



(U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Denice Lopez taken Aug. 6, 2019) A U.S. Army Soldier with the 2nd Cavalry Regiment takes a seat during a promotion board held during Agile Spirit 19 at the Vaziani Military Base near Tbilisi, Georgia, Aug. 6, 2019.

Promotions

By Retired Sgt. Maj. Toni Gagnon Ross

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Promotions are a part of every Soldier's career. Putting on that first stripe, the "mosquito wing," is the beginning of a series of promotions which are based not only on performance but on an individual's potential for additional responsibility. *Army Regulation 600-8-19, Enlisted Promotions and Reductions*, helps to explain the ins and outs of all enlisted promotions. The purpose of the promotion system is "to fill authorized enlisted spaces with the best qualified Soldiers."

Upon entering the ranks of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps your primary function becomes that of leadership which implies that you must develop your Soldiers. Challenging and rewarding, being a Leader of Soldiers is a great privilege. It requires perseverance, commitment, selflessness and a litany of Leadership traits, values, competencies and attributes that are developed over time.

The *Army Noncommissioned Officer Guide, FM 7-22.7* [now *TC 7-22.7*], states: "As a leader, as a trainer and as a teacher, the NCO embodies the Army's past, present and future." It explains what NCOs should "be, know and do,"

and provides vignettes and lessons learned to assist NCOs at each of the levels of responsibility. The Leader Requirements Model, as outlined in *Army Doctrinal Publication 6-22, Army Leadership* [now *Army Leadership and the Profession*], specifically identifies the leader competency of "develops" as "creates a positive environment/fosters esprit de corps, prepares self, develops others, and stewards the profession." *Army Regulation 600-20, Army Command Policy*, emphasizes "that effective performance counseling ensures Soldiers are prepared to carry out their duties efficiently and accomplish the mission."

As an NCO you develop your subordinates for promotion through counseling, both formal and informal, discussing ways to improve while always acknowledging positive behavior. As difficult as it may seem, when counseling your Soldiers about promotion you must be honest with them and offer suggestions on how they might improve themselves both personally and professionally. You owe them the truth but delivered with tact and diplomacy just as you would like to hear it from your supervisor.



U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Johnson Alexandre, 595th Transportation Brigade, pins on Sgt. Jose Morales' new rank during a promotion ceremony at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, Oct. 30, 2020. (U.S. Army photo by Claudio LaMantia)

General Omar Bradley once said “I would caution you to always remember that an essential qualification of a good leader is the ability to recognize, select and train junior leaders.”

This responsibility started with your leaders selecting you for promotion and now as an NCO you too will look for those competencies and attributes in your Soldiers.

You are charged with providing the right type of leadership and to convey the knowledge necessary to assist in their development. Likewise you will look to your Leaders to assist you in developing your leadership skills and preparing you for your next promotion and/or level or responsibility. As you increase in rank and position, considerable more experience will be required thus it will take you longer to be promoted than when you were a junior Soldier. It is important that during your counseling sessions you seek guidance on how to improve while realizing that improvement takes practice.

You should also search the internet and other sources such as the Army Career Tracker for your specific military occupational specialty career map which should help you with identifying what schools and positions you should seek in order to broaden your training, education and experience. You should always strive to develop your Soldiers and yourself so that when afforded the opportunity to attend a school both they and you are prepared to do so.

As you work through the semi-centralized promotion system for promotions to sergeant and staff sergeant you will have opportunities to assist yourself in obtaining additional points through education, physical training, weapons qualification and most importantly your appearance and communication skills. This is also true when encouraging your Soldiers. Appearing before a promotion board is always a test of your personal courage in learning to deal with the “butterflies in your stomach” and demonstrate your knowledge and confidence.

Always put your uniform together using the regulation (AR 670-1), a ruler and a “second set of eyes.” Make sure it fits and is well-pressed; check it out several weeks in advance so you have time to have alterations made if necessary. A poor fitting uniform, improperly placed awards, service ribbons and badges, unserviceable shoes or a poor haircut will set the stage for your entire board appearance. This applies to your Specialists appearing before the Sergeant board, you have an ethical and moral duty to ensure you have checked their uniforms, etc. so they have the best opportunity to succeed before the board.

Also prepare them for questions that require an opinion such as: What is the most important activity/event happening in the United States today and why do you think this? If you were the battalion command sergeant major for a day, what would you change and why? What is the most important leadership quality and why? These are questions that test a leader’s ability to “think on their feet,” present a solid response, and have the personal courage to stand by their opinion.

Occasionally a board member might challenge an answer to an opinion question; all the while, your Soldier or you may agree that the board member’s answer is commendable but “in your opinion” your position is the correct one. It is fine to acknowledge another’s opinion but if you truly believe in your position, do not allow yourself to be swayed; to do so might be considered “waffling” or uncertainty in your answer which in and of itself can lead a much worse result than answering the question incorrectly. These are two behaviors which result in weak leadership.

Similarly, the question “Why should you be promoted to the next higher grade?” may illicit the response “Because I am the best specialist (sergeant) in the Army” Make sure you are prepared to answer why that is. Stumble here and you might find yourself stumbling throughout the remainder of your board appearance, compromising a successful score. No matter what happens, a Soldier



(U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Denice Lopez taken Aug. 6, 2019) U.S. Army Sgt. Susana Pelayo, 2nd Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, salutes the president of the board during a promotion board held during Agile Spirit 19 at the Vaziani Military Base near Tbilisi, Georgia, Aug. 6, 2019.

must maintain their composure and military bearing throughout their board appearance. The saying “Never let them see you sweat!” is something for your Soldiers and you to keep tucked in the back of your mind at all times.

Most NCOs have a war story or two to share about their appearance before a promotion board, thus they can relate to a Soldier’s board preparation and appearance. It is a learning experience to be shared so that others can benefit from your Soldiers’ or your appearance before they attend a board. Developing your subordinates and yourself for promotion is inherent to

your duties as a Leader. It takes hard work and a desire to succeed. It is within a Soldier’s reach and a measure of preparedness and tenacity. You as a Leader are an integral part of that process. Encouragement and assistance will go a long way in supporting your Soldiers and yourself towards success. ■

*The Army recently announced changes to policy regarding temporary promotions. For more information visit https://www.army.mil/article/241131/temporary_promotions_for_ncos_slated_to_begin_next_year



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