



Sgt. 1st Class Brandon Myles speaks to the morning shift at Black Jack Inn Dining Facility at Fort Hood, Texas. After each shift, he focuses on the positive during an After Action Review. (Photo by Meghan Portillo/NCO Journal)

By Example

DFAC Manager's Positive Approach Encourages Creativity

By Meghan Portillo

Word on the street is that Black Jack Inn Dining Facility at Fort Hood, Texas, is the place to be at meal time, and the leadership skills of the DFAC's manager, Sgt. 1st Class Brandon Myles with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 115th Brigade Support Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, have a lot to do with that.

The dining facility serves about 2,400 diners per day, more than any other DFAC on post.

An average DFAC serves 400 Soldiers for lunch, Myles said, but Black Jack, which supports a brigade as well as the Basic Leader Course, often feeds 250 within the first 30 minutes.

Myles said he strives every day to create a positive environment for the 91 NCOs and Soldiers employed at the facility. By being generous with public praise and rewarding individuals who display stellar performance with an extra day off, he has enabled the DFAC personnel to be creative in a stressful and often thankless line of work.

Why did you join the Army?

I joined because my brother joined. He was food service. He came home, looked like he had himself together, and I thought I should give it a shot. If he can do it, I can do it. Now, I've been in the Army longer than any of my brothers. I've continued to serve because it really is rewarding. I enjoy helping people and serving people. When I first came in, I thought I was going to do about three years. I moved up a lot faster than I thought I would and started seeing it from a different light. I was no longer a worker bee. I became an NCO who could actually help people. I love the Army, and I love working with Soldiers.

How does your role help the Army as a whole?

We keep everybody fed, but it's bigger than that. It's keeping everybody safe, maintaining proper temps. Two thousand four hundred people may come through here. If we mishandle something, it could be 2,400 who can't

do their jobs the next day. We could kill 2,400. So it is an important job, and one I tell my Soldiers they should be proud of. Food service is probably one of the biggest morale boosters for those Soldiers who come through that door. You can either see it as a thousand critics coming through, or you can see it as being showcased every day. People go to the motor pool on Mondays. They go to S1 when they need something. We service about 2,400 people a day every single day. So you should take pride in it and put the best out there for them. Show that you are creative and have fun with it.

How do you encourage NCOs to keep Soldiers motivated?

Because it is a thankless job, you can't come down hard on them. You honestly can't. It's a stressful environment. It's high tempo; it's nonstop. You have to lighten the air. You have got to find the good stuff. Find something that is correct. Look for the positive. Give them public praise. If I see somebody really squared away, I will give them the rest of the day off. We allow them to play music in the kitchen. Sometimes we play music throughout the serving period and put it on the PA system. You can hear them singing right now.

And, if you do really well here, we can send you down to the actual culinary arts building – maybe you will get a week to go work on a different side of your craft. If we have special events, we might just have them stop working in here and work that particular event. Recently, General Martin Dempsey came in. So we took a team of people and said, "Get creative. Bounce ideas off of each other. This is your sole mission." They really love stuff like that, because they get recognized for it.

What about your NCOs makes you proud?

Normally when you work this closely with people, not everybody gets along – especially the senior NCOs. As a sergeant first class, you could just make sure your people are in the building and then go on your way. But it's really not like that here. I'm not the highest ranking sergeant first class here, but the others actually have no problem working for me. One of them was actually my Advanced Individual Training instructor. He taught me when I was a private, 13 years ago.

I think we all work well together because we share the same vision: For those 90 minutes [of service time,] we are going to be the best on the installation. Honestly, it is a competition. Nobody says it, but we want business from across post. We want everybody's business. We want to be the best. The NCOs here, we truly share that vision. They'll call me in the middle of the night, saying, "Hey man, what about this meal?" or, "How about we do this tomorrow?" They just bounce crazy ideas, and we run with it. Normally, in an environment this stressful, it is hard to be creative, much less find joy in your work, and they actually do that.

How have other NCOs helped you in your career?

I had good NCOs who actually care. Regardless of PCS moves, they were still just a phone call away. They expected a lot of me but were also approachable at the same time. They taught me more than just the food service side of the house. They taught me more than just how to cook. If you can help people and motivate them to want to do whatever it is that they do, I think that is kind of special. And that is what I had. I had only joined because my brother had joined. I was only a cook because my brother was a cook. Somewhere in there, a select few NCOs stood out and inspired me. They enjoyed their work. They taught me how to be a better person, how to be a better father, how to handle my finances. They were counselors to me, and I just try to mirror that and give that back.

What advice do you have for junior NCOs?

Be the example. Just remember somebody is watching, and wants to be you. You might not even know who it is, but a subordinate is watching you. You are creating another you. Somebody is going to emulate what it is that you do, be it right or wrong. You really are part of something bigger than yourself, especially when you become an NCO. It's no longer just about you. You are responsible for more than yourself. People come from all different walks of life. You have to be approachable. You have to know your audience. What makes one person tick won't make another person tick. You just have to find what works. ■



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