

Not in My Squad leads to better NCOs

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Upon his arrival at the Center for the Army Profession and Ethic (CAPE), it took no time for Sgt. Maj. Boris Bolanos, senior enlisted advisor at CAPE, to realize that many junior NCOs have never seen how the first principle of mission command.

Since then, Bolaños has taken the Not in My Squad concept on the road from West Point, New York, conducting seminars throughout the Army. NIMS is the sergeant major of the Army’s initiative, which was designed to teach junior NCOs how to strengthen mutual trust, build cohesion and address issues Soldiers face.

“Not in My Squad uses the principles of mission command, which is to exercise disciplined initiative and accept the prudent risk,” Bolaños said. “The noncommissioned officer at the squad level understands that he has the autonomy and authority to make decisions at his or her level and that he can take care of those systemic issues in the squad. It relieves the senior leaders of having to deal with those issues that the squad leader is there for — he is there to train, lead, coach and mentor those subordinate Soldiers under his supervision, his stewardship.”²

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey launched NIMS two years ago, giving greater responsibility to junior NCOs. The concept for the initiative originated after Dailey heard a group of West Point cadets taking responsibility for their behavior and upholding the Army ethic on and off duty.³

The intent was to develop the grassroots approach at the organizational or the direct leadership level and have units

embrace the idea of empowering junior NCOs to lead squads, sections or teams and handle problems within their elements, Bolaños said.⁴

“The highest performing squads are those that are built upon trust — trust in their leaders and trust in one another,” Dailey said in an instructional video on NIMS played during workshops. “This is the essential element of Not in My Squad. ... Squad leaders are in a position to have an immediate impact on their Soldiers by modeling the Army ethic.”⁵

Bolaños visits installations to spread and teach the NIMS concept across the Army.

“That’s one of the major outcomes of NIMS — that we expect to go out to the divisions, the corps, in some cases some of the separate brigades, like we just came back from [visiting] 2nd Cavalry Regiment in Vilseck, Germany,” he said. “It was a very successful event, and we want to do that with as many units as possible, not only active component units but also National Guard and Reserve units.”

During workshops, NCOs work in cells to discuss unit-level concerns and issues. Following the group evaluation, NCOs are asked to use the leadership skills learned during the workshop to problem-solve and present practical solutions to issues.⁶

Bolaños urges NCOs to sign up for a workshop, and if a NIMS workshop isn’t planned to talk to senior leaders and ask them to request one. A NIMS workshop is an investment in NCOs, he said.

“The investment is in mission command,” said Patrick Toffler, a research and assessment analyst for CAPE. “NIMS contributes to mutual trust and cohesive teamwork, which is the first principle of mission command. It’s an add-on; it’s part of preparing for the conduct of the mission. If somebody tells you to conduct eight hours of SHARP training, you are going to say, ‘How am I going to fit this in?’ If someone tells you that you need to prepare to conduct a mission, you say, ‘Of course.’ So teaching your squad leaders how to strengthen mutual trust and strengthen cohesive teamwork is contributing to the mission.”⁷

Junior NCOs have not been taught how to use mission command to help the Army, Bolaños said.⁸

“One of the things I do as a sergeant major overseeing the initiative, as I go around all these different installations, brigades and divisions, is that I bring the perspective of mission command as the junior squad leaders are presenting the challenges that they face within their squads,” he said.

Command Sgt. Maj. David Davenport, command sergeant major of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, recently invited Bolaños to be a panelist during TRADOC’s State of NCO Development Town Hall 4.

“What I would like for [panelists] to do is to remind NCOs that there is no greater honor than to be a member of this NCO Corps,” Davenport said. “And to be a member of this NCO Corps comes with a lot of requirements — not only can you recite the NCO Creed or the Seven Core Army Values, but you actually live them and you reinforce them to your Soldiers; you discipline your Soldiers when they don’t live up to a standard, and develop plans of action for corrective actions, like if they can’t pass a PT test; you invest in your Soldiers to get the most out of them.”⁹

References

1. Sgt. Maj. Boris Bolaños in discussion with the author, March 2017.
2. Ibid.
3. Dailey, Daniel A., “Sgt. Maj. of the Army Dailey Not in My Squad (NIMS) Workshop Introduction” YouTube. June 3, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FIVNryPNGtE>
4. Bolaños, Boris, March 2017.

5. Dailey, Daniel, "NIMS Workshop" June 3, 2016
6. Bolaños, Boris, March 2017.
7. Patrick Toffler (research and assessment analyst) in discussion with the author, March 2017.
8. Bolaños, Boris, March 2017.
9. Command Sgt. Maj. David Davenport in discussion with the author, March 2017.