



(Graphic illustration by Dale Cordes)

The Look of Leadership

By Sgt. Maj. Kyle Matus

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This article is in memory of 1st Sgt. Christopher C. Rafferty. Killed in Action July 21, 2006, Sharana, Afghanistan.

As a young Soldier, I moved to Germany for my first duty station and joined a company that would soon deploy to Iraq. Upon arrival, I decided the best philosophy to follow would be to rely on my father's wise advice and be slow to speak, allowing me the opportunity to observe those around me. It was during this time I learned the nucleus holding my first company together was 1st Sgt. Rafferty, a 5-foot-7-inch, loud and interactive company first sergeant. He was a leader who met all challenges head on and always looked his Soldiers in the eye as a sign of respect.

Authentic Leadership

He was my first experience with authentic leadership and a prime example of how to truly care about Soldiers. He frequently asked his Soldiers how they were doing and wanted real conversations and honest answers, showing us he genuinely cared and was sincere. The look of undivided attention on his face when addressing us, his upright posture, and the way he always looked us in the eye expressed a desire to know and understand Soldiers both inside and outside his unit. This senior noncommissioned officer (NCO) valued our well-being and the U.S. Army as a whole.

This care and understanding were even more evident during our deployment to Iraq when my platoon was attached to a different company so Forward Operating Base Normandy could have a platoon of engineers. Even over distance, and attached to a different command, we never felt excluded or unimportant to Rafferty or our original unit. He used letters to communicate with us and made trips via convoy to visit when possible. His influential leadership never faltered, even from a distance.

Joining the Ranks

Upon redeployment, my squad leader recommended me for promotion to sergeant. I used every second I could to study questions, manuals, scenarios, and create a personal biography to prepare for the promotion board. Because I knew Rafferty cared about me as a Soldier and person, I felt confident in my answers, posture, and poise during the question-and-answer phase. After the board was over, I waited patiently to find out if a promotion was in my near future.

The board informed me I would be a brand-new NCO and Rafferty asked me to meet him at his office. He wanted to impart a piece of wisdom before I be-

came a sergeant. He told me I had all the knowledge to become a great leader, but sometimes even great leaders find themselves in chaos. Even when they feel like they have all the answers, someone or something can make them second-guess themselves, their abilities, and their leadership. Selfish pride and a lack of humility will get a leader nowhere in today's Army. Taking care of Soldiers and their families is the sign of a real leader.

Conclusion

A year after we returned from our deployment to Iraq, Rafferty deployed again to Afghanistan, where he would be Killed in Action while coordinating a response to a mortar and possible rocket-propelled grenade attack. He died doing what he loved—caring for and protecting his Soldiers.

His message was clear: Care about your Soldiers. Authentic leadership is genuine, humble, and builds long-term trust. If all NCOs possessed the genuineness that Rafferty had their organizations would flourish, and Soldiers would be confident they are cared about and someone always has their back. So, as you progress up the chain of leadership, show your Soldiers you care. Ask them how they are doing and always look them in the eye. ■

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