

The officer, NCO relationship

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1st Lt. Chris Neyman, a platoon leader with the 1st Infantry Division, 3rd Brigade Reconnaissance Troop, consults with his platoon sergeant and senior scouts while conducting clearing operations in Fallujah, Iraq November 15, 2004, during Operation Al-Fajr. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Kimberly Snow)

The cohesiveness and morale of an Army unit, whether it be a platoon, company, or larger element, directly reflects on the interaction between the officers and noncommissioned officers.

According to Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-22, section 2-15, NCOs have roles as trainers, mentors, communicators, and advisors. When junior officers first serve in the Army, their NCOs help to train and mold them, forming professional and personal bonds based on mutual trust and common goals. "Watching each other's back" is a fundamental step in team building and cohesion.¹

Integral to the Army's success, is the professional relationship between officer and NCO.² Leaders, of all ranks, form and mold this professional relationship, from counseling to training events, on a continuous basis.

The initial opportunity may be formal, such as a counseling session or an informal handshake, which provides both leaders the opportunity to begin to assess each other and formulate opinions based on appearance, demeanor, body language, and mannerisms.³

Building the Team

To help establish a professional relationship, an NCO should meet with his or her new platoon leader and identify roles and responsibilities.

This first meeting will provide the officer an idea of how an experienced NCO assists in leading the team and helps to establish the professional relationship and build the trust necessary for high performing teams.

"The officer and NCO relationship is like a marriage", said retired Maj. Gen. Donald R. Infante, coauthor of "Officer or NCO? Who Does What?" "When you are married, you take care of each other."⁴

"The best way to develop the NCO and officer relationship is through trust" said retired Sgt. 1st Class Tate West, former battalion logistics NCO.

"NCOs can earn that trust by knowing their Soldiers and accomplishing their mission, which allows their officers to have confidence in their abilities and the decisions they make."⁵

Since NCOs are stewards of traditions, customs, and courtesies of the Army and the unit, it is important maintain and continue these legacies with the next generation of Soldiers.⁶ Young officers should expect their NCOs to coach and mentor them, recognizing the need for mutual development and shared understanding. The platoon sergeant must integrate them into the team, molding and educating them to the Army life and culture.

Mentorship is an important aspect of the officer and NCO relationship. Mentoring is the voluntary developmental relationship that exists between a person of greater experience and a person of lesser experience characterized by mutual trust and respect. Mentoring extends beyond the scope of chain of command relationship and occurs when a mentor provides the mentee advice and counsel. Effective mentoring will positively affect personal and professional development. Assessment, feedback, and guidance are critical within the mentoring relationship and must be valued by the mentee in order for growth and development to occur.⁷

"I met my platoon sergeant on a late afternoon deep in the Fort Hood, Texas, training area. He walked up, saluted and laid out the next 12 hours." said Maj. Terron Wharton, currently the systems manager, Army Capabilities Integration Center. "Over the next three hours I saw that my NCO had set me up for success, ensuring I made an excellent first impression with the platoon and my NCOs. It was the start of a great relationship that lasts to this day."⁸

ADRP 6-22, describes mentoring as the voluntary developmental relationship between persons of greater and lesser experience:

Supportive mentoring occurs when a mentor does not outrank the person being mentored, but has extensive knowledge and experience. Contrary to common belief, mentoring relationships are not confined to the superior-subordinate relationship. They may occur between peers and often between senior NCOs and junior officers. This relationship can occur across many levels of rank. In many circumstances, this relationship extends past the time where one party has left the chain of command.⁹

Together officers and NCOs share common goals, mission accomplishment, and Soldier welfare.

The New Company Commander

As officers advance in rank and become company commanders, officers-in-charge or staff officers, they will meet their primary NCO in-charge. The outcome of this meeting will probably reflect the officer's first encounter with an NCO many years before.

These midlevel officers should expect their first sergeants and other senior NCOs to train and educate both officers and Soldiers, maintain standards, and assist in developing the unit's goals and missions. Additionally, they should expect the senior NCO to have a strong sense of duty and be standard-bearers in appearance, morals, ethics, values, and job competency, which becomes the foundation for building unit cohesion.¹⁰

Engaged leadership is critical to unit team building and cohesion, according to Command Sgt. Maj. Jason Maynard, senior fires support training NCO, National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California.

"Leaders set the stage for the environment in the unit," Maynard said. "A leaders attitude and actions directly affect Soldiers."¹¹

Training Circular 7-22.7, *Noncommissioned Officer Guide*, bases the foundation for this environment on mutual trust.

Mutual trust and common goals are the two characteristics that enhance the relationship between Officers and NCOs. For instances, "NCOs have roles as trainers, mentors, communicators, and advisors. When junior officers first serve in the Army, their NCO helps to train and mold them. Doing so ensures Soldier safety while forming professional and personal bonds with the officers based on mutual trust and common goals" NCOs are "the backbone of the Army" and are the senior enlisted advisors who assist Commanders with knowledge and discipline for all enlisted matters.¹²

What Kind of NCO are you?

NCOs are instructors and mentors, throughout every level of command, and are responsible for the development of Soldiers and officers alike. Therefore, establishing a good professional relationship with their officers is vital to unit success.

Ask yourself; are you the advisor? Are you communicating the commander's intent? Are you enforcing the standards? Are you building or burning bridges? Are you training leaders and are you the consummate professional? Does your working relationship feel like an arranged marriage or wedded bliss? Are you part of the process, or part of the problem?

Join the discussion at <https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal> (<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>).

Notes

1. U.S. Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-22. *Army Leadership*. Department of the Army. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2012 sec 2-15

2. U.S. Army. *Noncommissioned Officer Guide*. Department of the Army. TC 7-22.7. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2015

3. Ron Rossier. "Building the NCO/Officer Team When does the process begin." *The NCO Journal*, Winter 1993, 8.

4. MG Donald R. Infante and MSG Norman J. Oliver, "The Officer and the NCO: Who Does What?" *Officer's Call*, (March/April 1989): 4-6. For a discussion of the problems with command in Vietnam." see Richard A. Gabriel and Paul L. Savage, *Crisis in Command*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978.)

5. West Tate A. written interview with author 24 September 2017

5. Frost, 14C 71, written interview with author, 29 September 2017
6. Army Regulation (AR) 600-100, *Army Profession and Leadership*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 5 April 2017
7. "The Noncommissioned Officer and Petty Officer," JEL - Joint Electronic Library, 2014, accessed September 05, 2017, p. 33. <http://dtic.mil/doctrine> (<http://dtic.mil/doctrine>)
8. Terron Wharton, "The Overlooked Mentors," *eARMOR*, Oct. & Dec. 2016.
9. ARDP 6-22 Army Leadership Sec 7-68
10. Joe B. Parson and Carl W. Fischer, *From One Leader to Another Volume II* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, US Army Combined Arms Center, 2015). pp. 2963-294
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12. Training Circular (TC) 7-22.7, *Noncommissioned Officer Guide*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 7 April 2015