

THE NCO CREED

No one is more professional than I. I am a Noncommissioned Officer, a leader of soldiers. As a Noncommissioned Officer, I realize that I am a member of a time honored corps, which is known as "The Backbone of the Army". I am proud of the Corps of Noncommissioned Officers and will at all times conduct myself so as to bring credit upon the Corps, the Military Service and my country regardless of the situation in which I find myself. I will not use my grade or position to attain pleasure, profit, or personal safety.

Competence is my watchword. My two basic responsibilities will always be uppermost in my mind -- accomplishment of my mission and the welfare of my soldiers. I will strive to remain technically and tactically proficient. I am aware of my role as a Non-commissioned Officer. I will fulfill my responsibilities inherent in that role. All soldiers are entitled to outstanding leadership; I will provide that leadership. I know my soldiers and I will always place their needs above my own. I will communicate consistently with my soldiers and never leave them uninformed. I will be fair and impartial when recommending both rewards and punishment.

Officers of my unit will have maximum time to accomplish their duties; they will not have to accomplish mine. I will earn their respect and confidence as well as that of my soldiers. I will be loyal to those with whom I serve; seniors, peers, and subordinates alike. I will exercise initiative by taking appropriate action in the absence of orders. I will not compromise my integrity, nor my moral courage. I will not forget, nor will I allow my comrades to forget that we are professionals, Noncommissioned Officers, leaders!

The NCO: Army Leader, Servant Leader

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In the fall of 1989 at Fort Campbell, Ky., I was a patrol leader returning from a night reconnaissance patrol when I went to the platoon command post to submit my patrol report. When I arrived, my platoon sergeant, Sgt. 1st Class Larry Johnson, was manning the radios, both the company network and the fires network, and was the only person awake at the position. He motioned me down, placed a finger to his lips (for me to be quiet) and asked for the report. I gave him the report and he said that he would let the platoon leader know what I reported when he woke up later.

"Sgt. Johnson, have you had any rest yet?" I asked. "Nah, I'll wake the platoon leader in a little while and rack out then," he said. "They (the platoon leader, radio operator, fire support specialist and medic) need the sleep more than I do. Besides, I'm used to this."

He smiled and waved me off to also get some sleep. As I walked back to my position off the perimeter, I thought about how our grizzled platoon sergeant was always taking care of us and hoped, when it was my turn, I would do so as well.

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Each and every noncommissioned officer who sustains the Army of this nation has taken an oath. With the swearing of that oath, you enter into a sacred agreement to support the nation. They support the nation, your leaders and your subordinates through your service. This is reconfirmed in the Soldiers' Creed, which says, "I will serve the people of the United States and live the Army Values." Through these acts you have chosen to become first a servant, and through time-in-service and increases in responsibility, an NCO and a servant leader.

Servant leadership is one of many approaches to leader development. The term servant leadership has been in use since Dr. Robert Greenleaf wrote the essay, "The Servant as Leader," in 1970, which focuses on the areas of ethics and ethical leadership. The idea of the servant leader can be traced back even further—more than 2000 years—to China. This can be documented in early Chinese writings: "The sage has no invariable mind of his own; he makes the mind of the people his mind," Lao Tzu wrote in Tao Te Ching.

In his essay, Greenleaf said that a servant leader is a person who chooses first to be a servant (This sounds a great deal like an NCO, especially when considered with the Oath of Enlistment and the Soldiers' Creed). By first becoming a servant, a Soldier follows, later choosing a path to become a leader and an NCO. In this way, when Soldiers become leaders, they do not place themselves or their needs first. Rather, the servant leader places the needs of others—subordinate and senior—first and simultaneously maintains a focus on the result, or mission, of the organization and team. By following this path, this leader is seen by all members of the organization and team to be ethically motivated.

Servant leadership places primary importance and focus on the organization's people as its principal concern. Other areas of concern are minor or peripheral. This doesn't mean that results are unimportant. Indeed, by focusing on the welfare and needs of the people, the people accomplish the mission and the desired results are obtained.

Servant leaders are modeled and guided by seven characteristics that contribute to their personality. They exhibit and practice the following qualities: agape love, humility, altruism, trust, vision, empowerment and service. These guiding areas are directed toward their followers, who are the servant leader's primary concern. The foundation of this model is agape love, which can be translated to simply doing the right thing.

We can see similarities when you compare the seven Army Values—loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage—to the seven characteristic areas that guide a servant leader. Trust is

loyalty. Altruism or selflessness is selfless service. Humility calls one to respect people and treat them properly. Agape love, or doing the right thing, is integrity.

In the recently published book, *From One Leader to Another*, from the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, doing the right thing is a common message. The book is a collection of observations and insights from Army leaders who are themselves servant leaders. With their messages, these servant leaders are growing and inspiring the next generation of NCOs.

Within the Army, servant leaders are observed practicing servant leadership every day. While the mission and job come first, the Soldiers are taken care of always. This includes all Soldiers, both subordinate and senior. Army leaders eat only after their Soldiers eat and are expected to share the hardships of their subordinates. Leading by example ensures that leaders care for their subordinates first, before themselves. Doing so allows them to understand the challenges, hardships and limitations. Their subordinates, in turn, observe and emulate the actions of their servant leaders and they begin leading by example themselves.

Proof of servant leadership principles are exemplified in the words of the NCO Creed. The creed states: "I will not use my grade or position to attain pleasure, profit or personal safety.... Officers of my unit will have maximum time to accomplish their duties; they will not have to accomplish mine.... I know my Soldiers, and I will always place their needs above my own." In fact, the whole NCO Creed, along with the Soldiers' Creed, is a testament to servant leadership.

Servant leadership and the servant leader are powerful sources of inspiration in our Army today, and examples can be seen throughout time. Servant leaders, having chosen to be servants first, have in them the capacity for caring and providing for others—subordinate or senior. The servant leader feels a responsibility to do this and does not serve seeking reward. The servant leader cares for all and attempts to bring them to a level that inspires them to also become servant leaders.

Observations and experiences from my 30 years of service (27 years as a leader) have shown me that good leaders, are good followers, or servants, first. Along the way, they perfected the skills of the Army profession and learned to care for Soldiers. Eventually, they embrace the philosophy of servant leadership themselves and became servant leaders.

Soldiers can sense when their leaders genuinely care about them and this builds trust. This trust forges a bond between all and solidifies the team. That bond is all-encompassing. Soldiers know the leader genuinely cares about their needs and the leader trusts that the Soldiers will do what is required to complete the task and get the mission accomplished. ■

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