



During the 45th Sustainment Brigade's induction ceremony, the Army's newest sergeants received copies of the NCO Creed, the NCO Charge, and The Three Meter Zone. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Maurice Smith)

Book Review: The Three Meter Zone

By Crystal Bradshaw

"Every Soldier is a leader regardless of [their] rank or position."

-Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-65, November 1985¹

Command Sgt. Maj. J. Dave Pendry's book, *The Three Meter Zone* is aimed at providing non-commissioned officers and Soldiers leadership lessons that expand their professional development. From his 28 years of experience in human relations and as a garrison command sergeant major for Fort Myer, Virginia, and Fort McNair, Washington D.C., Pendry touches on topics with personal stories. The lessons and experiences in the book are as important today as they were during its initial publication in 1999. NCOs will find the book comes from a Soldier's perspective on everyday leadership and the sphere of influence surrounding him and his first-level NCO leader, which Pendry calls the three-meter zone.²

The book is a quick read and easily digested due to the short, concise subtopics, simple concepts, diagrams, and humor as Pendry relates his life lessons through anecdotes.

"I highly recommend all NCOs, both active and reserve component read *The Three Meter Zone*," said retired Command Sgt. Maj. James (Jimmie) W. Spencer, former director of the Association of the U.S. Army Noncommissioned Officer and Soldier Programs, "[M]ake it a permanent part of [your] personal professional libraries."³

Levels of Leadership

"Leadership is a matter of intelligence, trustworthiness, humanness, courage, and sternness."

-Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

The book's title comes from Pendry's identification of three types of Soldiers: three-meter, fifty-meter, and 100-meter Soldiers, each requiring a different level or style of leadership.⁴ Three-meter Soldiers need a close eye from the NCO as well as additional mentoring and guidance.

Pendry recalled an instance during basic training where an instructor explained the lethality of the Bouncing Betty during the Vietnam War, a mine that, when stepped on, bounced waist high before detonating.

"The instructor told us that if you are within three meters of this weapon when it detonates, you probably will not survive. At 50 meters...your chances for survival improve dramatically. At 100 meters, you are relatively safe," Pendry said.⁵

Pendry's point? NCOs should identify three-meter Soldiers and provide the guidance they need to focus on the mission and help them survive. Not to say NCOs should spend less time and attention on the 100 or 50-meter Soldiers, however, they should be aware of their Soldiers and identify those who need immediate attention.

According to Pendry, all levels of leadership influence Soldiers.

"The most important and critical leadership [opportunity], however, takes place between the Soldier and the first line noncommissioned leader," Pendry said.⁶ Because of daily interaction, NCOs have the most direct influence on struggling Soldiers.

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Lead By Example

"NCOs must never forget that they are the model Soldiers imitate. Their approach to being NCOs and Soldiers, good or bad, will be copied. Consciously or not, they will be the example."

-Command Sgt. Maj. J.D. Pendry⁷

According to Pendry, although leadership theories explain how leadership works, historical books about generals provide Army history, and NCOs know the basic leadership manual by heart, these things do not teach Soldiers how to lead or follow.

"At the end of the day," wrote Pendry in the introduction of *The Three Meter Zone*, "All a Soldier learns about leading and following is learned from another Soldier—a noncommissioned officer."⁸

Pendry's first battalion commander demonstrated leadership when he provided him with a copy of his leadership philosophy, and discussed his views on training, discipline, communication, team building, as well as their senior-subordinate relationship and its importance to the success of the command.⁹ The battalion commander's approach made Pendry realize the support challenges unit

first sergeants and other NCOs face if they do not know where they stand. Pendry's battalion commander helped him reevaluate his personal leadership philosophy.¹⁰

"Developing, committing, writing, and sharing your philosophy on leading people that you rely on is a critical step in taking a leadership role in an organization," Pendry explained.¹¹

Pendry's advice on creating a personalized philosophy is straightforward:

- Make sure it is yours.
- Write down how you are. Not what you would like to be.
- People will hold you to it so believe and live it.

Meeting Your Soldiers' Needs

Pendry believes Soldiers should understand the importance of a cohesive unit, which eases other aspects of team building. As conflicts arise, it is an NCO's job to show Soldiers they cannot accomplish a goal unless they work together.¹²

NCOs should be aware of their Soldiers' backgrounds which allows them to understand them, mentor them, and bring them together.¹³ That knowledge also allows them to meet and stay in touch with their Soldiers' needs and pass them on to their command, which ultimately supports mission accomplishment.¹⁴

Pendry recalled a first sergeant who was "out of touch" with his Soldiers' needs. He created a carpeted and paneled day room where the Soldiers could watch TV or read, which was what the Soldiers in his unit wanted when he was a private but never received. He was dismayed to find none of his Soldiers used the room. Although he had good intentions and cared for them, he failed to understand their needs and provided something they did not want.

"If the first sergeant had just looked around or asked the Soldiers, he would have known what was needed," Pendry said.¹⁵ "It's a part of our charter as an NCO corps to know Soldiers, stay focused on them, and stay in touch with their needs."¹⁶

Related: SMA Dailey's Book Club: Start with Why

Conclusion

Throughout the book, Pendry discussed a wide range of topics. From unit cohesion to promotion boards, he covered issues NCOs face today. Soldiers may find the summaries at the end of each chapter helpful because they provide Pendry's advice in a bullet format without diluting any of the value.

Pendry's thoughts and philosophy are relevant in today's Army and will provide encouragement and mentoring advice to NCOs as they lead from the front. Pendry believes NCOs are essential to Soldier development and troop welfare. They also contribute to officer growth and must be trustworthy leaders. ■

Related:

From One Leader to Another Volume I and Volume II (a collection of observations from Army senior NCOs) edited by retired Command Sgt. Maj. Joe B. Parson

Soldier for Life: Leader Lessons From The 12th Sergeant Major Of The Army Jack L. Tilley

Notes

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| 1. Mentioned on page xii of <i>The Three Meter Zone</i> by Command Sgt. Maj. J.D. Pendry. | 8. Pendry, xi. |
| 2. Command Sgt. Maj. J.D. Pendry, <i>The Three Meter Zone</i> (New York: Presidio Press, 1999), 89; 153. | 9. Pendry, 4. |
| 3. Pendry, x. | 10. Pendry, 5. |
| 4. Pendry, xi. | 11. Pendry, 5. |
| 5. Pendry, 121. | 12. Pendry, 57. |
| 6. Pendry, xi. | 13. Pendry, 144. |
| 7. Pendry, 165. | 14. Pendry, 140. |
| | 15. Pendry, 143. |
| | 16. Pendry, 144. |
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