



U.S. Army Soldiers attending the Basic Leader Course (BLC) at NCO Academy Hawaii team up to flip a tire during the Academy's PT Competition. NCOs must remain self-aware and develop authenticity, confidence, and empowerment skills to support the demands of multi-domain conflicts. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Christopher Thompson)

# An Argument for Developing NCOs Self-Awareness Skills Earlier

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**P**resent-day NCOs experience challenges far beyond foundational leader training. Assignments and tasks associated with the roles and responsibilities of each NCO rank require leaders who remain adaptive to ever-changing environments. They serve as trainers, evaluators, and coaches and advise commanders on critical decisions to win our nation's wars. Their roles continuously evolve as the requirements

of war evolve. NCOs must operate within defined autonomies to win 21st century fights. This is why they must remain self-aware and develop authenticity, confidence, and empowerment skills to support the demands of multi-domain conflicts.

## **Advancing Self-Awareness**

The Army's current model for developing senior

NCOs use non-cognitive and cognitive thinking assessments and subordinate and peer feedback during the Sergeant Major Assessment Program (Department of the Army, 2021). Assessing leaders before they are assigned command leadership positions enables the Army to have the right leaders in the right positions over time. However, NCOs require assessments earlier in their career to develop self-awareness skills.

A downfall of not developing self-awareness early is the potential for NCOs to believe they are beyond correction. This could lead to a breakdown in accountability and ultimately degrade team effectiveness. Individual self-awareness skills remain critical to team cohesiveness and require leaders who remain adaptive to changing environments throughout their careers.

Incorporating NCO assessments before promotion boards would develop a foundation of needed feedback and enable leaders across the Army to assist their subordinates. Another possibility would be incorporating peer evaluations during the Basic Leaders Course (BLC) to foster NCO feedback assessments earlier in their careers. Lastly, soliciting and using peer and subordinate assessments during NCO quarterly counseling would also increase leader awareness. Self-aware individuals influence self-regulation, which supports humility (Miller & Verhaeghen, 2022). Intentional NCO development early through continuous assessments throughout their career will build authenticity.

## Authenticity

Diverse formations across the Army require leaders who embrace change and rise above adversity. Authentic leaders practice self-reflection throughout their military journey, identifying strengths and weaknesses that reduce counterproductive behaviors within organizations. Perceptions of a leader's authenticity positively affect subordinates' perception of work engagement (Arokiasamy et al., 2022). Leader responsibilities often require them to seek validation through their organization and subordinates' healthy performance. There are countless moments where thankless contributions become critical success factors.

Changes in the operational environment require leaders to adapt and listen to their

Soldiers to understand each member of their team. Healthy communication with team members enables the organization to foster an environment of feedback. NCOs who embrace feedback increase their efforts to evolve in their position and yield positive results. They build credibility through their actions, displayed in their confidence to lead in complex and evolving environments.

## Confidence

Leaders develop their confidence throughout their careers based on their professional and firsthand experiences as NCOs. Building their personal self-confidence helps them improve their subordinates' confidence in the organization. Confidence is contagious and moves throughout an organization (DA, 2006). Leaders who view their confidence levels as a skill will potentially seek guidance through coaching and mentorship to grow self-confidence throughout their experience as NCOs.

Confident leaders understand the importance of asking for help when needed. There are moments in NCOs' careers when circumstances will overshadow their daily responsibilities to lead formations. Adversity is one of the greatest teachers of humility and improves leaders' awareness during crises. Confident NCOs understand when to take charge and when to seek guidance. They improve organizations by empowering



Sgt. Roshunda M. Cole, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade, participates in a master resiliency class at Fort Riley, Kansas, July 24, 2023. Cole learned about the six competencies of the Army's MRT program, including self-awareness, self-regulation, optimism, mental agility, and strengths of character connection. Individual self-awareness skills remain critical to team cohesiveness and require leaders who remain adaptive to changing environments throughout their careers. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Dawson Smith)

their subordinates and supporting a healthy climate.

## Empowerment

Empowering others within the formation requires NCOs to share their vision and remain committed to organizational values. The Army values set the foundation for Soldiers to develop healthy character traits necessary for positive behaviors. Empowering subordinates simplifies the process and enables the Army to maintain success as leaders transition in and out of service. Sharing knowledge and experience through genuine feedback helps Soldiers manage career expectations and supports consistent growth and development.

Leaders who value counseling and constructive

feedback truly empower their formations to achieve the best subordinate performance efforts. Soldiers who feel accepted and valued are more likely to continue serving. Therefore, NCOs substantially influence Soldier retention and are the blueprint for those young Soldiers destined to become future U.S. Army NCOs.

## Conclusion

Future NCOs must remain self-aware and develop skills that support authenticity, confidence, and empowerment to support the demands of a multi-domain fight. Embracing these pillars develops leaders of character who grow into strong NCOs worthy of leading the future fight. ■

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