



Drill sergeants must see their leaders actively engaged in training to know their mission is a priority. The battalion commander or command sergeant major's presence in the field is a powerful way to demonstrate commitment to the mission. (U.S. Army photo by Christopher Wilson)

A Year of Learning and Growth: Basic Training and Command Sergeants Major

By Command Sgt. Maj. Steven J. Henderson

2-60th Infantry Regiment

One year ago, I assumed responsibility for a basic training battalion at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. While excited, I was intimidated by the idea of serving and leading drill sergeants and cadre.

A year later, I have grown and gained tremendous insight — insight that I believe would benefit all newly assigned command sergeants major in the basic combat training environment.

Talent Management

The most important responsibility for a command sergeant major in the basic training environment is talent management. While drill sergeants can serve a 36-month assignment, many choose to complete their

mandatory 24 months and depart the organization. The command sergeant major — in concert with the company first sergeants and the battalion's human resource managers — must forecast these moves and be ready to reassign drill sergeants with the battalion to ensure proper leader-to-led ratios.

After assuming responsibility, I created a talent management board that included each drill sergeant's photo, military occupational specialty, and anticipated date of departure. Our talent management board is displayed in the battalion's command suite, so commanders and first sergeants can assist in ensuring we have active conversations on the organization's talent.

Another critical component to talent management is

specialty courses and a robust professional development program to enhance the drill sergeant's knowledge on basic rifle marksmanship, physical fitness, resilience, and leadership. The organization's command sergeant major must take a proactive approach to ensure drill sergeants attend and complete these courses as well as creating relevant and worthwhile leader professional development (LPD) opportunities.

The Army's Leadership Requirements Model should serve as the bedrock of an organization's LPD program, with Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC)-centric courses to ensure drill sergeants and cadre understand Army and TRADOC policies.

Organizational Leadership

Small ripples make big waves, and in the basic training environment, ripples inevitably turn into tsunamis. After assuming responsibility for my organization, I quickly learned that the smallest changes make significant impacts on the cadre. Newly assigned command sergeants major should be purposeful when introducing new ideas or concepts. Patience and persistent messaging are critical to ensuring drill sergeants and cadre

understand purpose, which will lead to a smoother transition to commitment over compliance.

Another critical component to organizational leadership is the battalion's leadership presence. Drill sergeants often work arduous hours and must see the battalion commander or command sergeant major have skin in the game. Command sergeants major should take steps to prevent being overwhelmed by requirements from both the organization and higher headquarters to participate in a range, attend a block of instruction, or audit a class. Active participation will display your commitment to the drill sergeants and their mission and provide you opportunities to have conversations with cadre.

Large-Scale Combat Operations

Basic combat training has evolved in its tactical training to ensure trainees understand how to fight and survive in the Large-Scale Combat Operations (LSCO) environment. Trainees now learn and are tested on tactical posture, defensive fighting positions, and basic level squad operations. In the culminating field training exercise aptly called "the Forge," drill sergeants transition to tactical-level squad leaders, leading trainees through a



U.S. Army Reserve Staff Sgt. Rudy Nieman, a drill sergeant with the 108th Training Command (IET), prepares for the marksmanship qualifying range during the 2024 U.S. Army Drill Sergeant of the Year competition. The organization's command sergeant major must take a proactive approach to ensure drill sergeants are attending and completing specialty courses. Competitions like Drill Sergeant of the Year highlight the importance of maintaining excellence in leadership. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Justin Escourse)

situational-based and scenario-driven exercise meant to replicate a LSCO environment.

As the master trainer and senior advisor to the commander, newly appointed command sergeants major should collaborate with company first sergeants to create or refine training programs for drill sergeants to ensure each NCO is skilled and confident in their ability to train basic level tactical skills. Command sergeants major must ensure each company has planned and scheduled training (led by the first sergeant) to assess and retrain drill sergeants where skilled competency persists throughout the formation.

Additionally, opportunities exist in the basic training LSCO environment for commanders, staff, and medical personnel to receive worthwhile training that will prepare each to enter Forces Command (FORSCOM) units trained and ready to lead their respective formations. Collaboration with the battalion's executive officer is critical to ensure these key personnel are included in all tactical training, ranging from tactical operations center (TOC) operations, resupply efforts, and casualty evacuation.

Teamwork

Perhaps the most consequential component to a newly appointed command sergeant major's

success is teamwork. After assuming responsibility, command sergeants major must schedule office calls with the installation command sergeant major as well as the installation garrison command sergeant major. Each of these leaders will provide guidance on a wide range of topics that will give necessary insight for organizational success.

Additionally, collaboration with fellow command sergeants major within your organization and across the installation is necessary for mission success. Sharing ideas, resources, and — at times — manpower will pay dividends as command sergeants major maneuver their way through their first year.

Finally, the importance of the relationship between the battalion commander and command sergeant major cannot be overstated. It is the sole responsibility of command sergeants major to reshape themselves into the leaders the organization's commander needs. This process is not easily done, so constant communication and collaboration are needed from both leaders. Counseling (both formal and informal), daily synchronization meetings, and sharing a cup of coffee will give command sergeants major the tools they need to understand intent. This sort of collaboration will also ensure that intent is communicated and understood by all in the formation. ■

Command Sergeant Major Steven J. Henderson is the senior enlisted advisor for 2-60th Infantry Regiment at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. He has served in a variety of leadership assignments and positions over the last 26 years ranging from squad leader to command sergeant major. He holds a bachelor's degree in business and a master's degree in political affairs.



<https://www.armypress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>

<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>

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.

