



The 66th Military Intelligence Brigade held an NCO Induction ceremony on Clay Kaserne, Wiesbaden, Germany, Jan. 10, 2019. Command Sergeants Major Robert Abernethy and Christopher Matthews spoke to the new NCOs about expectations, challenges they may face, and the meaning of the NCO Creed. (U.S. Army photo by Ashley L. Keasler)

Leadership

Building a Culture of Respect

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Early in my career, I had difficulty controlling my response to negative stimuli when interacting with others. If one of my Soldiers broke the rules, I took it as a personal attack on my authority. This perception caused me to become emotionally responsible for a situation that was not entirely under my control. Instead of asking why the Soldier broke the rules, I focused on how it made me feel. As a result, I became angry and took actions that did nothing to correct the problem. I wanted to take the time to explore why this is a counterproductive style of leadership so others, especially new leaders, can progress faster and further than I did.

Leadership is a lifelong collection of skills, traits, intelligence, intuition, and most importantly, the drive and motivation to do what one believes is right. It is dynamic and requires passion and empathy to view situations from multiple points of view to make informed critical decisions. This article will investigate strategies

leaders can employ to identify and correct organizational culture gaps and foster a climate of mutual respect.

Building Relationships

There are many different motives to enlist in the U.S. Army, from pay and benefits, to honor, adventure, and a

sense of patriotic duty. Regardless of the specific reason, according to a *Rand* study, "Leadership and fellow Soldiers were cited as the most important source of motivation, camaraderie, and overall social support" (Helmus et al., 2018, p. 2). This means that Soldiers want to be inspired, motivated, and belong to a close-knit and supportive team. This can only happen through emotionally intelligent leadership that focuses on building strong foundations and relationships (Department of the Army, 2019).

Developmental Mindsets

According to American psychologist and mindset expert Dr. Carol Dweck, there are two basic types of developmental mindsets: Fixed and growth mindsets (Dweck, 2006). In a fixed mindset, individuals believe their qualities are fixed traits and cannot change. These people rely on their intelligence and talents rather than working to develop and improve them. They also believe that talent alone leads to success, and no amount of effort will change that.

Alternatively, in a growth mindset, individuals have an underlying belief their skills and intelligence can grow with time and experience (Dweck, 2006). When people believe they can hone and sharpen skills and attributes they realize their efforts affect their achievement, which leads to even higher achievements.

Multiple-time Pro Bowl and Super Bowl winner Jerry Rice is a relevant example of the growth mindset. He is arguably the greatest wide receiver in the history of professional football. Interestingly, from an athletic ability standpoint, he was not immediately phenomenal upon entering the NFL. However, Rice was honest with himself, knew he was comparatively slow, and knew training just for raw speed would not make him faster than those with natural ability (Rice & Silver, 1996). Instead, he focused on the abilities he could change and developed a legendary work ethic, continuously challenging his ability to improve both mentally and physically. Because of this work ethic and growth mindset, Rice won three Super Bowls and was selected to the Pro Bowl 13 times. He was also picked as *USA Today's* best NFL football player of all time ("NFL 100," 2019).

Proactive vs. Reactive Mindsets

In Dr. Stephen Covey's book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, he compares proactive and reactive mindsets. Proactive people focus on their Circle of Influence, which consists of things they can control or change. On the other hand, reactive people focus on things in their Circle of Concern (things they have little to no control over) (Covey, 2004). This can lead to negative energy, excuses, and accusations towards external



U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Felicia D. Rodriguez, outgoing Command Sergeant Major of the Brigade Support Battalion, 173rd Airborne Brigade, gives a speech during a change of responsibility ceremony at Caserma Del Din, Vicenza, Italy, Sept. 30, 2020. (U.S. Army photo by Paolo Bovo)

factors. This negativity causes their influence to shrink. According to Dr. Covey:

“Proactive is about taking responsibility for your life. You can't keep blaming everything on your parents or grandparents. Proactive people recognize that they are “response-able.” They don't blame genetics, circumstances, conditions, or conditioning for their behavior. They know they choose their behavior. Reactive people, on the other hand, are often affected by their physical environment. They find external sources to blame for their behavior. If the weather is good, they feel good. If it isn't, it affects their attitude and performance, and they blame the weather. (Covey, n.d., para. 1)”

On a personal level, recognizing these different mindsets and outlooks has helped me focus on my role as a leader and allowed me to discover why certain situations occurred and how to ensure they don't happen again. Learning to be objective also gave me an appropriate perspective and helped me assign responsibility to all actors in each event or incident.

Power Vs. Authority Leadership

It is essential to understand the difference between power and authority as it applies to leadership. Power is positional in nature, or the ability to make someone do something, resulting from the leader's standing within the hierarchy and usually through the threat of punishments (Hunter, 2012). The problem with a power-centric leadership style is it is based off of fear and creates a



U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Sean Howard, senior enlisted advisor of the 21st Theater Sustainment Command, conducts a town hall meeting with Soldiers and civilians during a leader engagement tour at 7th Army Training Command's Grafenwoehr training area, Germany, Nov. 18, 2020. (U.S. Army photo by Markus Rauchenberger)

toxic work environment. This causes the most talented subordinates to leave and is not conducive to long-term success (Pols, 2018).

Authority is the persuasive ability to influence someone to do something based on the leader's character (Hunter, 2012). Persuasive authority takes more time to develop but has a more impactful and positive result because the leader builds solid relationships with their subordinates and peers. According to Lucas Pols at *Forbes*, "Authority comes from influence — cultivating a desire in other people to work for you. You can create

this authority by removing the barriers facing employees and by being trustworthy, caring, committed, selfless and, most importantly, an incredible listener" (2018, para. 10).

Compassionate Listening

Listening to understand instead of listening to talk is important when building authority with followers because it shows a genuine interest. When leaders listen to understand they develop empathy with their subordinates and attempt to view situations from their viewpoint (Osten, 2016). Listening with interest and compassion helps leaders make decisions that are best for both individuals and units. Listening to understand is a great example for all subordinates to emulate when they themselves become leaders.

Conclusion

In the U.S. Army, leaders often become like family. With long training cycles and deployments, Soldiers sometimes look to their leaders in the same context one would view a parent. Because of this impact on future leaders, it is critical that current leaders practice emotional intelligence and uphold the Army Values. To keep the best and brightest of this new generation, U.S. Army leaders need to build strong relationships, have high expectations, and treat their Soldiers with respect. This will ensure the U.S. Army is prepared for future conflict.

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