



U.S. Army Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, complete the "Gut Buster" obstacle at the Camp Buehring, Kuwait Air Assault obstacle course June 6, 2019. The Soldiers, currently deployed in support of Operation Spartan Shield, completed the course in small teams in memory of the 1-8 Soldiers who landed on Utah Beach as part of the D-Day invasion of Normandy. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Liane Hatch)

Six Pillars of a Successful NCO

By John L. Hewitt III

86th Training Division

On June 28, 2019, I had the pleasure of delivering a speech to the graduates of Class 007-19 of the Basic Leader Course (BLC) at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin. As the senior civilian at the 86th Training Division, and an 18-year military officer, the faculty at the academy was interested in my leadership philosophy and thought it would benefit the newly minted noncommissioned officers (NCOs). The following is adapted from my remarks that day.

I am not going to provide you a chronological timeline of my accomplishments. And I won't tell you to do things I do not personally practice or believe. And I am definitely not going to tell you that I have paid off your college loans, like Robert F. Smith did at a recent Morehouse College's graduation, although that was a shining

example of leadership in action (McGregor, 2019). But I will tell you that, like you, I am a work in progress.

Today I will deliver a little message I call *Be (6)*. It's six things I want to impart to you before I leave. I find this to be an appropriate message for leaders in today's Army for three reasons: First, you are warriors. And warriors are lethal. Let's be clear, your job is to engage and destroy the enemy in close combat. Understanding that, however, we should also remember a few things. Warriors practice self-control. Warriors are agile, adaptive, intellectually savvy, and possess emotional intelligence, that, like good diplomacy, can end wars before they even begin.

Second, these six principles complement what you've learned in your Basic Leader Course. Further, these principles transcend your time in uniform, they should have



John L. Hewitt III gives a speech at a Basic Leaders Course graduation ceremony at the Noncommissioned Officer Academy at Fort McCoy, Wis., June 28, 2019. (Photo courtesy of the Fort McCoy NCO Academy)

a perpetual place in your life. And lastly, because you are NCOs, and NCOs are people of action, each principle is about action. Something you should do. Something you should employ. Something you should master.

Be Hungry

First, I want you to *be hungry*. You must possess an insatiable desire to achieve. Passion and motivation are not enough, you must develop a hunger. This hunger, unlike passion and motivation, will not only propel you forward from goal to goal, success to success, but it will sustain you through life's inevitable setbacks (Pietrzak, 2017).

Today's accomplishment should be the tip of the iceberg. Yes, savor the moment and be proud, but remember, success has no finish line. Although you completed a noble feat, you should not be satisfied. You should immediately begin focusing on the next goal. According to one of the greatest NFL coaches of all time, Bill Belichick, "If you sit back and spend too much time feeling good about what you did in the past, you're going to come up short next time" (2018, para. 1). Keep your hunger focused on the future. Do not allow current success to dampen your desire for more success (Malyon, 2018). You do not have all the time in the world (Arieff 2018). So *be hungry*.

Be Hard

When you pursue achievement and success, you will encounter trials and tribulations. That is why I want you to *be hard*. I am not talking about being stubborn, mean,

smug, or apathetic. When I say hard, I am referring to resilience.

Hard people can be counted on, especially when situations are tough. Hard men and women make sound decisions under fire. They are not easily swayed by distractions. They do not crumble at the first signs of adversity.

According to research, when you view challenges as an opportunity to learn, problem-solve, and increase confidence, you move closer to building long-term resilience ("The Road to Resilience," n.d.). So *be hard*.

Be Helpful

As you chase life's challenges, you will encounter tough times. And you will not be the only one. Remember, others struggle also, which is why you should be helpful. According to *Merriam-Webster Online* (2019), helpfulness is being "of service or assistance" (para. 1). Helpfulness enables you to build connections with others, especially with those you lead currently, as well as those you will lead in the future. It requires you to check your ego, which improves communication and collaboration, ultimately improving organizational outcomes (Hall, 2017).

So when you get back to your units, identify areas of improvement and consult with your immediate supervisor and take on the responsibility of improving and sustaining



A grader keeps track of laps while Soldiers from the 223rd Military Intelligence Battalion perform a two-mile run during an Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT) at the Parks Reserve Forces Training Area in Dublin, California, March 16, 2019. The two-mile run is the last of six events in the ACFT, which was designed to assess a Soldier's ability to perform activities faced in real-life scenarios. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Amy E. Carle)

those efforts. For example, if you have a young Soldier struggling with the new Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT) events like the 3 Repetition Maximum Deadlift, you can help that Soldier check out the ACFT website (<https://www.army.mil/acft/>) and create a training program that utilizes the alternate exercises until they develop their muscles enough to master the deadlift event (Army Combat Fitness Test, n.d.)

Also, beyond just your immediate unit, get out into the community and improve it. You, or your entire unit, can partner up with a local organization and clean a street, help the elderly with chores like yard work or groceries, build a home for a veteran, or hand out food to families in need. Not only will this benefit those involved by instilling a sense of duty and helpfulness, but it will promote a positive Army reputation, furthering our relationship with civilians. This could improve recruiting efforts, increasing the number and quality of future Soldiers.



A U.S. Paratrooper with the 82nd Airborne Division, receives some motivating words from his coach while he participates in the Thunderdome Competition during All American Week XXIX at Fort Bragg, N.C., May 23, 2018. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Jada Owens)

Be Hopeful

Next, I want you to *be hopeful*. Hope never replaces planning, but it's also not a liability. According to Scott Kaufman, the Scientific Director of the Imagination Institute at the University of Pennsylvania:

“Having goals is not enough. One has to keep getting closer to those goals, amidst all the inevitable twists and turns of life. Hope allows people to approach problems with a mindset and strategy-set suitable to success, thereby increasing the chances they will actually accomplish their goals. (Kauffman, 2011, para. 5)”

Life is full of challenges and difficulties. Talent and skill are not enough to achieve your goals and dreams. You must also possess the will to achieve those goals, especially when life gets tough. Hope is what keeps you focused, determined, and positive.

Consider this on your path to hopefulness: Set your expectations. The way we expect the world to be changes how we see it. If you think things will be tough, they will be. If you think today is your day. It will be. It is in your mind. You can change your life at any time, irrespective of your circumstances (Kauffman, 2011). Be inspired. *Be hopeful*.

Be Humble

As a leader, you should recognize that you do not know everything. This is the first step to humility. Humility is not about being passive, submissive, weak, or insecure. According to Dr. Karl Albrecht (2015), humility “involves an experience of growth in which you no longer need to put yourself above others. Everyone is a peer, from the most important person to the least.” (para. 17).

Think about the greatest leaders of all time. Most of them suffered ego-bruising losses or failures that reoriented them on improved qualities and a focus on others (Treasurer, 2016). Humility and learning go hand-in-hand. According to the *Forbes Coaching Council*, humility allows you to magnify



U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Moore, a combat medic assigned to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, Regional Health Command-Europe secures a simulated casualty on a sked while under a simulated chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear attack during the 21st Theater Sustainment Command Best Medic Competition in Baumholder, Germany, Aug. 22, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Jesse Pilgrim)

your strengths, connect with others, increase your curiosity, handle change and the unknown, break down barriers in your teams (or squads, platoons, companies, etc.), see beyond yourself, explore opportunities, and earn admiration and respect (2017).

Learning is truly about humility. Consider these actions on your path to humility: Listen to others attentively and actively. Do not rush to get your comments in. Be helpful as well as ask for help. Don't be prideful. Make it a habit to say thank you. And remember, you do not know everything, nor do you possess all the skills and talents to do everything yourself. So *be humble*.

Be Accountable

Merriam Webster defines accountability as "an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions" ("Accountability," n.d., para. 2). Being accountable and reliable is the backbone of an NCO. And the NCO is the backbone of the Army.

An NCO's dependability, especially under stress and impossible odds is what makes the United States Army a lethal fighting force. So go forth, build your foundation of leadership upon these six pillars, and do good in this world. Go be warriors. ■

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