



Author, then Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Adams, 180th Transportation Battalion CSM, checks Spc. Nathan Forgues' dog tags during an in-ranks inspection of the Logistical Task Force 180 Truck Rodeo at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, May 4, 2006. According to the Department of the Army's Noncommissioned Officer Guide, under the Be, Know, Do concept, it is imperative NCOs know their Soldiers. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Robert Adams)

# Shaping an NCO's Career Through Mission Command

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**D**espite their echelon, command teams exercise mission command in garrison and theaters of operation. According to the Department of the Army (2019b), "Mission command is the Army's approach to command and control that empowers subordinate decision making and decentralized execution appropriate to the situation" (p.1-3). Yet, battalion command teams make many daily decisions

impacting Soldiers' careers. While mission command is a philosophy, it is also embedded within the command and control warfighting function.

Successful command teams understand and execute mission command concepts. However, they must also provide leadership, take responsibility for their actions, and make timely decisions. Using the concepts of mission command, this article analyzes



Author, then Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Adams, talks to soldiers from transportation battalion headquarters during Operation Iraqi Freedom, circa 2003-2004. One of the battalion command teams' many duties and responsibilities is to continuously assess the organization. According to Army Doctrine Publication 6-0, Mission command: Command and control of Army forces (ADP 6-0), "Continuous assessment helps commanders anticipate and adapt the force to changing circumstances." (Photo courtesy of retired CSM Richard B. Adams Jr.)

how a battalion command team's decisions affected a noncommissioned officer's (NCO) deployment and, ultimately, the individual's career.

## Notification of Deployment

In August 2002, a transportation battalion headquarters received a warning order notifying them of an anticipated deployment to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Most units are fenced in after receiving deployment orders, commonly referred to as stop movement.

Stop movement can keep Soldiers from moving because of permanent change of station (PCS) orders or attending service schools such as Drill Sergeant School (DSS).

As the much-anticipated orders were received, the battalion command team scheduled numerous family readiness group meetings informing Soldiers and their families of the upcoming deployment.

In addition, they reviewed a list of Soldiers scheduled to PCS or attend service schools. Upon review, the command team noticed one of their supply section NCOs was scheduled to attend DSS. They quickly assessed their organization before deciding on the NCO's career.

## Commander's Activities: Assessment

One of the battalion command teams' many duties and responsibilities is continuously assessing the organization. According to the Department of the Army (2019b), "Continuous assessment helps commanders anticipate and adapt the force to changing circumstances" (p. 2-16).

Once the command team identified the NCO was scheduled to attend DSS, the battalion commander tasked

the battalion command sergeant major (CSM) to assess the organization for a potential replacement.

The CSM quickly huddled up with the administration section's NCO in charge (NCOIC) and scrubbed the battalion's unit manning roster. The transportation headquarters consisted of 45 officers and enlisted Soldiers with operational control of six units with more than 900 Soldiers. Admin's NCOIC provided the CSM with the supply sergeant readiness status in each of the six subordinate units.

According to the Department of the Army (2020), under the Be, Know, Do concept, it is imperative NCOs know their Soldiers. The CSM personally knew all the supply sergeants but wanted their official readiness status before talking with them.

After scrubbing the manning roster and the readiness status list, the CSM identified a possible replacement for the supply NCO. He back-briefed the commander and provided a recommended course of action.

## Elements of Command: Decision-Making

Decision-making is a critical leadership aspect commanders must exercise with the utmost respect in any situation. They have two ways to approach decisions: analytically or intuitively. The Department of the Army (2019b) states:

"Analytic decision making generates several alternative solutions, compares those solutions to a set of criteria, and selects the best course of action. ... Intuitive decision making is reaching a conclusion in a way that is not expressly known by the decision maker. ... Intuitive decision making is faster than analytic decision making, but it requires an adequate level of experience to recognize an acceptable course of action" (p. 2-5).

The commander knew he had to make quick and timely decisions because of the upcoming deployment. Because of the CSM's assessment and recommendation, his decision was easy: allow the Soldier to attend DSS by replacing them with a subordinate unit supply NCO. It was easy to make because of his trust and confidence in the CSM and his knowledge of the commander's intent.

## Mutual Trust

For command teams to succeed, they must have mutual trust. According to the Department of the Army (2019b), "Mutual trust is shared confidence between commanders,



subordinates, and partners that they can be relied on and are competent in performing their assigned tasks” (p.1-7).

Battalion command teams must be able to speak with one voice to be successful. Trust is a contributing factor to speaking with one voice. Sometimes, command teams disagree, but they should always be transparent with Soldiers. The fact the CSM operated with the commander’s intent and trust helped make the decision easy.

## Commander’s Intent

As battalion CSMs, it is imperative they constantly and consistently operate with their commander’s intent, ensuring their Soldiers do the same. Commander’s intent consists of three major factors Soldiers should understand: the operation’s purpose, key tasks, and desired end state (Department of the Army, 2022).

Based on the situation in this article, the operation’s overall purpose was to ensure the battalion headquarters was properly staffed for its upcoming deployment.

A key task was for the CSM to extensively assess subordinate units to find a possible replacement for the supply NCO so the Soldier could attend school. The desired end state was for the unit to be properly staffed before deployment and to develop the Soldier’s career progression by enabling the NCO to attend a career-enhancing school.

## Development and Career Progression

Another of the battalion command team’s direct duties and responsibilities is to develop their Soldiers, enlisted and officers, and set them up for career progression.

According to the Department of the Army (2019a), “Leader development of others involves recruiting, accessing, developing, assigning, promoting, and retaining the leaders with the potential for levels of greater responsibility” (p. 6-1).

In the example story provided, the command team exercised developing, assigning, and promoting by allowing the NCO to attend school and potentially setting the Soldier up for future career progression.

Developing Soldiers is hard work, but it pays big dividends in the long run. Battalion command teams don’t often see the fruits of their labor or the results of their decisions for various reasons. In this story, however, the CSM did.

## Results of the Battalion Command Team’s Decision

As a result of the command team’s decision, the supply NCO went on to successfully graduate from



Author, then Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Adams (center), poses with other senior enlisted leaders from the 180th Transportation Battalion during Operation Iraqi Freedom, circa 2003-2004. Battalion command teams must be able to speak with one voice to be successful. Trust is a contributing factor to speaking with one voice. Sometimes, command teams disagree, but they should always be transparent with Soldiers. (Photo courtesy of retired CSM Richard B. Adams Jr.)

DSS. Years later, that same NCO attended Class 62 at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA), now the Sergeants Major Academy, where his former battalion CSM served as a military instructor in the same class.

That year was the CSM’s last year as a military instructor. He retired and assumed a position as a USASMA instructor. The NCO later went on to serve as a nominative CSM.

## Conclusion

The focus of this article expounds on how a battalion command team’s decisions affected an NCO’s career path. As leaders, we are charged to accomplish the mission and care for our Soldiers.

Communication and trust were major factors contributing to the command team’s decision. What other avenues aid decision-making regarding Soldiers’ future career progressions?

One major factor was the CSM’s ability to live by the Be, Know, Do concept. Another major contributing factor was the command team’s ability to develop their Soldiers, both enlisted and officers, and set them up for future career progression. What other systems and processes will assist leaders in setting Soldiers up for future success? ■

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