



U.S. Soldiers graduate from the Basic Leader Course (BLC) at the 7th Army NCO Academy in Grafenwoehr, Germany, Aug. 30, 2024. NCOs are more than just leaders — they're the backbone of the U.S. Army. Strengthening discipline is key to ensuring that when the time comes, they and their Soldiers are ready to meet any challenge head-on. (U.S. Army photo by Miriam Schraml)

The Power of Discipline

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NCOs are more than just leaders — they're the backbone of the U.S. Army. In a world where global tensions and future conflicts loom like shadows on the horizon, NCOs' ability to enforce discipline, train their Soldiers for the realities of combat, and inspire the next generation of leaders is critical.

This article explores how NCOs can enhance discipline in their formations, emphasizing realistic training, enforcing high standards, and promoting professional military education (PME).

Good Order and Discipline

Strengthening discipline is key to ensuring that when the time comes, NCOs and their Soldiers are ready to meet any challenge head-on. Good order and discipline are the blood that powers our military apparatus.

The Army's ability to motivate Soldiers to follow the rules and articles that govern the profession is critical. NCOs ensure the Army maintains good order and discipline in its formations.

"Establishing and enforcing standards and discipline is the key to an organization's overall success and should be treated in such a way that every member of the organization understands those standards and that they are committed individually and collectively to those standards. If you can find an organization which is highly successful in combat, chances are they are one that has high standards and have strong enforcement of discipline at every level."

— Command Sgt. Maj.
Shelton R. Williamson (2020)

NCOs must hold themselves as well as their peers, superiors, and subordinates accountable to Army standards. Discipline is not inherent or innate. It is nurtured by the NCOs who understand success in the Army profession is proven in the field of battle.

NCOs need to ensure the concept of stewardship is cultivated in junior leaders early on. This means NCOs must be ready to correct and rehabilitate behaviors and Soldiers who fail to see beyond the 50-meter target. NCOs must enforce the standards now because the Army's success depends on the next generation of Soldiers who take the guidon.

Realistic training

"I truly believe we have to be experts as Soldiers, no matter what your [military occupational specialty] is."

*– 16th Sergeant Major of the Army
Michael A. Grinston (Kimmons, 2019)*

Global tensions continue to rise as geopolitical rivals destabilize their respective regions. Russian aggression in Ukraine has shown what a future European conflict will look like concerning large-scale combat operations (LSCO).

China's territorial disputes with neighbors and Taiwan necessitate deep thinking about how the Army conducts

training. Realistic training, geared toward amplifying lethality and maintaining readiness, holds secondary and tertiary effects on discipline.

"NCOs should not be afraid to challenge their Soldiers in innovative ways to prepare them for future combat. During the '2019 Best Warrior Competition,' even the Army's best Soldiers struggled to perform basic individual tasks in realistic training environments. ... After demonstrating basic proficiency, NCOs can reduce visibility, or add physical and/or psychological stressors to their tasks in order to push their Soldiers' training. These added stressors will better prepare Soldiers for the realities of LSCO."

*– Sgt. Maj. Jackson Perry
and Master Sgt. Phillip Fenrick (2020)*

The realities of the war in Ukraine paint a grim picture of what the next war could look like. Training that brings these realities to Soldiers lends an air of significance and builds on the need to enforce discipline.

These secondary and tertiary orders of effect on discipline require that NCOs ensure training aligns with their units' Mission Essential Task Lists (METL). They must know their Soldiers are proficient in individual tasks.



U.S. Staff Sgt. Michael Johnson (left), 7th Army Training Command, demonstrates to 3rd Infantry Division Soldiers how to give an in-ranks inspection. NCOs need to hold themselves, their peers, their superiors, and their subordinates accountable to Army standards. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Elizabeth Tarr)

Professional Military Education

PME is the foundation of Army leadership and is vital for strengthening discipline. NCOs who attend leadership schools like the Basic Leader Course (BLC) and subsequent courses need to learn more than just the pen and paper of the profession.

They must spend more time learning how to instill discipline in their units. PME curriculum needs to be geared toward learning to punish and reward Soldiers judiciously. It should be longer and incorporate more uncertain and complex leadership challenges, allowing burgeoning leaders to understand the importance of discipline while fine-tuning their leadership styles.

Expanding PME opportunities for NCOs and junior enlisted alike ensures discipline is front and center in their minds.

“Anchored by our Joint Enlisted Leader Attributes, our vision is to reform Enlisted Joint Professional Military Education (EJPME) to ensure that we produce leaders who embody the knowledge, skills, and attributes necessary to succeed in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous battlespace.”

— Joint Chiefs of Staff (2021)

Discipline naturally strengthens as Soldiers who attend leadership courses return to their units with a set vision of what right looks like. NCOs will enforce standards and be the professionals the Army needs them to be.

Conclusion

NCOs play a crucial role in maintaining and strengthening discipline across the Army. By enforcing standards, cultivating good order and discipline, and fostering a culture of accountability, NCOs ensure their Soldiers’ readiness for the challenges ahead.



Soldiers conduct squad tactical exercise drills in Smilov, Czech Republic, May 12, 2024. Realistic training, geared toward amplifying lethality and maintaining readiness, holds secondary and tertiary effects on discipline. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Jeff Clements)

Realistic training builds readiness and reinforces the importance of discipline in combat situations.

Expanding and enhancing PME provides NCOs the tools and knowledge to lead effectively and instill discipline in their units.

Ultimately, the Army’s success depends on the ability of its NCOs to nurture and enforce discipline at every level, ensuring the force is always prepared for the future war. ■

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