

Examples of Leadership

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Published in the NCO Journal's 1991 fall issue

Jan. 31, 2018



Staff Sgt. Joseph Polcsa, representing U.S. Army Pacific, leads his Soldiers by example, competing up to the level of 2016 Best Warrior at Fort A.P. Hill, Sept. 28. (U.S. Army photo by David Vergun)

As guides and mentors, noncommissioned officers have left lasting impressions on today's NCO. Here are some of their examples of leadership.

Most first-term soldiers depend on NCOs to help guide them through every imaginable situation, much like a trail master leads an unknowing group through a perilous jungle.

Just as a trail master protects tourists from danger and shows them the highlights of the trip, an NCO works to keep first termers out of trouble and points them in the right direction.

Almost all of us eventually come into contact with someone we will always remember, someone we respect, someone whose guidance helped us.

When Sgt. Rock makes a favorable and unforgettable impression on Pvt. Snuffy, for instance, Snuffy is likely to always recall how Rock took care of his needs and looked after his welfare. If Snuffy decides to reenlist in the Army and later is promoted to a leadership position, chances are that Snuffy will follow Rock's example.

One or two caring moments between soldiers usually isn't enough for one soldier to totally respect the other.

Unless that one caring moment is dramatic or meaningful enough to leave a lasting impression.

Such was the case for Spc. Victor Borges, who now works with G-1 of the 7th Infantry Division (Light) at Fort Ord, California. While serving with the 1st Battalion, 65th Infantry, Puerto Rico National Guard, Borges witnessed an action by his first sergeant, Benjamin Rodriguez, that he will never forget.

"We were about four hours into the land navigation part of the training (at the Jungle Operations Training Center in Panama), when two soldiers

dropped from heat exhaustion," said Borges.

"Others were dizzy and falling down in the steaming heat. On top of that we had run out of water. All the company commander would say is, 'Just get the mission accomplished.'

The platoon sergeants complained to the commanding officer that the soldiers needed water, but were told that the mission needed to be completed.

"Then 1st Sgt. Rodriguez shows up. He tells the CO that the troops won't move until they're rested and resupplied with water," Borges said. "By this time, about 10 soldiers had dropped from heat exhaustion. The first sergeant also instructed the platoon sergeants not to move their troops."

By challenging the company commander, Borges' first shirt had put his rank on the line. "But the first sergeant was mad. His attitude was 'I'd rather save lives than worry about what might happen because I challenged the CO.' I've worked with good NCOs and bad NCOs. But Rodriguez' example of caring will always stay with me."

Sgt. Ned Kelley, who is assigned to the same section and unit as Borges, worked with a staff sergeant who wound up being his role model. Kelley said Staff Sgt. Willis Butler was the kind of soldier who also stood up for his soldiers.

"I admired Butler from the first day I saw him. When he signed into the personnel actions branch, they wanted him to work in an E-5 slot," Kelley said. "He went around and around with them and, finally, he ended up in the slot that reflected his rank."

"He taught me how to stand up for myself as an NCO. He also taught me how to separate my professional from my personal life."

Besides being in good physical condition, he was always there to listen to problems and give advice, Kelley said.

"A first-term soldier in our unit was having personal problems. Married only a year, brand new to the Army and close to divorcing her husband back in the states, her job performance was going down," Kelley remembered.

"Butler, married himself, noticed and set up a counseling session. He told the soldier about his personal way of dealing with separation and suggested other avenues of counseling."

He also arranged for her to call her husband and talk over the situation. Then he talked her into taking two weeks of leave to go home and patch things up," Kelley said. "I learned later that the couple's marriage survived."

"Butler earned respect the old fashioned way," Kelley said. "He earned it by listening and by sharing his experiences and know-how to guide her in such a way that she solved her own problem."