

Understanding Counseling and Human Needs

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Sgt. Kristi Hyde, human resources sergeant, Special Troops Battalion, XVIII Airborne Corps, reviews a performance growth counseling with one of her Soldiers. Hyde, who has been an NCO for almost two years, believes that her job is to lead, develop and mentor Soldiers. "My favorite part of the job is helping Soldiers on a daily basis and to see that the Soldiers I have mentored have been met with success," said Hyde. (US Army Photo by Sgt. Krista Lainhart)

The difference between good noncommissioned officers and outstanding ones lies in their ability to communicate and understand what motivates their Soldiers. Both are aware that the unit's strength depends on the effectiveness of their Soldiers who require training, equipment,

and sustenance in order to perform well. However, the difference between the two is how well NCOs communicate and listen.

Outstanding NCOs have a “toolbox” in which they keep counseling as one such valuable tool, but it carries a negative connotation for some.

In Army Training Publication (ATP) 6-22.1 “*The Counseling Process*”, counseling is defined as “...the process used by leaders to review with a subordinate the subordinate’s demonstrated performance and potential.”¹ While Merriam Webster’s Dictionary defines counseling as “...advice and support that is given to people to help them deal with problems, make important decisions, etc.”² Based on these definitions of counseling, any time NCOs correct an issue or address the needs of their Soldiers, they are counseling them.

Before counseling a subordinate, NCOs should consult ATP 6-22.1 for approved counseling methods and techniques. It identifies three approaches to counseling: directive, nondirective and combination, as well as the different forms of counseling used by the Army. It is up to NCOs to determine when to use a specific format.³

According to the 10th Edition of the NCO Guide, “the directive approach is most commonly used to make on the spot corrections.”⁴ It states that “...you must use the directive approach to counsel an unresponsive soldier who will not connect bad behavior or conduct with the consequences.”⁵

Nondirective counseling gives the subordinate a chance to explore options with input from the NCO and allows both them to share information. The combination approach borrows aspects from both methods.⁶

The combination approach takes less time than the nondirective approach because the NCO listens to the subordinate's issue and then provides an answer, giving the Soldier an opportunity to gain experience in problem-solving under the NCO's tutelage.⁷

Although the three counseling formats help define the style and shape the counseling session, NCOs need to prepare before conducting indirect and combination counseling. It will help prevent conflicting messages and allow Soldiers to communicate their needs.

Preparing for a counseling session takes forethought. Take for instance a nondirective counseling session conducted across a desk. To a Soldier, the formality of talking across a desk may be daunting and construed as a formal counseling session, hampering the communication flow between the Soldier and NCO.

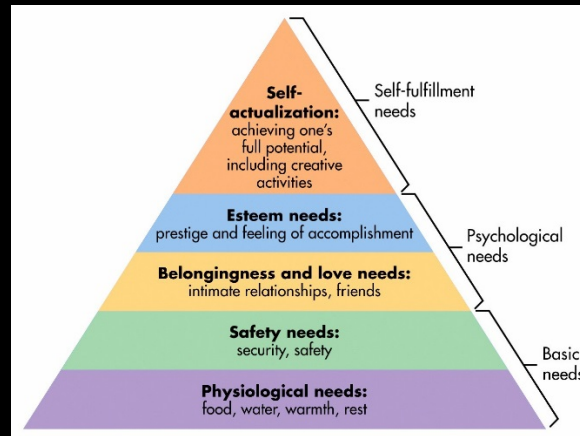
When providing feedback or opening a nondirective counseling session, NCOs should remove any barriers to communication by making the space comfortable and non-threatening. Doing so will improve the flow of information. Arrange the chairs in your office to face each other without any barrier between them and meet the soldier at the door and invite him or her into your office. Some of the most effective and beneficial counseling sessions are extremely informal and conducted away from the workspace.

It is important to recognize that every human being has a set of needs. Beyond determining the correct method of counseling and ensuring that the message is transmitted and received correctly, NCOs should understand the needs motivating their Soldiers. Each person assesses their needs differently, assigns a value to them, then acts on them in order of priority.

In 1943, psychologist Abraham Maslow published a paper titled "A Theory of Human Motivation," which talks about the needs driving human beings. Maslow identified the motivations, expressed as "needs," into five categories.

“People are motivated to achieve certain needs and that some needs take precedence over others.” Maslow said. “Our most basic need is for physical survival, and this will be the first thing that motivates our behavior.”⁸

These needs, commonly referred to as Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, is arranged in order of precedence using a pyramid, starting with the basic needs at the bottom.



Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs displayed in order of precedence. 9.

According to Maslow’s theory, the five basic needs are divided into three categories: basic, psychological, and self-fulfillment. NCOs can use this information to understand how a lack of need fulfillment can influence their Soldiers’ ability to make decisions. This can be helpful when Soldiers place their most basic needs before their duties. By recognizing their Soldiers’ needs, NCOs can support them to meet those needs.

Consider the following scenario:

Private Smith is normally a squared away young soldier. However, within the past few months, he has arrived late for formations and his job performance has slipped. His NCO counseled him in an attempt to correct this negative behavior, but after a week, the private reverted to his previous poor performance. At this point, the NCO would be right to conduct

written administrative action. However, it is also the NCOs responsibility to determine why the private no longer exceeds standards.

The NCO learns during the counseling session that the private is concerned with his rented studio apartment since he and his wife are expecting their first child. They are looking for a new place to live because their apartment is too small and has accessibility issues. In addition, most places are beyond his housing allowance and post housing will not be available for another year. Using Maslow's chart, what needs is the private having issues with? Why have these needs affected his performance?

According to Maslow, the more basic the need and the longer it goes unaddressed, the more impact it has on the person. The needs at the bottom of the hierarchy chart come before meeting the next level of needs. The closer to need fulfillment a person gets, the sooner they start to fulfill other needs in the hierarchy. On the other hand, the further needs are from fulfillment, the more time a person will spend on meeting those needs. In the above scenario the private is so focused on meeting the safety needs for his growing family that he has allowed it to impact his performance.¹⁰

When addressing a substandard performance issue, NCOs should use Department of the Army Form 4856 to document the counseling for future use. A great NCO will go one step further and probe for the cause and address it. Addressing the cause will not only help the Soldier but also meet his or her needs.

While the hierarchy theory can help identify causes for substandard performance, Maslow's theory can help NCOs develop their Soldiers. By using the hierarchy as a leadership tool, NCOs and Soldiers can identify needs beyond the necessities for food and security.

As an illustration of going beyond the basic needs, use the following as an example of the higher levels of the hierarchy.

Private 1st Class Jones has met the requirements expected by his leadership. He is a sharp Soldier who can complete any task with little to no supervision. With this in mind, Sgt. Michaels provides performance feedback during Jones' performance growth counseling session. Michaels asks Jones about his goals as well as what he needs to meet them. The private says he needs additional training in his MOS and requests to go to advanced courses.

In this case, Jones has met his basic needs, but by asking for input, Michaels addressed Jones' higher-level needs in the psychological tier of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.¹¹

Substandard performance is not always created by the lack of a Soldier's needs, however, understanding basic human needs and how they drive Soldiers and NCOs can help identify the root causes.

Through effective counseling skills and by addressing the needs of subordinates, NCOs instill respect, build confidence in Soldiers abilities, and create trust.

Notes:

1. Army Training Publication. 2014. "ATP 6-22.1 *The Counseling Process*." Department of Defense, US Army
2. Merriam Webster Inc. 2017. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. Accessed Aug 23, 2017. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/counseling>
3. Army Training Publication. 2014. "ATP 6-22.1 *The Counseling Process*." Department of Defense, US Army
4. Dan Elder. 2015. *NCO Guide (10th Edition)*. Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books.
5. Dan Elder. 2015. *NCO Guide (10th Edition)*. Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books.
6. Dan Elder. 2015. *NCO Guide (10th Edition)*. Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books
7. Dan Elder. 2015. *NCO Guide (10th Edition)*. Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books
8. Abraham H. Maslow, 1987. *Motivation and Personality*. New York: Longman.
9. McLeod, Saul. 2016. *Simply Psychology, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*. Accessed Aug 20, 2017. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>.
10. Abraham H. Maslow, 1987. *Motivation and Personality*. New York: Longman.
11. Abraham H. Maslow, 1987. *Motivation and Personality*. New York: Longman.

Counseling, one of the most important leadership and professional development responsibilities, enables Army leaders to help Soldiers and Army Civilians become more capable, resilient, satisfied, and better prepared for current and future responsibilities. SATP 6-22.1