

Things I Wish I Knew

COMMAND SGT. MAJ. JASON C. PORRAS

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Advice from Your Current Self to Your Younger Self

The purpose of this column is for senior NCOs to provide advice and direction to young NCOs to ensure they are on the right path to life and career development.

This is an opportunity for senior leaders to mentor the NCO Corps with the wisdom they wish they would have had as junior leaders.

Please send all submissions to the NCO Journal website under the *Publish With NCO Journal* tab.



Command Sgt. Maj. Jason Porras, the senior enlisted advisor for the Special Troops Battalion, 1st Armored Division Resolute Support Sustainment Brigade, conducted battlefield circulation on Bagram Air field, Afghanistan, May 23, 2017. During the circulation, Soldiers from the mail distribution center explained the process of how the mail is moved in, out and around Afghanistan.

Command Sgt. Maj. Jason Porras

My name is Command Sgt. Maj. Jason C. Porras and I am currently the Army University command sergeant major. I joined the U.S. Army out of Tampa, Florida, as an 18-year-old high school dropout. Looking for a serious career, and one my children could be proud of, I joined the Army and headed off to basic training. I am a 42A (Human Resource Specialist) by trade, but spent the majority of my career filling positions not directly tied to my military occupational specialty (MOS). I believe in doing your best regardless of what position you're in. Doing your absolute best is more important than where you're slotted. I also believe in bettering yourself while you're in the military. Since joining, I've earned my associates, bachelor's, and master's degrees, all while serving in the military. Years later, after serving in a multitude of assignments, including every major leadership position up to command sergeant major, I was asked to reflect on things I wish I knew and things I do to remind myself to remain a humble leader. I hope some of my thoughts will help others get a head start on figuring things out that took me longer than I would have liked.



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1. Don't take for granted where you are right now.

You only get one turn being where you are in the position you're in. You may come back to the same duty station, even same unit, but your role will be different. Enjoy what you're doing today. Have fun and make the most of it.

2. Don't procrastinate.

Putting things off is habit-forming. Looking back, I could have done so much more to better myself both personally and professionally if I didn't procrastinate. Your career isn't a race, and yes, you must pace yourself, but don't become a constant procrastinator.

3. The people around you are breaking their backs to do great things, and you are a part of that.

Whether they're your boss, peer, or subordinate, take the time to thank them for what they do. We do a terrible job of simply saying "good job".

4. Always remember, another Soldier's life sucks way worse than yours.

Don't complain unless you've got it the hardest. And trust me: you don't.

5. Invest in the person, not just the Soldier.

If the person knows you genuinely care about them, the Soldier in them will know the same. Know your people, their likes and dislikes, and the things they are passionate about. The things that matter to them should matter to you.

6. You're not special, you're just old and have been around a long time.

You've earned it sure, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't still fill sandbags like everyone else. Note – as a Battalion CSM I filled more than my share of sandbags during deployment. People thought I was crazy at first, but then other senior people joined in.

7. If you get that gut feeling that someone wants to talk about something, but they don't engage – go engage them.

Your gut is normally right. If they still don't open up and you have the same feeling, sick the chaplain on them just to be sure.

8. People make mistakes. Hell, most don't make as many as you.

What was their intention? Find out why they did what they did. If they had good intentions, adjust their sight picture, don't jump straight to punishment. Most people do the wrong thing in spectacular fashion and would do the right thing in spectacular fashion if they only knew what right looked like. Take the time to show them.

9. Don't think for a second you'd be where you are without those who made you successful.

Don't forget about them. Reach out and thank them, or just check in on them and tell them you appreciate them for who they are.

10. Find the oddball / misfit children. They are Soldiers too, and they often don't fit in with their peers.

Often, all someone needs to know is that one person cares about them. Once you find three to four oddballs, link them together. Make it a point to see them face to face when you're in their area of operations (AO). Don't forget, you're an oddball too – people just pretend to laugh at your jokes because you're a CSM.



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