



# Leadership, Training and Paperwork

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**A**s a human resource professional, I was intrigued by the opportunity to serve in an infantry battalion. I was soon amazed by a very training-focused, disciplined and performance oriented organization. After my first day on the job, I was convinced the infantry is about caring for Soldiers and training.

Here, training and caring for Soldiers are synonymous. However, I was surprised at how often administrative actions took a back seat to training. Paperwork was routinely relegated to a lower priority. As a noncommissioned officer I think all leaders should place a renewed emphasis on paperwork to maintain our highly proficient force. Both training and administrative actions are key ingredients to maintaining the all-volunteer force.

As a career S-1 (personnel and administration) Soldier, I am humbled by some of the awards and evaluations I have read that document Soldiers routinely doing the impossible. The training they received and the leadership they were provided facilitated their actions and, ultimately, the unit's success. These warriors earned the accolades they were given.

Similarly, I have read administrative actions that poorly portrayed the excellence achieved by a Soldier. As the last person to read an action before signatures are

added, I ask that Army leaders recognize that accurately documenting our subordinates' strengths and weaknesses will help groom Soldiers for today's challenges as well as mold them into productive leaders for the Army.

After training and deploying with infantrymen, I am even more convinced of the importance of managing administrative actions. Planning, preparing and training are essential components of a successful mission. Soldiers will excel in difficult situations based on the confidence they have in the plan, but even more so on the confidence they have in their leadership taking care of them.

Just as it takes countless hours of planning, preparation and training to ensure a successful mission, leaders are in a contractual relationship with their subordinates to spend adequate time preparing evaluations, writing awards and ensuring emergency documentation is accurate. The last 12 years of war have validated to me that failing to take care of a Soldier's administrative requirements is a failure to take care of the Soldier.

## Evaluations

The Army's evaluation systems are primarily designed to offer official feedback on an individual's performance. Whether it is officer evaluation reports or NCOERs,

these documents serve as indicators of exceptional, marginal or sub-standard performance. Additionally, written counseling provides more frequent feedback on a weekly, monthly or quarterly basis. However, the strength of these evaluations rest on the evaluator. Particularly with sergeants first class and above, the rated Soldier does not stand before a promotion board, so the document provided by the evaluator is the only thing a board member sees during the promotion selection process. Therefore, failing to properly articulate the extent of one's performance during the rated period hurts both the individual and the Army.

Imagine 10 superior Soldiers competing against 10 marginal performers. The senior leaders who are members of the board will make their selection based on the strength of the written evaluations that make up a board packet. If the superior performers' evaluations are written with marginal effort, the Army suffers because strong performers will likely be placed in marginal jobs. The individuals will be deflated because their evaluations poorly depict the time and effort they gave during the rated period. Equally problematic for a promotion board is the marginal individual who should have received a marginal evaluation. Instead, the writing of the evaluation artificially inflates the NCO's actual performance. Leaders must be able to articulate the strengths—marginal or exceptional—of their subordinate's performance. Their efforts to craft a well written evaluation must match the exemplary efforts of their subordinates. The "cut and paste" technique is not good leadership and not worthy of the sacrifices today's men and women in the Army make.

## Awards

Awards are another area in which leaders can highlight exceptional service. Unfortunately, I have often seen the same template used by entire units with very little thought from the person who submitted the award.

The award system is part of the Army's history. A Soldier—regardless of rank or military occupation specialty—who performs exceptionally above the standard is deserving of an award. Associating rank with an award, instead of with an associated action or exemplary service, demeans the principle behind the award system.

Properly assessing performance is a leader's responsibility. Leaders must have the intellect to adequately articulate actions or service that is deserving of an award, regardless of the type. Leaders should also have the integrity to not submit an award for someone who failed to earn one. As with evaluations, Soldiers do not go before commanders when they are considering the approval or disapproval an award; the DA Form 638 "Recommendation for Award" and accompanying documentation does.

## Emergency Data

Emergency data information is another key component of taking care of Soldiers' administrative needs. I have heard horror stories about deployed Soldiers whose leaders failed to ensure their DD Form 93, "Record of Emergency Data," was updated. Some of these Soldiers gave the ultimate sacrifice while honorably serving their country, but the notification of their death and the benefits they allocated for their loved ones were delayed because their leaders failed to understand the importance of paperwork. Leaders include pre-combat checks and pre-combat inspections during operation order briefs. The dangers involved with training and deployments should convince us, as an Army, that emergency data should also be part of pre-combat checks and pre-combat inspections.

## Counseling

Many times we counsel a Soldier to correct errors. But how often do we counsel and award Soldiers for the good things they've done? As leaders, it is our job to promote success and enforce standards. Leaders must chronicle achievement with details and provide a thorough explanation of the Soldier's efforts and contributions to the mission. Paperwork must really portray the Soldier as they are—outstanding or mediocre. A well-articulated evaluation or award is the difference that separates a marginal Soldier from an exceptional Soldier.

## Scenario

My views about the importance of timely and accurate paperwork are reinforced daily in my current assignment as a senior human resource manager.

While deployed, my command stresses the importance of updating the DD 93s daily. The Army's system of notifying next of kin following a casualty is compromised if the paperwork is not updated. The notification process is prolonged, and the Army must improvise by contacting friends and known associates to identify the actual location of the next of kin. Unfortunately, during one of my previous deployments, the unit I replaced was forced to exercise this scenario because they failed to validate paperwork. I empathize with the family of the fallen hero whose mourning was prolonged because paperwork was outdated.

Another example of the importance of paperwork deals with one of my Soldiers from a previous assignment. Through a series of mistakes, my command was considering barring one of my troopers from re-enlisting. However, I endorsed the Soldier and his desire to remain in the Army, and I had the counseling to support my dissenting opinion. My paperwork facilitated a good Soldier remaining in the Army, and he is now being groomed for the staff sergeant board. His current command sees what I did thanks to adequate documentation.

## Conclusion

As the Army reduces its end strength, evaluations and awards will become a significant factor. Far too often leaders take evaluation bullets from generic websites or copy-and-paste bullets from previous evaluations. Soldiers deserve a better effort from their leaders, particularly with the demands we place on our Soldiers.

We already know the U.S. Army is the best-trained, best-equipped and best-led fighting force in the world. As an observer from the S-1 section, I recommend we also strive to be the best at everything we do, including taking enough time and putting forth maximum effort when writing evaluations, awards and counseling statements. Taking care of the administrative requirements is an extremely important component of taking care of the Army's most important resource—

our Soldiers. Well written evaluations will set our Soldiers apart, regardless of their branch or MOS.

My experience with the infantry has been a highlight of my career. The people I have met and the leaders I work alongside have proven the strength of our Army is the outstanding men and women who volunteer to serve this great nation. Leaders help determine the strength of the Army's future. With tools such as the evaluation and awards systems, we will build better Soldiers, better leaders and a more cohesive Army. We all take pride in our jobs and should expect that our efforts will be properly documented. Paperwork can be tedious, but it is an essential component of our Army. Our Soldiers have earned the right to expect their leaders will provide feedback fitting for their efforts. The Army must embrace the mentality that taking care of Soldiers includes taking care of paperwork. ■

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