



Sgt. Maj. Nathan E. Buckner instructs a leadership class Oct. 3 at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas. (Photo by Spc. Ashley Arnett)

From the SGM: Mission command needs strategic NCOs

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There are definable differences between leading organizations in conventional and irregular warfare, and leading in decisive-action operations. Yet, some cannot adapt and don't decentralize or don't empower NCOs to think and act strategically. Trapped in a bygone era, they refuse to change their maladaptive leadership approaches to match today's contemporary operational environment.

The keys to success in the operational environment of today are strategic leadership and mission command. And though it may sound simple, do not underestimate the amount of complexity and mental agility associated

with implementing the Strategic Leadership Model in decisive-action operations. I'd say the task is analogous to clearing a weapon's malfunction during an ambush.

Nonetheless, strategic leadership is the most logical approach to leading in mission command. The very words conjure up the NCO Creed and NCOs being the "backbone of the Army," where NCOs at all levels instill discipline throughout the operations process.

The essence of strategic leadership is this: Know the capabilities of your Soldiers, your commander's intent and your environment. Then decide on a course of action while continuously assessing the situation and allowing

your leaders to use their own initiative and discernment to solve complex problems. The same concepts apply to leading organizations in decisive-action operations.

The Strategic Leadership Model encourages adaptability and agility by acting as a driver for critical thinking. It thus eliminates many self-serving biases and thinking traps. As such, strategic NCOs do not rest on their laurels, and they understand they must lead by example. Their sense of resolve and understanding of the commander's intent in mission command is the driving force of disciplined initiative, motivating them to seek solutions to ill-structured problems that traditionally minded NCOs may dismiss as unsolvable.

For some NCOs, mission command defies conventional wisdom. So they often become irresolute in their decisions and settle for solving every simple problem. Subsequently, they become overwhelmed because decisive-action operations are too complex to micromanage.

Strategic NCOs, however, are constantly monitoring and assessing the operational environment. They understand that their influence resides within the principles of mission command. They know that empowerment and situational awareness are the instigators of change. They

know that strategic leadership is an art of choosing — choosing to change, choosing to treat others with dignity and respect, and choosing to live the profession of arms 100 percent every single day. They view strategic leadership as a principled duty, not as an additional task.

As they have in the past, senior NCOs today will adapt to the challenges of a new age. They will accomplish this by finding creative ways to apply time-honored principles through continuous assessment of the mission command warfighting function. That innovative approach is strategic leadership. It is a natural fit for mission command because it fosters empowerment and understanding, and necessitates collaboration.

By living a lifestyle of excellence and exhibiting a strong moral character with a resolute mindset, strategic NCOs will continue to inspire Soldiers and lead their organizations to success in decisive-action operations. ■

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