



Soldiers from Echo Company, 16th Ordnance Battalion, participate in a team-building Physical Readiness Training session that incorporated elements of suicide awareness and prevention at Fort Lee, Virginia, Feb. 8, 2018. (Courtesy photo provided by U.S. Army Garrison Fort Lee Public Affairs)

# Genuine Leadership

## Getting back to the Basics

*Command Sgt. Maj. Ronald Riling*

U.S. Army Materiel Command

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**W**hile the Army has made significant changes over its 237 year history, some things never change. The fundamentals of a good leader have remained steadfast over the past few centuries. As noncommissioned officers, we owe it to our peers and our subordinates to be the best leaders we can be.

I believe these are four primary tenets to maintain the strength of the NCO Corps: go back to the basics, maintain discipline, enforce the standards, and communicate. An NCO who is able to practice those four crafts will have a unit that can accomplish any mission it sets out to accomplish.

### Back to the Basics

We've been a nation at war for more than a decade. The events of 9/11/2001 came as a surprise to all of us, but we've met the challenge head on. However, as a result of spending rotation after rotation in a combat environment, we've lost our focus on training and equipping the force. In order for the Army to succeed, we must be manned, equipped, trained and ready for combat. Our Army and our Soldiers – particularly our NCOs - must be ready for the unknown. We don't know when it's happening, or what it will be, but it is going to happen. We can't let our guard down. Only





U.S. Army Pfc. Dallas Gibbs (left), a petroleum supply specialist, and Spc. Kevin Ogle, a motor transport operator, both with the 191st Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 96th Sustainment Brigade, conduct preventive maintenance checks and services on a M1088 fuel truck at Mihail Kogalniceanu, Romania, Jan. 14, 2019. Regionally allocated forces conduct maintenance regularly to maintain readiness and lethality, and participate in future training exercises with partners and allies. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Kris Bonet, 24th Theater Public Affairs Support Element)

backwards in your unit. While you're looking at physical training, take a look at your height and weight standards. What are you doing as a leader to teach your Soldiers good eating habits and good PT habits? Lead by example here – if your Soldiers see you doing PT, and picking a healthy meal over a high fat, fast food meal, they'll understand how it works. Our Army has to get back in shape.

one percent of our population makes the choice to defend America. We've got to make sure we do it right.

When I talk about getting back to the basics, I'm talking about falling back to what we know works – about reestablishing the foundation that Soldiers need to be successful.

An NCO who gets back to the basics makes sure to make time to do some “housekeeping” – are you taking care of those garrison duties? Are you and your Soldiers doing maintenance on your personal and organization equipment? Are you conducting counseling? Holding inspections? Checking on the barracks? This is “NCO 101”. We all learned how to perform these duties, we just need to get back to actually doing it.

While you're in garrison, work off your Professional Military Education back log. Send your Soldiers and NCOs to school. We must develop our future leaders because one day they will replace us. How about you? Are you working toward a degree? If not, you should be. One day you will retire, and that degree will serve you well.

A formal education isn't the only thing you should be focusing on – you need to make sure you are conducting Officer and NCO Professional Development. Sometimes you need to combine them. Make sure your Officers and your NCOs spend some good training time together. Remember your bearing, but don't try to make all of those sessions formal.

Physical training is also important. There's a new training circular out, TC 3-22.20. Get familiar with it. This is what is being taught in basic training. Don't go

We have to educate our Soldiers on the choices they make and then enforce the standards.

While we're getting back to the basics, don't forget the importance of counseling. Our Soldiers deserve to know what the standards are, and how well they are doing at meeting those standards. You can't expect a Soldier to meet the standards if you've never established the standards. Counseling doesn't have to always be negative. If your Soldiers are doing well, you should tell them as much. We all like a little encouragement and acknowledgment from our senior leaders. Don't wait to do counseling until it is too late. If you see something going in the wrong direction, see if you can steer it back on track.

Another basic area we must return to is maintenance. We've got Soldiers who have never had to take care of their own vehicles. That's going to change. The contracts we have in place now might not continue. We must train our Soldiers to do maintenance. Get in your motor pools and see what your Soldiers know. You will be surprised.

It's not just about vehicles; we've got to sustain our equipment. Do you know what your Sustainment Brigades are capable of? How about your AFSBs? Get them to help you out. Start thinking about motor stables. It's important that you start thinking about how to sustain your own equipment - as many of us did in the past. Dollars are dwindling. You're going to end up doing your own sustainment and maintenance.

## Maintain discipline

We all know our equipment is only as good as our operators. What are we doing to maintain discipline in our operators – our Soldiers? What are we doing to make sure our Soldiers are good representatives of the uniform and the nation?

Let's clean up alcohol and drug issues. When was your last urinalysis test? Do you have a good screening program in place? If folks have a problem, it's your responsibility to get them help before it's too late. If you send a Soldier to rehab, give them a chance to do better. Why would you waste the funds if you don't give them a chance?

Drugs, alcohol and other discipline issues in senior NCOs and Officers will get you thrown out. We don't have time for bad leaders. We don't need to tolerate bad leaders. Bad leaders create toxic work environments, and we simply don't need to tolerate it. Hazing? Not in our Army.

Everyone complains about the young Soldiers who come in our Army. Instead of complaining, make it your responsibility to work with them. Basic training only has them for nine weeks. Take ownership of them and help them become a good Soldier. Show them what right looks like. If you've got a bad Soldier, take a long look at how you've helped mentor and train them. You might be part of the issue if you haven't taken time to be a good leader, a good NCO.

## Enforce the Standards

A good NCO always enforces the standard. Salute. Give the greeting of the day to Officers. Be polite and professional. Are we calling "attention" and "at ease" for Officers and NCOs? Are we saluting? Are we standing at "parade rest" for NCOs? These are things that make our Army better than the rest. Let's not lose that tradition or that standard.

A great way to make sure standards are established and met is to use the Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Reporting System the way it was designed. NCOERs are changing to better align with the current

doctrine on leadership. Use that NCOER to reduce inflated evaluations. Use that NCOER to provide greater separation between marginal, average and outstanding performers. Enforcing the standards in the evaluation process will ensure we have a disciplined system in place that paints a clear and accurate picture of our NCO Corps.

## Communicate, communicate, and communicate

As is the case in so many things, communication is the key. As a leader and as an NCO, people are watching you. And they are listening to you. Our Army policies are changing constantly. Agree or disagree, you need to watch how you voice your opinion on contentious topics. It's your job to understand, explain, and enforce new policies and processes. It's not your job to spout off about how much you disagree or agree with the policies. Doing so can create a toxic leadership environment, and we don't need that in our formations. Try to keep in mind that leaders take care of Soldiers, and Soldiers take care of Soldiers. Don't make remarks about your personal feelings. You're there to communicate the standards and to enforce them.

I cannot overstate how important communication is. The number one reason for suicide is relationship issues. Does your Soldier trust you enough to talk to you if he or she has a problem? Do they feel like you will listen? We've got to be engaged and help prevent these suicides from happening.



U.S. Army Pfc. Benjamin Ambrosio, a wheeled vehicle mechanic assigned to 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division, conducts routine maintenance for up armored patrol vehicles at Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan, Feb. 14, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by 1st Lt. Verniccia Ford)





U.S. Army Sgt. Marcus Demchak, a squad leader assigned to Alpha Troop, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, provides instruction on the M120 Mortar System at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, June 22, 2017. Demchak taught indirect fire infantryman on how to deal with a mortar miss fire during sergeant's time training. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Armando R. Limon, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division)

Leaders care 24/7 – not just in combat, but also in garrison. You've got to know your people. You have to talk to your formations. Leaders and Soldiers are tired and we need to watch out for each other. Take leave and rest when the opportunity is given. If you need help, ask for it and make sure your Soldiers know they can ask you for help as well.

Our Army is changing. But it's nothing new – it's nothing we haven't been through before. As we change, we will find ways to grow stronger. One thing that will never change is the need for NCOs to serve as the best possible example to junior Soldiers. NCOs serve as the "go to" work force for senior leaders. As long as we continue to focus on the basics, maintain discipline, enforce the standards, and communicate – up and down the chain - NCOs will remain the "Backbone of the Army". ■

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