



Key leadership from the 301st Maneuver Enhancement Brigade reviews a route before a convoy takes place at Schwab Army Reserve Center, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, March 10, 2017. Soldiers from the 301st Maneuver Enhancement Brigade went through a series of maneuver and mobility exercises to ensure deployment readiness and demonstrate the brigade's ability to command and control in a tactical environment. (U.S. Army Reserve photo by Spc. Sean F. Harding).

# The Importance of Professional Candor

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“Leadership,” according to [Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, \*Army Leadership\*](#), “is a multiplier of effects; with it, organizations are focused and synchronized, resources are used efficiently, people become energized and motivated, and missions are more likely to achieve desired outcomes.”<sup>1</sup>

But under the umbrella of leadership, not all orders given will have an easy outcome. Yet, expressing disagreement with an order in front of subordinates is a sure way to undermine unit synchronization, motivation, and focus.

What should Noncommissioned Officers do when disagreements arise? The following article explores a way to give insight, or professionally disagree, with a higher-ranking officer or NCO.

## Using Established Channels

Soldiers take an oath at enlistment to obey orders according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice.<sup>2</sup> Obedience to orders requires communication through the chain of command

until NCOs understand the orders and can deliver them with an attitude of ownership. If we establish ADP 6-22 as our leadership benchmark, then NCOs whole-heartedly backing issued orders is essential because “the degree of commitment or compliance affects initiative taken, motivation to accomplish missions, and the degree of accepted responsibility. Commanders expect NCOs and Soldiers to commit to successful mission accomplishment.”<sup>3</sup>

*Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-22, Army Leadership*, states, “Communicating openly and clearly with superiors is important for organizational leaders... Understanding the direction of the higher headquarters reduces course corrections at the lower levels, thus minimizing friction and maintaining a stable organizational tempo and climate.”<sup>4</sup> Taking the extra time to make sure all orders are understood thoroughly not only ensures the objectives are carried out promptly, but carried out correctly. This can enable multiple units to work together as a larger battalion or division-sized unit instead of a rogue squad that costs everyone time and money because they have to repeat missions for not performing them correctly the first time.

## Defining Professional Candor

The definition of candor is being frank, honest, and sincere with others.<sup>5</sup> Professional candor is the use of appropriate, direct, and open discussion between Soldiers and leaders, especially those with opposing viewpoints.

NCOs are responsible for providing superiors with input during the decision-making process. They must also clarify and answer subordinates’ questions when giving orders. Both situations require NCOs to use professional candor to promote a cohesive and collective leadership front.

Collective leadership refers to “the combined effects and synergies when leaders at different levels synchronize their leadership actions to achieve a common purpose. High-performing collective leadership occurs when leadership processes are mutually reinforcing and the result is greater than the sum of its parts—a sense of shared responsibility for the unit exists.”<sup>6</sup>

When NCOs are asked for their opinion by a superior, they need to respond with a supportive, rather than a critical, attitude towards the military decision-making process. However, agreeing with superiors to avoid confrontation is not collective leadership and can also be detrimental to the unit mission. Disagreement is not disloyalty when used as a collaborative tool. Professionally expressing concerns is an effective contribution to the decision-making process and requires an element of trust from superior to subordinate.

However, when subordinates question an order, ADP 6-22 states, “Leaders can mitigate resistance by anticipating what others value, their reactions to influence their shared understanding of common goals, and their commitment to the general organization or the purpose of the mission and their trust in the organization and the leader.”<sup>7</sup>

NCOs should anticipate and understand opposing viewpoints by subordinates and use logic, inspiration, and encouragement to get them to also take ownership of the order passed down by higher in order to achieve collective leadership.

According to ADP 6-22, “Subordinates respond well to leadership that encourages commitment to achieve shared goals [and] influence others through the communication of ideas and common causes.”<sup>8</sup>

## How to Practice Professional Candor

Paul Graham, a venture capitalist and computer scientist, states that there are seven ways to disagree.<sup>9</sup> Of the seven, the most professional form of disagreement is hierarchy six, refuting the central point. Some of the remaining forms like name calling (disagreement hierarchy 0) and personal attacks as a basis for disagreement, are not part of the professional demeanor required of NCOs.

“One has to commit explicitly to what the central point [of the disagreement] is,” Graham says.

For example, to effectively disagree, NCOs should consider the following scenario:

While participating in the decision-making process for troop deployment in the area of operations, you are ordered to move your Soldiers to an area you know to be heavily occupied by opposing forces.

You restate what he said so he knows you understand his point: “You want us to move our resources to this location with the enemy forces located here.”

You then follow up with specific reasons for why you disagree: “But I think we should move them to this location for the following reasons.”<sup>10</sup>

This method of disagreement is difficult since it requires a well-planned response, but is the form of disagreement that most encourages professional candor. Graham also notes that agreeable participants to decision-making do not normally offer input, having already made up their minds. It is the person who dis-

agrees, offering an additional viewpoint or a different set of experiences to draw on, who often adds productively to the conversation.

### Combining Differences

There is no better training environment to learn how to put all the pillars of leadership together and build a collective leadership front than the Basic Leader Course.

According to ADP 6-22, "Leaders can encounter resistance when attempting to influence others internal or external to their unit. After taking measures of underlying causes of resistance, leaders can...clarify how the influence action relates to their personal values."<sup>11</sup>

Spc. Lyia M. Cerillo, 46th Composite Truck Company, 194th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, Republic of South Korea, said her most difficult challenge at the Basic

Leader Course was learning how to accomplish team goals when there were a variety of approaches from Soldiers of many different military occupational specialties.

"We had to use cohesion and teamwork, build off each other, and make it like we were one," Cerillo said.<sup>12</sup>

### Conclusion

Over the course of their careers, NCOs will encounter situations requiring their obedience to lawful orders and will be tasked with leading Soldiers who may disagree with them. Such situations will test their ability to respond professionally. However, using the guidelines provided in ADP 6-22, and an attitude of professional candor, they will establish themselves as honest, open, and dependable NCOs who can unify and lead Soldiers in any situation. ■

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### Notes

1. Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, *Army Leadership*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office), 2012, 2. [https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR\\_pubs/DR\\_a/pdf/web/adp6\\_22.pdf](https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/adp6_22.pdf).

2. "Oath of Enlistment," *army.mil*, <https://www.army.mil/values/oath.html>.

3. ADP 6-22, *Army Leadership*, 2.

4. Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-22, *Army Leadership*, (Headquarters, Department of the Army), 2012, 10-17. [https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR\\_pubs/DR\\_a/pdf/web/adrp6\\_22.pdf](https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/adrp6_22.pdf).

5. ADP 6-22, *Army Leadership*, 3-3,

6. ADP 6-22, *Army Leadership*, 4.

7. ADP 6-22, *Army Leadership*, 2.

8. ADP 6-22, *Army Leadership*, 3.

9. Paul Graham, "How to Disagree," *paulgraham.com*, March 2008, <http://www.paulgraham.com/disagree.html>.

10. Paul Rainer, "How to disagree well: 7 of the best and worst ways to argue," *bigthink.com*, March 16, 2018, <http://bigthink.com/paul-ratner/how-to-disagree-well-7-of-the-best-and-worst-ways-to-argue>.

11. ADP 6-22: *Army Leadership*, 2.

12. Micah VanDyke, "Warriors' Second to None' at leader course," *Stars and Stripes*, March 2018, Retrieved from <http://korea.stripes.com/education/warriors-second-none-leader-course>

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