

Why are the basics important to a leader

Sgt. Troy V. Clark Jr.

229TH Chemical Company, 276th Engineer Battalion

June 15, 2018



Sgt. Edward Monell, a team leader with 10th Sustainment Brigade Command Security Team, instructs Soldiers as they conduct a reflexive fire exercise May 23 in Afghanistan. The training was conducted to hone the team's ability to shoot, move and communicate. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Luis Saavedra, 10th Mountain Division Sustainment Brigade Public Affairs Office)

When we talk about the basics of leadership and why they are important to a leader, we should understand the Army is built upon them. They are prerequisites to Soldier success. A former noncommissioned officer-in-charge, who I consider a leader and mentor, introduced me to the four R's; the right place, the right time, the right uniform, and do the right thing. They may sound cliché, but those words were powerful and grounding, but most of all they

stuck in the mind of an optimistic E-4 who hung on every word. If you are in the right place, at the right time, in the right uniform, and you are doing the right thing, you minimize the chances of drawing unwanted attention.

Soldier's Creed and Warrior Ethos

The Soldier's Creed (<https://www.army.mil/values/soldiers.html>) and Warrior Ethos (<https://www.army.mil/values/warrior.html>) are two examples of the basics. Every single line and paragraph of the NCO Creed (<https://www.army.mil/values/nco.html>) outlines NCO expectations. It provides guidance and direction. I always knew I wanted to be a leader, I knew I wanted to help people and transform "helping" into words such as leading, training, and developing while giving purpose, direction, and motivation.

I think it all boils down to your level of bearing and integrity. If you conduct yourself as if the world is listening and your parents are watching, then the chances of suffering a loss of confidence and embarrassment due to lack of professionalism are slim. Most importantly, you have to remember you are not perfect and even though you may try to be squared away to the tenth power, you are still susceptible to human error or unforeseen circumstances. They are part of life and no matter how much you plan and prepare the inevitable can always happen.

The Growing Pain Years

I remember transitioning from Basic Training to Advanced Individual Training then to my home station unit. During the next five years, which I call my Army growing pain years, I experienced many different leadership styles, some purposeful and others not. The leadership styles, I witnessed, influenced me to be the leader I am today.

One of the most valuable lessons I learned is we cannot focus on the messenger but must instead focus on the message and its value. To remain resilient and focus on the message regardless of the delivery, we have to adopt a positive attitude and not allow personal feelings to influence it.

Having been in the Army for more than 10 years, I can identify the strengths and weaknesses of other leaders as well as my own. If you adopt that mindset, then communications may improve, and you would be open to new thoughts and problem-solving strategies.

The Army is extremely diverse, with Soldiers from across the world. We can learn a lot culturally from the Soldiers with whom we live, work and share the battlefield.

Take Care of Your Soldiers

The most important and basic responsibility of any leader is to take care of the Soldiers. Why? Because without if you don't support them they won't support you and without their support operations would fail. Soldier care is the most important NCO responsibility.

At a minimum, every squad leader should check on his or her Soldiers once or twice a month. NCOs need to understand their Soldiers are not all the same, they all do not come from the same place, speak the same language, nor have the same dialect. Most of all, we were not all raised the same way. Some were adopted or came from single-parent homes. Ultimately, we look at the world through a different lens and a different perspective and have formulated our way of doing things.

According to Field Manual 6-22

(https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/fm6_22.pdf), Leader Development, "Team welfare is vital to completing a mission while maintaining morale. Taking care of followers will allow creation of a closer working relationship. Leaders must be able to keep an eye on the mission while being cognizant of and caring for the people working for them."¹

FM 6-22, "Table 7-8, Balances mission and welfare of followers," states:

- Regularly assesses mission effects on the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of subordinates.
- Checks-in with team members and subordinates to monitor morale and safety.
- Provides appropriate relief when difficult conditions risk jeopardizing subordinate success.
- Builds a cohesive team moving in one direction to achieve common goals.
- Offers support and resources when a team member seems unnecessarily overloaded.²

Transparency and Accountability

My grandparents raised me, and they taught me transparency and accountability. For example, if I went out, my grandfather said, "Son, let me know where you're going and what time you will be back". At the time I thought, "He's trying to control what I do." Thankfully, I now understand the value of what he was trying to instill in me. It relates to our Soldiers because accountability is responsibility. If NCOs don't know what's going on with their Soldiers, they cannot provide an accurate health and welfare report and know the wellbeing of their Soldiers.

Stewardship

Stewardship is an important leadership responsibility. When NCOs take care of entrusted resources, they improve equipment longevity and the mission. Good stewardship practices start with taking care of your personal belongings, vehicles, homes, and possessions. Army stewardship is as simple as cleaning the trash out of vehicles and taking care of the equipment entrusted to your care. As leaders, NCOs should set the example at every opportunity. Take the opportunity to coach your Soldiers and show how to complete tasks by getting your hands dirty alongside them.

Purpose, Direction, and Motivation

The NCOs job again is to lead, train and develop, not tell, run, and hide. For example, one of the soldiers in my section was tasked by another NCO to clean the inside of the unit's bus. When I checked on him to see how it was going, he was dabbing the mop on the steps. I could see the floor was still dirty and there was trash under the seats. I explained to the Soldier what needed to happen, we developed a plan, and we executed the task together.

I explained to the Soldier that it was important the bus be cleaned to standard because otherwise, germs will collect inside and because keeping things maintained saves time and money. I also told him that when a task or duty is assigned, he should do it to the best of his ability, that he should take pride in what he does whether it's cleaning a bus or executing a mission. Whatever the duty, he should accomplish it with pride because it will have his name on it.

So what did that do for the Soldier? It gave him purpose, direction, and motivation.

It is understood you may not have time to explain the "why" but as a former NCO once told me – "If your Soldiers trust in your example, they will essentially follow you through the fire." That is our job as NCOs. We should take the time to coach our Soldiers and capitalize on every opportunity we can simply because it's the right thing to do.

Four-Step Plan

The method I use to help develop my Soldiers is a simple four-step plan. The first step, figure out where you are in life. Second, figure out where you want to go and if you are undecided just do something positive. Third, figure out what tools you have to help you get where you want to go, certifications, skills, etc. Forth and last, develop a plan, get in touch with like-minded people, and use techniques that will help you reach your goals. Most of all, the best way to get ahead is to help yourself.

Conclusion

We all have encountered and dealt with hardships, upsets, letdowns, disappointments, and rejections. Do not use them as excuses, use them as a sword to fight through current and future battles. Most of all, share your knowledge. Talk to your Soldiers about your experiences, they need to hear them. You may never know what a Soldier is going through, but if you share what you know, it will increase awareness.

So, you have to ask yourself this question ... are you sticking to the basics? If not, it is imperative that you get back to them because they are the foundation of Soldier success.

Notes

1. Leader Development, FM 6-22 (Headquarters, Department of the Army, June 2015), chapter 7, 7-12, https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/fm6_22.pdf (https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/fm6_22.pdf).
2. FM 6-22, Chapter 7, Table 7-8.