



(Photo courtesy of Ken Scar taken Jan. 9, 2020) U.S. Army Master Sgt. Andre Bland instructs a group of Clemson University ROTC cadets during an “actions on the objective” field exercise at Bowman Field, Clemson, South Carolina, Jan. 9, 2020.

Mentorship: The NCO’s Role in Developing Junior Officers

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U.S. Army Cadet Command

“The Nation, our Officers and our Soldiers have placed great trust and confidence in the NCO Corps, and deserve nothing less than competent, confident, and trusted professionals to remain the world’s premier land fighting force.” — Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael A. Grinston (Department of the Army, 2020, Foreword).

Developing future officers in the U.S. Army is a responsibility of the Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) Corps and falls to senior enlisted NCOs to pass on their experience, discipline, and management skills (Department of the Army, 2020). For the Reserve

Officer Training Corps (ROTC), the number one attribute NCOs bring to the development of cadets is experience. Cadets will remember their senior NCOs similar to how enlisted Soldiers remember their drill sergeants. It is important senior enlisted leaders fulfill their roles as



(Photo courtesy of Eric Bartelt taken July 23, 2020) U.S. Army Pfc. Justin Garrison, 3rd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, demonstrates the immediate action needed during a rifle malfunction to new cadets while drill sergeant Sgt. Darren O'Dell oversees training at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, July 23, 2020.

mentors and leave a positive impression junior officers take with them as they transition into the U.S. Army.

The NCO and Officer Relationship

The NCO Corps is a collective of Soldier professionals who are responsible for unit readiness, leadership, training management, communications, operations, and program management (Department of the Army, 2020). However, NCOs do not operate alone and share many unit responsibilities with an officer counterpart. The relationship between officer and NCO must be built on the core value of trust, with both parties upholding the Army Values of *loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity*, and *personal courage* (Department of the Army, 2019). The senior NCO at the ROTC should be a reflection of these values and a positive example for cadets and young officers to follow.

The Cadet

The path of commissioning through the ROTC is not easy. Balancing Army requirements, university standards, and social pressure is not a simple task. The senior NCO is responsible for cadet development and teaches them how to successfully manage and uphold Army expectations while completing their studies.

To demonstrate the scope of the ROTC program on a national level, as of 2018, there were 20,000 cadets enrolled in 273 host programs and over 1,100 partnerships and affiliate schools (Department of the Army, 2018). Ideally, each program is staffed by senior NCOs that uphold the Army Values. This builds the confidence and trust necessary between young officers and NCOs and helps officers learn to build successful working relationships in their future units.

The Senior NCO

Being a great leader is more than just what someone does during working hours. It's a lifestyle adopted and demonstrated by senior NCOs and is passed on to young cadets and officers. According to *Army Regulation (AR) 350-1: Army Training and Leader Development*, leader development is "...achieved through the lifelong synthesis of the knowledge, skills, and experiences gained through the training and education opportunities in the institutional, operational, and self-development domains" (Department of the Army, 2017, p.3). This means it is vital cadets not only learn leadership attributes and competencies in the classroom, but also observe senior NCOs demonstrating Army attributes in their professional and personal lives.

The senior NCOs that make up ROTC cadre must lead by example and be present, authentic, empathetic, and engaging.

They are a young officer's first representation of the NCO Corps. "The relationship established during junior officer development will have a lasting impact on those officer's opinions, respect for, good will, and confidence in NCOs for the rest of their careers" (Department of the Army, 2020, pp. 7-3-7-4). A failed mentorship can negatively influence a young officer's opinion of NCOs and affect their trust relationships with the NCO Corps, ultimately impacting future unit readiness and capabilities.

Mentorship

The mentorship between senior NCOs and their officer counterparts in the command team is critical to the success of an organization. Senior NCOs are subject matter experts, which is why commanders rely on them to utilize their experience to develop junior leaders from the technical, tactical, and even personal levels.

Former Sgt. Maj. of the Army Leon L. Van Autreve said:

“It is the noncommissioned officer to whom the Soldier first turns when he needs information, counsel, or other help. Squad leaders, platoon sergeants, and first sergeants create the leadership environment in which today's Army concepts thrive or expire. The quality of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps determines in large measure the quality of the Army. (“NCO Leadership,” n.d., para. 21)”

Senior NCOs bring both professional and life experience to the partnership. They are generally older, more mature, and have increased self-awareness. They also understand the difficulty of balancing family needs with the mandatory requirements of the Army (Eckhart, 2020). Their experi-

ence includes leadership schools, multiple units, multiple deployments, and they have mentored Soldiers of different ranks. All of which needs to be passed on to young and inexperienced officers and cadets starting their U.S. Army career so they can better effectively lead their first unit.

Conclusion

Leaders are not born, they are trained, shaped, coached, retrained, advised, and empowered through

formal education, mentorships, and their own experiences. A military career for a young officer will be full of physical and emotional obstacles that require a guide. A cadet should understand that once commissioned, they become responsible for everything their unit does or doesn't do. The competence and confidence instilled in them by their senior NCOs will steer them towards mission success. ■

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