



Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael A. Grinston greets Soldiers deployed to Al Asad Air Base, Iraq, Dec. 19, 2019. Since August 2019, Grinston has tasked young NCOs to lead the culture change in order to create more cohesive, fit and lethal squads across the Army. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Derek Mustard)

Ownership: Be, Know, Do

By Master Sgt. Brian L. Creed

32d Army Air and Missile Defense Command

Noncommissioned officers (NCOs) are asked to undertake the difficult yet essential task of caring for the health, welfare, and training of their Soldiers. Such a task does not occur without ownership: owning the mission, intent, and purpose behind every order.

A leader with integrity owns the success or failure of every mission. Successful leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of their team members as well as they know themselves, and leverage all resources to steer their team towards mission success. NCOs are the *backbone of the Army*. This responsibility should not be taken lightly. It will always carry importance, relevance, and risk.

The Leader (Be)

NCOs must earn the respect and confidence of their seniors, peers, and subordinates. Ownership of their teams and squads ensures the NCO stays relevant in their decision-making and places the commander's intent as the priority (Schroeder, 2020; Narlock, 2018).

One might consider a *back in my day* type of leader as one that doesn't take responsibility for their team's actions. By overestimating past events and implying everything was more functional in a previous era, this type of leader blames their failures on a new generation of Soldiers instead of taking ownership for their team's actions (Gopnik, 2019).

The Team (Know)

A leader sets the culture and climate of the unit through their ability to lead each member to their full potential. Ownership extends from the commander down to each Soldier (Willink & Babin, 2015). It is critical for a leader to ensure that everyone in the unit understands the mission. When teams and squads understand that everything they do is in service to the mission, every task becomes relevant.

Soldiers must think beyond menial duties. These tasks, whether small or large, prepare them for combat. The effort with which a Soldier mops a floor can be compared to how well a Soldier cleans their weapon between missions. Both tasks have a larger goal in mind: pride in the garrison facilities, and confidence in a clean weapon that fires properly.



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Jason N. Bobo, a team leader with 5th Squadron, 73rd Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division awaits extraction at a helicopter landing zone as a CH-47F Chinook prepares to land in southeastern Afghanistan, Dec. 29, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Master Sgt. Alejandro Licea)

“When you build a cohesive team, I want you to say ‘This is my squad,’ That has ownership, and that builds a positive attitude.”

— Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael Grinston (Gatchell, 2019, para. 3)

In combat, leaders are placed with their Soldiers in difficult, complex, and dangerous situations. No one wants to follow a leader that is hesitant, complains, believes they shouldn’t be there, or believes that the squad can’t win. A positive mindset throughout every activity, including mowing grass and mopping floors, generates team ownership of their mission (Willink & Babin, 2015).

The Mission (Do)

An NCO must take ownership not just of their team, but also of their knowledge, or lack of it. According to the *Noncommissioned Officer Guide*, “Reading is an essential element of professional development. The scope and breadth of leader relevant issues in professional readings will serve to broaden and to deepen our understanding of our roles in leadership” (Department of the Army, 2020 p. D-1). A good NCO will recognize their shortage of world experience and read for clarity and insight from others so as not to be caught off guard by unexpected situations. From the early Greeks to our own NCOs in Iraq and Afghanistan, there are few situations that haven’t been played out before across the centuries.

Another area that improves leadership skills is the ability to write and form coherent arguments. According to Command Sgt. Maj. Teresa Duncan, “As we go through the higher writing processes, we should look at how we can not just take what we think, but then, support it with facts” (Duncan, 2019, para. 12). The ability to use relevant facts in discussions is a sign of a well-rounded thinker and leader. Being able to both read and write properly equips an NCO with leadership tools and offers experiences from leaders of the past to guide their squads correctly.

Good leaders also recognize that everyone on the team has different experiences, skillsets, and strengths. This multitude of assets can be utilized to accomplish a variety of missions. Leaders understand every Soldier is an individual. NCOs build diverse and dynamic teams to effectively accomplish a myriad of missions.

Within the NCO Corps, understanding and fulfilling the commander’s intent is the benchmark for being a successful NCO. It allows the NCO to train their Soldiers on individual and collective tasks with purpose, direction, and understanding of the end state. For this new generation of Soldiers to believe in their mission or training, it is important for them to understand what is expected and



U.S. Army Soldiers with the 143rd Infantry Regiment (Airborne) return fire with a M240B machine gun during the Joint Forcible Entry Exercise at Kelly Drop Zone, San Antonio, Texas, March 23, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Jeffery Harris)

where the training or operation is leading them (Patel, 2017).

Teaching Soldiers the necessary components of an operation, and its logical progression has a two-fold effect. First, Soldiers will know their role and critical responsibilities. Second, they will know the roles and responsibilities

of every team member so that in case of casualties, the mission can still move forward. A team trained in this manner allows anyone to pick up where another left off (Greer, 2018).

“We have to be able to trust that platoon sergeant, that platoon leader, that squad leader, those team leaders, and those Soldiers to execute their mission and to understand the intent, understand those key tasks, the purpose, and the end-state to be able to accomplish their mission. (Prosser, 2020, para. 36)”

In Summary

The team leader directs, guides, and motivates each member to their full potential and knows how to inspire ownership within their team. NCOs that know how to generate team ownership will be prepared to lead when the situation has heavy costs and high risks. When every member of the team knows their critical roles, as well as the roles of other team members, they're ready for the future fight. ■

Click below to listen to the Podcasts from the article:



References

- Department of the Army. (2020). *The noncommissioned officer guide*. https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN20340_TC%207-22x7%20FINAL%20WEB.pdf
- Duncan, T. (2020). The importance of writing. *NCO Journal*. <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/Archives/2020/February/The-Importance-of-Writing/>
- Gatchell, B. (2019). Sergeant major of the Army exhorts Soldiers to take ownership of 'my squad.' https://www.army.mil/article/227158/sergeant_major_of_army_exhorts_soldiers_to_take_ownership_of_my_squad
- Gopnik, A. Why the old look down on the young. *The Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-we-look-down-on-todays-kids-11575561273>
- Greer, J. (2018). Training: The foundation for success in combat. <https://www.heritage.org/military-strength-topical-essays/2019-essays/training-the-foundation-success-combat>
- Narlock, J. (2018). Ownership is leadership: Three steps to owning your outcomes and being a better leader. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbeshumanresourcescouncil/2018/02/22/ownership-is-leadership-three-steps-to-owning-your-outcomes-and-being-a-better-leader/#5bf7a2271ae2>

Patel, D. (2017). 8 ways Generation Z will differ from millennials in the workplace. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/deeppatel/2017/09/21/8-ways-generation-z-will-differ-from-millennials-in-the-workplace/#6e4d88fd76e5>

Prosser, C. (2020). Mission command and small unit leadership. *NCO Journal*. <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/Archives/2020/February/Army-Doctrine-and-the-NCO/>

Schroeder, B. (2020). If you want to maximize your career, you need to embrace freedom and accountability. Seven insights to guide your way. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernhardschroeder/2020/01/14/if-you-want-to-maximize-your-career-you-need-need-to-embrace-freedom-and-accountability--seven-insights-to-guide-your-way/#7fcd2ae8896c>

Willink, J., & Babin, L. (2015). *Extreme ownership*. St. Martin's Press.

Master Sgt. Brian L. Creed is currently the G4 senior maintenance supervisor for the 32d Army Air and Missile Defense Command at Fort Bliss, Texas. He previously served as the first sergeant for Alpha Company, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 725th Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska. He holds a master's degree in political science with a concentration in international relations and a bachelor's degree in sociology. He is currently working toward his master's degree in business administration with a concentration in strategic leadership.



<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>

<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>

<https://www.instagram.com/ncojournalofficial/>

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCO Journal, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

