



A cavalry scout with the 4th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, rehearses AT-4 rocket launcher procedures Feb. 24, 2023, at Fort Riley, Kansas. Time spent empowering and developing our Soldiers will pay dividends for the Army in the future. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Joshua Holladay)

The Importance of Empowering Your Subordinates

By Sgt. Brandon Burnett

4th Cavalry Regiment of the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division

A recurring issue I have noticed throughout my time in the Army is increased stress among leaders because of the increased workload they feel responsible for daily. Many times leaders, consciously or subconsciously, reject the idea of “turning

loose of the reins” and allowing their subordinates to take action on tasks. This action, or inaction, increases a leader’s workload and stress, decreases productivity and makes subordinates feel like their leader doesn’t trust them to accomplish tasks on their own. Recogniz-

ing this behavior in ourselves, and actively taking steps to mitigate it, is a key step in stress management and the development of our subordinates.

When deciding what type of leader I wanted to be, I reflected on the example set for me by my first NCO after advanced individual training. He was a tough but fair Sergeant First Class. He expected excellence but was always willing to go the extra mile to help me achieve and even exceed expectations. I appreciated both the relative autonomy and mentorship he provided. Effective leadership in the Army is built upon a foundation of awareness, trust and the development of subordinates. My NCO walked the walk. By prioritizing these elements, leaders Army-wide can help establish a cohesive team culture, cultivate individual growth and ultimately achieve success despite adversity.

Awareness

“Awareness of weaknesses also helps leaders rely on others who possess strengths the leader may lack,” (Department of the Army, 2019, p. 6-3). As leaders, we owe it to ourselves and our subordinates to utilize introspection to determine our strengths and weaknesses. By looking within, leaders can better delegate tasks to subordinates, giving them opportunities to excel in areas where they are strong. As well as develop themselves in areas where they are weak. Introspection is self-improvement tool that, when utilized properly, will improve you as a leader and inspire your subordinates to seek to improve themselves constantly. However, it brings a certain level of vulnerability that we as NCOs often struggle with.

We must learn to be vulnerable with our subordinates and ask for help when needed. I often say, “only you know what you don’t know.” It means that only you, the individual, truly knows what you need to be taught or helped with. If we all learn to be vulnerable with our Soldiers, that example will make them more comfortable expressing their weaknesses identified through introspection. This leads to better-trained, more effective and more cohesive teams.

Trust

“Trust has a direct relationship on the time and resources required to accomplish the mission,” (Department of the Army, 2019, p. 1-2). Leaders have to trust in the abilities of their subordinates and use that

trust to develop and enable them to succeed in their missions. Oftentimes leaders struggle to turn loose of responsibilities and pass them off to subordinates, for fear of the subordinates failing. If we as leaders recognize that failure leads to an opportunity for training and development, then we can find it easier to enable our subordinates to take on an increased level of responsibility. A workload shared amongst many will decrease the stress on the individual. A group working together to complete all tasks to ensure mission success, fosters an environment of trust and cohesion between leaders and subordinates. By increasing the responsibilities of your subordinates and trusting them to accomplish the tasks, you make them feel empowered to exercise initiative in future situations.

One of the greatest gifts my first NCO passed on to me was the idea that you must trust your subordinates to carry on in your absence to adequately prepare them as their NCO. I was consistently entrusted with increasing responsibility for tasks outside of my job scope and paygrade, and was given the tools to succeed, and the autonomy to make my own decisions about how to best accomplish tasks. My NCO trusted me to complete these tasks making me feel like a valuable and reliable team member. This action greatly aided my professional development and leadership philosophy as I became an NCO. Trusting my Soldiers with a task they can be responsible for, and stepping back to allow them to decide how the task will be completed, allows me the greatest opportunity to assess each of their strengths and weaknesses as I begin to develop them as leaders.



Paratroopers with the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division train during a Joint Readiness Training Center rotation 23-07 on Fort Polk, La., April 30, 2023. Effective leadership is built on a foundation of awareness, trust and the development of subordinates. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Lilliana Magoon)

Development

“Leaders look ahead and prepare subordinates with potential to assume positions with greater leadership responsibility; in turn, subordinates develop themselves to prepare for future leadership assignments” (Department of the Army, 2019, p. 6-1). It is the role and responsibility of a leader in the United States Army to ensure that they are doing everything in their power to guarantee the next generation of leaders is proficient in their roles within the organization. This is accomplished through a system of increasing subordinates' scope of responsibility and decreasing required oversight, while still seeing that the commander's intent is met. Increasing the responsibility of subordinates benefits both parties by increases subordinate experience level, decreasing the workload

and stress of the leader and fostering the needed trust between the subordinate and leader.

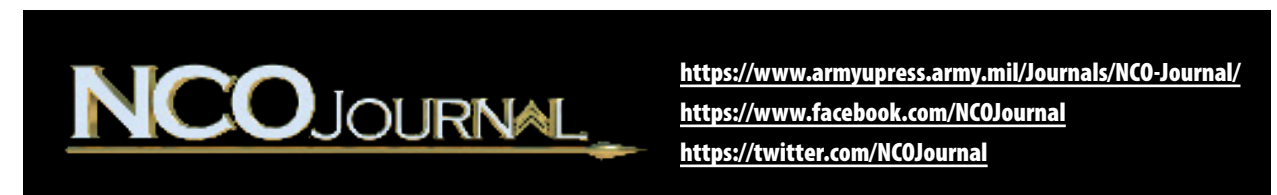
Conclusion

The time we spend investing in empowering and developing our subordinates will pay dividends in the future for the Army as an organization. We as leaders must ensure that the Army is equipped with capable and confident future leaders, starting with trusting and empowering those below us. Constantly seek to improve yourself and your subordinates, trust them with increased responsibility, empower them to be successful, develop them into effective future leaders and teach them that failure isn't the end. It's just an opportunity to learn and improve. ■

References

Department of the Army. (2019). *Army leadership and the profession (Army Doctrine Publication [ADP] 6-22)*. https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN20039-ADP_6-22-001-WEB-0.pdf

Sgt. Brandon Burnett is currently serving as a Motor Sergeant in, D Forward Support Troop of 1st Squadron 4th Cavalry Regiment of the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division at Fort Riley, Kansas. He has served in various leadership positions during his career in the Army, serving as a Team Leader, Armament Section NCOIC, Squad Leader, and Motor Sergeant. He is a graduate of the Army Logistics University 91F30 Advanced Leader Course, where he graduated with academic honors.



Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCO Journal, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

