu/pdf/announcements/2011/ir-ene.pdf>



Hurricane Irene
Electric Response Report

12-14-11



[Click for
video of
AAR](#)

**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
3. Skipping Qs 1 and 2. Jumping to #3 and 4. Not establishing the facts of *what actually happened*.
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.
6. Not recording clear useful summary of results.
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)