



Candles burn behind an NCO plaque at Contingency Operating Site Marez, Iraq. The candles represent valor, purity, and honor, values instilled in NCOs as they serve. The Reminders, Objectives, Accountability, Duty, and Standards followed by Recall, Outcome, Answerable, Deeds, and Scope (2-R.O.A.D.S.) framework offers a practical method for NCOs to internalize and apply the principles of the NCO Creed through focused action and reflective leadership. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Terence Ewings)

Live the NCO Creed Every Day

The 2-R.O.A.D.S. Method Shows the Way

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Serving 23 years across the Army's three components before recently retiring, I came to regard the Creed of the Noncommissioned Officer (more commonly referred to as the NCO Creed) as more than a doctrinal reference. It has become a living guide that informs my approach to leadership, training, and professional development. I witnessed the creed's immense transformative power, especially when you internalize its principles and apply them practically in the field.

This article reflects my experiences and need to share what I learned. Too often, studying the creed becomes a rote exercise, its deeper meaning overshadowed by military life's everyday demands (Department of the Army [DA], 2020).

To prevent that for those I led, I built a professional development program in the Senior Leader Course (SLC) that placed the creed at its center. I designed this program to move beyond simple recitation, encouraging NCOs to embody the creed's principles

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Serving as a guiding ethos for NCOs, the creed emphasizes leadership, integrity, and dedication to mission and Soldiers. Within the creed are assertions like “I will not use my grade or position to attain pleasure, profit, or personal safety” and “[m]y two basic responsibilities will always be uppermost in my mind — accomplishment of my mission and the welfare of my Soldiers” (DA, n.d.). Both lines serve as a reminder to NCOs of their obligations and duties.

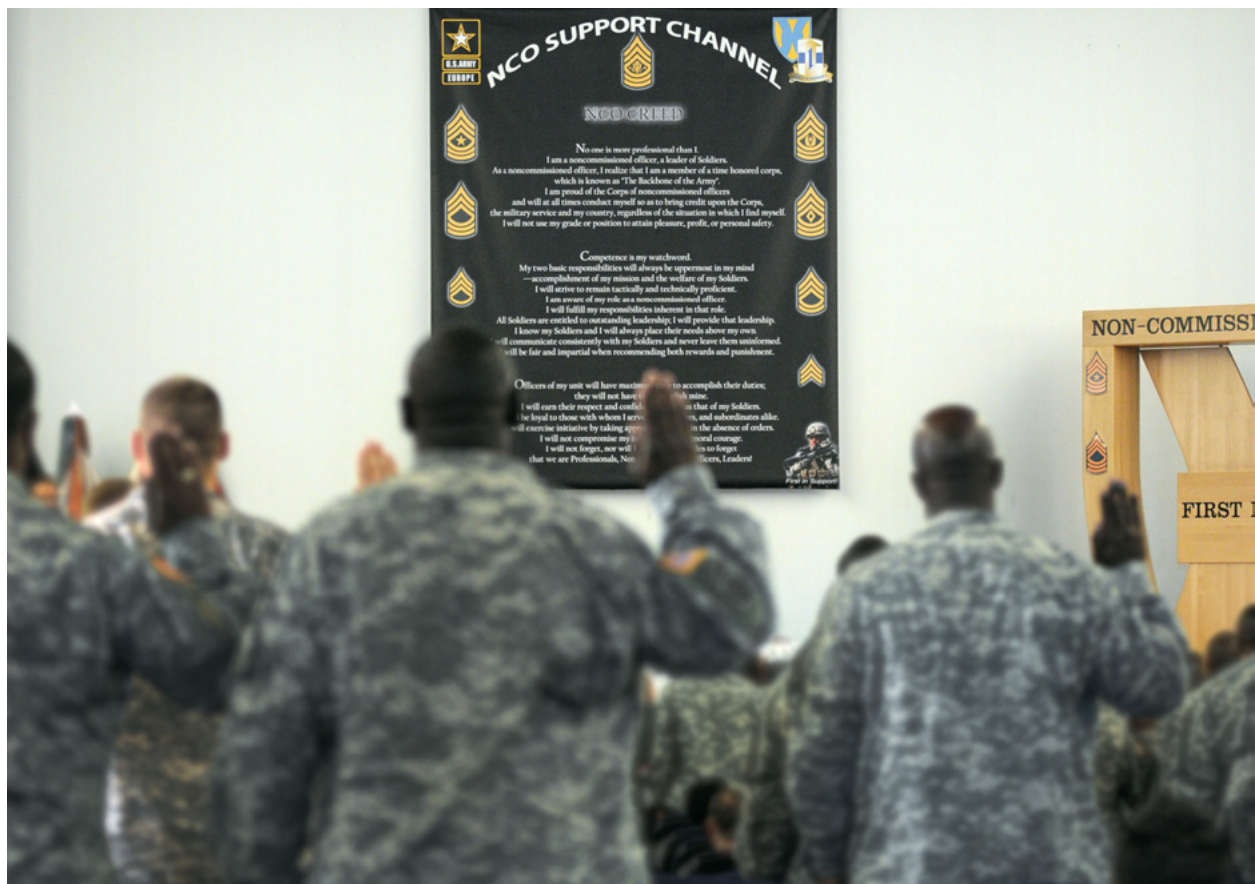
Army's highest standards of conduct (DA, 2020).

However, I believe the creed's true strength lies in its words and their practical application. To effectively translate these lines into leadership actions, I developed the 2-R.O.A.D.S. framework — a tool to help NCOs internalize and apply the creed's principles to their daily duties. Here is the framework:

The first layer of the 2-R.O.A.D.S. framework consists of critical reminders for NCOs and encompasses the key principles and values that should always be at the top of their minds.

Additionally, they must identify the objectives they aim to achieve, understand accountability for their actions and decisions, fulfill their duty to the utmost, and uphold high standards of quality and conduct.

This structured approach is consistent with Gagne's Nine Events of Instruction, which emphasize organizing learning through sequential stages to enhance focus and efficiency (Gagne, 1985). Similarly, Schema Theory underlines organizing knowledge into actionable frameworks, allowing individuals to interpret and apply



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How do the 2-R.O.A.D.S. help NCOs? Alone, perhaps there's a missing connection. That's why I chose to overlay creed sections to better connect its concepts and set into stone a better understanding and application of the framework. I found this helped NCOs better visualize their duties and responsibilities. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Christopher Gaylord)

information effectively (Anderson, 1984).

- **Reminders:** NCOs should always remember these fundamental values and principles to guide their actions and decisions (DA, 2020).
- **Objectives:** The specific goals or targets they aim to achieve, focusing on mission accomplishment and Soldier welfare.
- **Accountability:** They must be responsible for their decisions and actions, accepting rewards and consequences.
- **Duty:** The obligations and tasks that come with the position. NCOs have a moral obligation to fulfill their role, which is to provide leadership to their Soldiers.
- **Standards:** They should always uphold ethical and professional standards, ensuring integrity and moral courage, the benchmark of quality leadership.

This layer provides NCO leaders with what they must do daily to uphold the NCO Creed.

The Second R.O.A.D.S.

The second layer of the 2-R.O.A.D.S. framework encourages NCOs to reflect upon their experiences and lessons. This layer emphasizes the importance of

considering actions' outcomes and consequences, being answerable for one's decisions, recognizing how actions speak louder than words, and understanding the scope of one's authority and responsibility.

- **Recall:** To remember and reflect upon past experiences and lessons. NCOs should consistently look back, recalling insights from successes and failures (DA, 2020).
- **Outcome:** To consider the long-term consequences of decisions, not just their immediate results.
- **Answerable:** To be prepared to explain and justify actions taken. NCOs must be answerable to their Soldiers, peers, and superiors for their actions and decisions.
- **Deeds:** Acknowledging that actions speak louder than words, and they must earn the respect of those around them through their actions.
- **Scope:** They should understand the extent of their authority and responsibility, ensuring they operate within their role without overstepping.

This layer focuses on the "why" and "how" — why these principles are critical to leadership and how NCOs can implement them thoughtfully in their service.

Application of the 2-R.O.A.D.S. Framework to the NCO Creed

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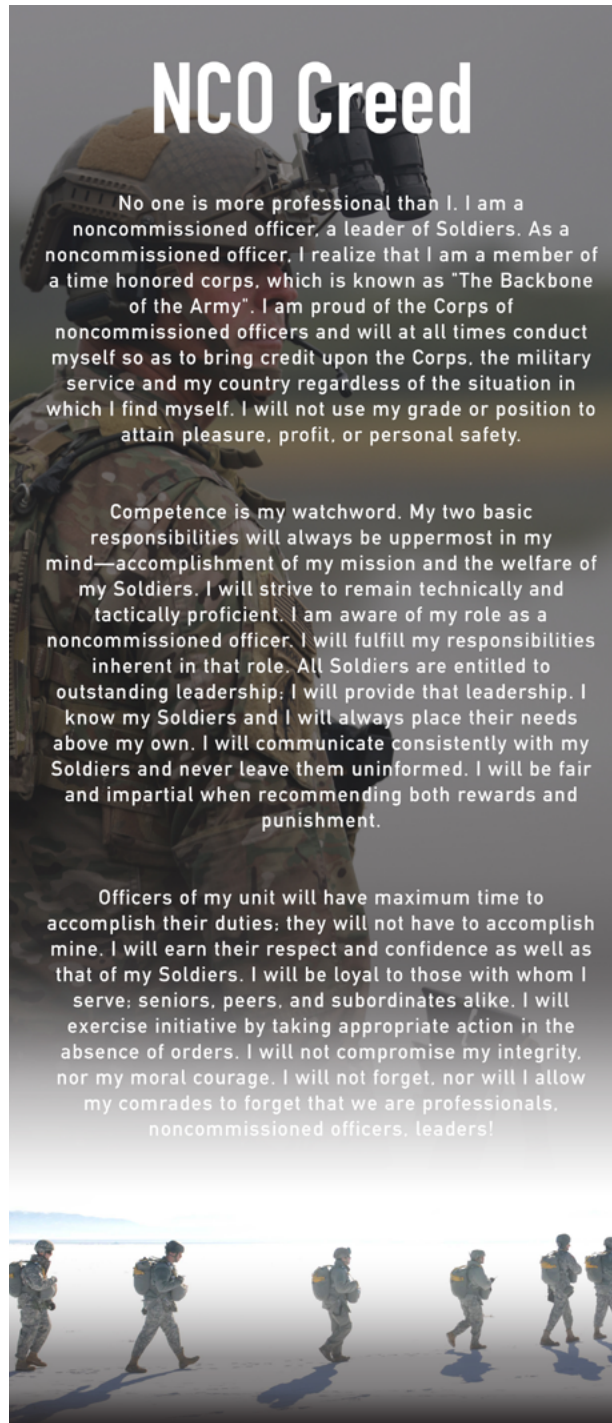
Here's what I came up with:

First R.O.A.D.S. Layer in the Creed

- **Reminders:** "No one is more professional than I. I am a noncommissioned officer, a leader of Soldiers" (DA, n.d., para. 1). This serves as a reminder of the professionalism and leadership role NCOs must embody. Situated Learning Theory supports this by emphasizing that leadership principles are most effectively learned in real-world contexts, such as military life (Lave & Wenger, 1991).
- **Objectives:** "My two basic responsibilities will always be uppermost in my mind — accomplishment of my mission and the welfare of my Soldiers" (DA, n.d., para. 2). Prioritizing goals aligns with Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) Theory, which stresses the importance of planning, monitoring, and achieving objectives (Zimmerman, 2002).
- **Accountability:** "I will fulfill my responsibilities inherent in that role" (DA, n.d., para. 2). This emphasizes the accountability of the NCO role.
- **Duty:** "All Soldiers are entitled to outstanding leadership; I will provide that leadership" (DA, n.d., para. 2). This statement outlines the duty of providing leadership.
- **Standards:** "I will not compromise my integrity, nor my moral courage" (DA, n.d., para. 3). Ethical Decision-Making frameworks like Rest's Four-Component Model affirm that maintaining ethical standards is critical for long-term leadership success (Rest, 1986).

Second R.O.A.D.S. Layer in the Creed

- **Recall:** "I am a member of a time honored corps, which is known as 'The Backbone of the Army'" (DA, n.d., para. 1). This calls for NCOs to recall the legacy and tradition to which they belong. Reflecting on past experiences to draw meaningful lessons aligns with the notion that managing cognitive load in complex learning environments ensures better retention and application of key knowledge (van Merriënboer & Sweller, 2005).
- **Outcome:** "I will be fair and impartial when recommending both rewards and punishment" (DA, n.d., para. 2). This



The 2-R.O.A.D.S. framework offers a structured approach to understanding and implementing the NCO Creed. By managing cognitive load and aligning with theories such as Cognitive Load Theory, this framework supports effective leadership development. (U.S. Army poster by Spc. Christopher Hall)



Newly inducted NCOs recite the NCO Creed at Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan, May 31, 2011. "No one is more professional than I. I am a noncommissioned officer, a leader of Soldiers." This passage serves as a reminder of the professionalism and leadership role NCOs must embody. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Edwin Rodriguez)

principle resonates with Bloom's Taxonomy, as it moves beyond foundational knowledge to the application and evaluation of ethical decisions (Bloom, 1956; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

- Answerable: "I will communicate consistently with my Soldiers and never leave them uninformed" (DA, n.d., para. 2). The focus on communication and responsibility aligns with Transformational Leadership principles, where effective communication fosters trust and respect (Bass, 1985).
- Deeds: "I will earn [officers of my unit's] respect and confidence as well as that of my Soldiers" (DA, n.d., para. 3). This focuses on deeds, not just words, to earn respect.
- Scope: "Officers of my unit will have maximum time to accomplish their duties; they will not have to accomplish mine"

(DA, n.d., para. 3). This defines the scope of an NCO's responsibilities, distinguishing it from that of officers.

Conclusion

The 2-R.O.A.D.S. framework offers a structured approach to understanding and implementing the NCO Creed. By managing cognitive load and aligning with theories such as Cognitive Load Theory (van Merriënboer & Sweller, 2005), this framework supports effective leadership development.

Additionally, by drawing on reflective practices from Experiential Learning Theory and ethical guidance from Decision-Making frameworks, the framework ensures that NCOs uphold the highest standards of professionalism and leadership.

This dual-layered framework provides a practical and reflective roadmap that strengthens NCOs' ability to lead, ensuring their Soldiers' mission and welfare remain paramount. ■

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