



The commandant, deputy commandant, and the branch chief of the Basic Leader Course at the Fort Drum NCO Academy, New York, conduct uniform inspections. Students of Class 07-18 learn the importance of the wear and appearance of the Army dress uniform during the course. (U.S. Army photo by Fort Drum NCO Academy)

Sharing knowledge and experience with the leaders of tomorrow

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Successful leaders share knowledge and experience through counseling, conducting realistic training, and delegating authority to subordinates. To be most effective, however, noncommissioned officers must consider a holistic approach to leadership, therefore establishing a foundation of trust and an environment conducive to learning. Such an approach supports and encourages intrinsic motivation while simultaneously offering incentives for extrinsic motivational behavior.

Establishing Trust

It is impossible to overstate the importance of forming a relationship with subordinates built on trust. In *The*

Servant Leader, James Autry describes five characteristics leaders possess and demonstrate: Authenticity, Vulnerability, Being Accepted, Being Present, and Being Useful.¹ These five ways of “being” apply to any organization and serve to develop and promote a relationship of trust.

Establishing trust involves creating a non-hostile environment where Soldiers feel free to ask questions and respond truthfully. It demands leaders recognize their shortcomings and work actively to improve them while demonstrating genuine concern for their subordinates. For this to succeed, leaders must be open about their values and why they make specific decisions so subordinates can observe they act consistently rather

than randomly.² This approach also encourages Soldiers to listen more attentively, since are aware their leader has their best interests in mind.

A healthy, professional relationship consists of many integrated elements. The first is competence. Soldiers must know their leaders are capable of providing information and answers when necessary. For effective communication, problem-solving, and mentoring to occur, Soldiers must value what their leaders have to say.

One aspect of leadership often misunderstood yet fundamental in building positive relationships is loyalty. As described in *The Servant Leader*, “[L]oyalty to employees means being honest and trusting, treating people as individuals and not as numbers, responding appropriately to special needs, providing resources, and, most importantly, acting with integrity.”³

Loyalty begets loyalty. In practice, one demonstrates loyalty by performing the job to the best of one’s abilities and not favoring one individual over another or establishing a subjective hierarchical structure that benefits one person or group of people over another.⁴

Another crucial aspect of building rapport and trust is maintaining professionalism. Leadership is an art requiring proper balance, and being too friendly with subordinates will lead to corrosion of trust. Conversely, a lack of a personal, inquisitive, and empathetic comportment will cause subordinates to view their leader as unapproachable, distant, and uncaring.⁵ A professional balance should exist where junior Soldiers feel free to talk to their NCO about major and minor issues, while maintaining rules, regulations, and standards.

Communication is Key

Communication involves two parties and cannot exist otherwise. One cannot share knowledge if it falls on deaf ears. Leaders must instill and maintain a willingness to learn, grow, and change within their subordinates. As Jocko Willink and Leif Babin recognized in their book, *Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy Seals Lead and Win*, all problems are leadership problems.⁶ It is therefore a leader’s responsibility to identify, address, and correct anti-social behavior exhibited by subordinates which may inhibit effective communication. Such conduct, if not resulting from a lack of trust, may be tied to apathy or job dissatisfaction. Leaders must ensure the environment is one supporting motivational behavior through professional satisfaction.

Professional Satisfaction

A useful tool for conceptualizing the factors that influence job satisfaction is Frederick Herzberg’s *Two-Factor Motivation Theory*. Research conducted by Herzberg in 1959 revealed professional satisfaction and dissatisfaction do not exist on the same continuum. Particular characteristics were found to affect satisfaction while having no

impact on dissatisfaction, and vice-versa. Herzberg described the opposite of “satisfaction” as “no satisfaction,” as opposed to “dissatisfaction.” Conversely, the opposite of “dissatisfaction” was not “satisfaction,” but merely an absence of dissatisfaction. For example, opportunities for achievement can profoundly influence an individual’s perception on how satisfied they feel with their position, but a lack of accomplishment within an organization does not necessarily lead to job dissatisfaction.⁷

Herzberg’s model identifies characteristics of a work environment and places them into one of two categories: Factors of satisfaction and factors of dissatisfaction. Herzberg found that factors influencing a feeling of dissatisfaction were typically associated with extrinsic motivators, while those that caused an increased sense of job satisfaction were attributable to intrinsic motivators. This link occurs because extrinsic motivators, or incentives that are tangible and exist outside of oneself, are expected and cause dissatisfaction if they are absent. Examples include organizational policies, pay, and working conditions among others. Intrinsic motivators influencing an individual’s perception of job satisfaction included the work itself, responsibility held, achievement, and advancement.⁸

Using this framework, a leader can develop junior leaders by providing an environment that reduces factors for dissatisfaction while creating factors for satisfaction that encourage intrinsic motivation. Such factors improve the perception organizational members have in regards to their profession and will cause them to have an open mind and be willing to engage in honest communication with leadership.

A fundamental method of promoting a subordinate’s personal and professional growth is through frequent and recurring counseling and performance evaluations. When used correctly, this process involves establishing objectives and setting benchmarks as a path to achieving those goals. It should seek to identify areas of sustainment as well as improvement.

Ongoing dialogue between the leader and subordinate should also be encouraged and tailored to the specific individuals and situation. Ideally, indirect and combined approaches to counseling should be utilized to develop a subordinate’s decision-making capabilities.⁹ It is important to remember communication is a two-way exchange of ideas and concepts. Subordinates should feel they have the ability to provide feedback, comments, and criticism to superiors. One way to facilitate this is for leaders to ask if there is anything they can do better to efficiently support their subordinates, mission, and team after each counseling session.

Training the Transfer of Knowledge

Realistic and strenuous training is the most profound way to develop leaders capable of operating in complex environments and is an integral means of transferring

knowledge and building future leaders. As Soldiers' primary teachers, NCOs should ensure training events are successively increased in difficulty and culminate in after action reviews. These reviews must identify areas of sustainment along with shortcomings and ways in which individuals can better perform in the future.¹⁰ This process provides seasoned leaders with opportunities to integrate their own experiences and knowledge into unit training, thereby creating well rounded and more relevant training events.

A significant but often underutilized method of bestowing experience to subordinates is delegating authority. This amplified responsibility influences positive change on many levels. The most apparent observed effect is junior Soldiers' increased motivation. Returning to Herzberg's *Two Factor Motivational Theory*, increased responsibility can promote job satisfaction by fostering intrinsic motivation. If a Soldier feels valued within an organization, it is likely he or she performs better. Accordingly, increasing responsibility directly and positively affects subordinates and the organization, while providing Soldiers with additional experience and an increasingly expansive knowledge base.¹¹

Decentralized command, or decentralized leadership, is a process that delegates appropriate decision-making authority to less experienced junior leaders. When used correctly, this command structure produces advantages on multiple levels. It allows leaders to focus on the mission at a macro level while empowering subordinates with increased responsibility in decision-making that develops and improves their knowledge base while providing valuable, real-world experience. [Joint Publication 3-0, Joint Operations](#), defines decentralized command as a process by which "commanders delegate decisions to subordinates wherever possible, which minimizes detailed control and empowers subordinates' initiative to make decisions based on commanders' guidance rather than constant communications."¹²

In *Extreme Ownership*, authors Willink and Babin say, "For any leader, placing full faith and trust in junior leaders with less experience and allowing them to manage their teams is a difficult thing to embrace."¹³ This philosophy stipulates that operational boundaries are established and provided to subordinates, while conveying a well-defined grasp of the overall intent.

Additionally, once subordinates make decisions, they must trust their leaders to back them up. As stated earlier, leadership is an art requiring appropriate balance. Leaders who choose to delegate decision-making authority and provide an increased sense of autonomy to subordinates should ensure their Soldiers are capable of handling the responsibility. They should allow their subordinates to make mistakes that don't jeopardize the mission, equipment, or the health of individuals.

This decentralized decision-making process is used at the highest levels of the joint operational environment and applies to first and second-line leaders. It encourages subordinates to think critically and take risks. Decision-making and risk-taking develop real-world experience, thereby developing Soldiers quickly and efficiently.

Conclusion

Army doctrine describes counseling and training as a means to develop adaptive and knowledgeable NCOs. What is often overlooked and lacking is a focus on professional relationships built on mutual respect and trust.

An organization may have the best trainers, facilities, and material at their disposal, but the lack of a holistic leadership approach squanders training potential. Leaders must ensure the workplace atmosphere they create is conducive to practices facilitating the sharing of knowledge and experience. Doing so is vital for enabling the Army in achieving its NCO 2020 strategy of building leaders who can operate effectively in complex environments. ■

Notes

1. James A. Autry, *The Servant Leader* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001).

2. David L. Mineo, "The Importance of Trust in Leadership," *Research Management Review* Vol. 20 Issue 1, 2014, accessed March 24, 2018, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1038828.pdf>.

3. James A. Autry, *The Servant Leader*.

4. James A. Autry, *The Servant Leader*.

5. James A. Autry, *The Servant Leader*.

6. Jocko Willink and Leif Babin, *Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy Seals Lead and Win* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015).

7. Mohammed Alshmemri, Lina Shahwan-Akl, and Phillip Maude, "Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory," *Life Science Journal* Vol. 14 Issue 15, 2017, accessed March 23, 2018, http://www.lifesciencesite.com/lsj/life140517/03_32120lsj140517_12_16.pdf.

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9. U.S. Army, *The Counseling Process*, ATP 6-22.1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, July 2014), https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/atp6_22x1.pdf.

10. U.S. Army, *Training Units and Developing Leaders*, ADP 7-0 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, August 2012), https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/adp7_0.pdf.

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12. Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Operations, JP 3-0 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, January 17, 2017), [http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Doc-](http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_0_20170117.pdf)

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