Reflections on Leading, Values, & Beliefs

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It is not enough to just recite the Army values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. Soldiers must embody them and inject these values into their everyday life. This can be aided by reflection — an introspective process involving deliberate contemplation of thoughts, emotions, and events and their effect on the world around them. The reflective space unites learning and experiences and generates empathy and critical thinking. This is a part of the leadership development process and requires a strong sense of purpose and active embrace of experiences to affect change (Walker & Reichard, 2020). This article utilizes reflective writing from Soldiers at the U.S. Army’s Sergeants Major Academy (SGM-A) illustrating the powerful process of reflection in senior noncommissioned officers (NCOs).

Reflection

For the U.S. Army, reflection is a skill that helps leaders correct mistakes, consider multiple outcomes in the decision-making and mission planning process, and explore experiences that are sometimes difficult to communicate (Bolton, 2014; Department of the Army, 2015). “Reflective practice is a twenty-first century imperative to mindfully and effectively negotiate the emerging landscapes through pausing, attending, revising, adopting and adapting new insights” (Ganly, 2018, p. 721).

Reflective Writing

The practice of reflective writing focuses on the writer’s experiences and attempts to identify the significance and meaning of these experiences as it applies to the world.
The act of forgetting can fuel burnout in Soldiers and leaders. Leaders often forget about that and the work to be done. The value of duty is to fulfill an obligation. The value of loyalty informs those to do their share. The value of respect is to treat people as they should be treated.

Those who value selfless service are committed to the team, going further, enduring longer, and looking closer to see how they can add to the effort.

We have to be able to exercise more care and concern. Something as simple as a “Good morning” and “How are you?” before getting to business sends the simple reminder that a person’s well-being matters.

Do one’s thing and understand that your best self is all that matters. Duty defines character so do your job without being told. A person with character understands the standards of behavior and what is and is not acceptable to carry out assigned tasks. The value of duty can never be underestimated when fulfilling ones’ obligations. Why go to such lengths just to keep a promise? At the end of the day, it’s about being your best self while you do your thing. This sentiment is a continuation of the dogma and traditions set for a military professional. The NCO creed demands ones’ commitment. Doing one’s thing and understanding your best self is all that matters is why values that build character are important to increasing not only your own happiness but also the happiness of others. Carrying out a task to completion or fulfilling a promise can bring degrees of comfort and maybe move you one step closer to becoming the best person and leader you can be.

The value of respect is to treat people as they should be treated.

The fundamental principle of the Army Value of respect relates to how Soldiers should treat others. According to ADP 6-22: Army Leadership and the Profession, respect is defined as “treat people as they should be treated” (Department of the Army, 2019, p. 1-12). On its surface, the textbook definition of respect is an admirable interpersonal principle, but the definition lacks clarity upon critical reflection. Where I differ from the Army’s approach to treating others with respect is in the application of the word “should.” The term “should” infers a conditions-based treatment of others, meaning treating others based on others’ actions. A more precise definition...
Those who value honor carry out, act, and live the values.

To live up to every Army value. For me, it was a process. From the beginning of inculcation to the tremendous experiences that made me realize just what an honor it is to serve.

From the first friend who had to pay the ultimate price for freedom, to the first friend's retirement from service, and realizing it was an honor to be counted among them.

From the first leadership position I held and all the mistakes I made, to the point when I realized I was preparing leaders to replace me and understanding what an honor it is to lead.

From having the confidence to follow orders and eventually the experience and courage to challenge a decision I knew was wrong and knowing what an honor it is to represent truth.

Honor is holding immeasurable internal value on every aspect of placing Soldiers' needs above my own, pushing my organization to success, developing leaders of the future, and knowing with all my heart, that service is an honor and I am honored to serve.

-Sgt. Maj. Deitra A. Alam
Vice Chair, SGM-A

Those who value personal courage are willing to stand up for and act upon the things that are right and wrong.

Through thick and thin, I'll be strong.
Loving and caring but I must continue on.
They can be my downfall—if my frailty shows—taking a piece of me with them and only I will know defeat.
But functioning independently without them, my future I can see—changes in myself, my life, and me.
The experiences of life have much to teach, but without constructive thought, I will not reach my goals.
I'll be strong through constraint be like shackles on my feet.
Through Integrity, I gained strength of character, discipline, and resiliency; being honest and truthful to yourself and others is brilliancy.

Salute to my brothers and sisters who died fighting for our country with Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Personal Courage, and the most important, Integrity; every day, the American Soldier will carry on your legacy.

-Master Sgt. Sierra L. Aquaowo
Student, Class 71, SGM-A

Conclusion

The Army Values set expectations for behaviors and actions in all situations. Reflection, and using reflective writing techniques, is a way for Soldiers to examine and connect to these values using their own experiences. This exercise in diversity of thoughts and perspectives allows for introspection and personal growth. Because each Soldier is different, sharing these reflections builds empathy and understanding and can strengthen trust and compassion for others.

References


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