

ACHIEVING CULTURAL CHANGE



Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III speaks before more than 500 senior leaders at the fifth annual SHARP Summit, held May 7-9, 2012, in Leesburg, Va. (Photo by J.D. Leipold)

## From The SMA: Are You Really Committed To Your Soldiers?

*By Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III*

14th Sergeant Major of the Army

Our Army has faced many challenges throughout the last 12 years, and we've always been successful. But today we face another challenge, and this time it is an insider threat — sexual harassment and sexual assault of Soldiers by others in our ranks. Despite efforts during the past four years, we have not been able to show significant progress, and that has eroded our reputation among the American public and our elected leaders.

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We say this is our top priority. We've spent years studying it. We've put together programs and training. But how can we influence and change the culture in our units to achieve the outcomes we want?

I know we can turn this around, but only if our Soldiers — from junior enlisted to senior NCOs — understand what it means to be a professional, and specifically, what it means to be committed.

Commitment is looking out for your fellow Soldiers and doing what the Army says you're supposed to do as that professional. From my perspective, however, we're not really sure what 'commitment' means when it comes to sexual assault and harassment. We talk a lot about it and mention that our Warrior Ethos reinforces it, but are you really committed to your fellow Soldiers?

When I conduct town hall meetings with Soldiers, the first thing I ask them is, "Hey, do you know what

this Army profession is all about?” And in almost every session, I get only four or five answers out of literally hundreds of people.

So if you're not talking about our professional requirements, I don't know how committed you are to provide NCO leadership, to change our culture and to ensure this threat does not endanger your Soldiers.

When your Soldiers understand the Army profession, they will understand their commitment to the Army when we say, “We need you to be this type of person. You are going to have this ethos, and you are going to live this way in a values-based organization.”

Our squad leaders have an important role to play in this effort, but they cannot do this alone. Mid-grade and senior NCOs must lead the change by example. The bottom line is that our Army is going to hold everyone in the chain of command accountable, right up to the top.

Even the most junior enlisted Soldier must understand the consequences of not being committed. They need to hear from each and every one of you personally. You need to tell them why allowing this threat into our ranks undermines both our Army and our professionalism.

When I am conducting a town hall meeting, I like to use this analogy to drive home this point. I ask them, “Have you ever had something stolen from the barracks?” Dozens raise their hands, and most say it was likely done by a fellow Soldier. I follow up by asking, “How did you feel about that?”

They say they lost trust in their fellow Soldiers, and in most circumstances, they say they lost faith in their leadership because they did little once it was reported. Many had to pay out of their own pockets to replace what was taken.

Did they get upset? Heck yeah. They were furious, and so were their friends. So I ask them, “Why aren't you furious when someone's dignity and respect — which

you can't buy back — is stolen from a fellow Soldier when they are sexually assaulted?”

You've got to put this threat into terms every Soldier can understand. They don't want to just see another set of PowerPoint slides — but we're still doing that.

Another way NCOs demonstrate commitment is by showing that there are consequences. When I talk to Soldiers in small groups, they tell me they don't see senior-level involvement in addressing this threat. They know something happened, but from their perception it seems the victim and the assault have just faded away.

Inevitably something did happen. We need to have the courage to tell them, “This is what happened and we did something.” We don't have to destroy someone's dignity when we tell them this, but we owe it to our Soldiers. As professionals, we must be a self-policing organization, and there needs to be an outcome.

Our Soldiers want to hear from NCOs. They want us out of our offices, talking to them in small groups and saying, “Look, this is why this is important.” To be engaged like that takes commitment.

Our young Soldiers, who rely on us so much, want leadership, purpose, direction, motivation and understanding that we love them and we're committed to them. And by example, we will be those professionals.

It takes an Army of action, an NCO Corps willing to do its part. This cannot be delegated, and it cannot be pushed up your chain of command.

Professionalism means going above and beyond for each and every one of our Soldiers. We're going to do more than the minimum.

We have to do this because at the end of the day, we're going to be held to a higher standard. Our Army is held to a higher standard. And if we're not going to do this, Congress will.

So, are you really committed? ■

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