



A drill sergeant provides guidance on maneuver tactics to a pair of privates. Once recruits enter the Initial Entry Training (IET) pipeline, drill sergeants inculcate and enforce discipline and Army standards throughout the trainees' *soldierization*. Leaders at the first unit of assignment must continuously reinforce discipline and standards. (U.S. Army photo by Bryan Araujo)

The Crucial Role NCOs Play in Strengthening the Army Profession

By Command Sgt. Maj. Raymond S. Harris

Training and Doctrine Command

This essay provides an overview of the Army profession, highlights the role of NCOs in strengthening it, and emphasizes their significance in upholding the values, standards, and ethics that define the profession. As you read through this, ask yourself:

- *What training strategies have you used to ensure discipline on the battlefield?*
- *What does our doctrine say about training and discipline, and how can you apply it in future training events?*
- *What other critical roles do NCOs play in strengthening the Army profession?*
- *How can you better mentor and coach your subordinates and peers?*
- *Are you the expert and master trainer for your formation? If not, why?*

Every mechanism is crucial in a military force's vast and intricate machinery. Among these cogs, NCOs stand out. They are the linchpins, the backbone upon which the entire structure of the U.S. Army profession rests.

NCOs' role goes beyond mere task execution. They're the custodians of discipline, junior Soldier mentors, and stewards of the Army values. Their direct interaction with Soldiers in day-to-day operations, hands-on leadership, and direction make them highly influential in shaping the Army profession.

Being part of the Army is more than a job. It's a dedication to duty, service, and sacrifice built on the pillars of character, commitment, and competence. NCOs embody these Army values and encourage accountability. They're leaders responsible for setting the standards of conduct, discipline, and performance in their units.

By leading through example, NCOs cultivate a culture of excellence that permeates the organization. The consequences of not upholding these values, standards, and ethics are significant, potentially leading to loss of trust, decline in morale, and weakening of the Army's effectiveness. We must understand the multifaceted role NCOs play in strengthening the Army profession.

Guardians of Discipline

Discipline is the bedrock upon which the effectiveness and credibility of any military organization stand. NCOs uphold and enforce discipline through leadership and the example they set. They're responsible for ensuring Soldiers adhere to standards of conduct, both on and off duty. These standards range from maintaining proper military bearing to following orders promptly and efficiently.

Understanding the Army and learning what it means to be a Soldier begin when a prospect engages with an Army recruiter. This individual is the first line of authority and military leadership recruits encounter, and the interaction sets the tone for the newcomer.

Once recruits enter the Initial Entry Training (IET) pipeline, drill sergeants inculcate and enforce discipline and Army standards throughout the trainees' *soldierization*. Leaders at the first unit of assignment must continuously reinforce discipline and standards, fortifying these attributes in our Soldiers.

During a mass casualty in Afghanistan in 2009, my Soldiers' discipline — forged in training — led to lives saved on a chaotic day. A vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) detonated at a shop in a village they were patrolling, creating an instant mass casualty situation.

The team in contact immediately relied on their training to secure the perimeter and start casualty assessment. At the same time, they called for quick reaction force (QRF) and messaged a "MASCAL" across the net to divert all assets to their vicinity.

These Soldiers could have let their emotions get the



Command Sgt. Maj. Raymond S. Harris, then V Corps command sergeant major, talked with junior enlisted Soldiers at the Poznan, Poland, dining facility Jan. 31, 2022. Setting the example is key to being an effective leader, and Harris strives to be that example every day. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Agustín Montañez)

better of them, but they stayed committed to each other and the greater mission. In the face of death and serious injury to themselves and their teammates, it was their resolve that carried the day.

NCOs led and modeled this behavior to ensure the Soldiers' minds stayed in the game and their professionalism outshone emotions. The significance of self-control cannot be overstated. In the chaos and uncertainty of the battlefield, discipline keeps Soldiers focused, resilient, and able to execute their missions with precision and efficiency.

Mentors, Role Models, and Experts

Beyond their role as enforcers of discipline and standards, NCOs also serve as mentors and role models for junior Soldiers. Through their experience and expertise, they guide and support those under their charge, helping them develop the skills and knowledge necessary to excel in their roles. By doing so, they model what a Soldier looks and acts like.

Mentorship and professional development programs serve as a medium for NCOs to model this behavior and pass along their knowledge and experiences. The programs also guarantee our Soldiers understand their purpose.

NCOs are the experts in their formation. They serve as primary trainers, ensuring their Soldiers are ready for combat. Their expertise guarantees they can provide accurate and effective instruction, guidance, and mentorship to their subordinates. Their deep knowledge and experience enable them to make informed decisions, solve problems quickly, adapt to changing situations, and communicate effectively to provide clear guidance.

Whether conducting individual training or leading collective exercises, NCOs ensure Soldiers are prepared to meet challenges they may face in combat

or during peacetime operations.

They provide their Soldiers with direction, motivation, and support. Their ability to remain composed under pressure, make critical decisions, and adapt to the environment is crucial to the success of any mission. Through firm but fair leadership, NCOs instill a sense of accountability and responsibility in their subordinates, ensuring they always adhere to Army regulations and protocols. By modeling these attributes in their units, NCOs contribute to the Army's overall readiness and effectiveness, fostering a culture of trust and cohesion.

By leading from the front and modeling positive behavior, NCOs inspire confidence, instill a sense of purpose and pride in their subordinates, and engender a commitment to upholding the Army's values on and off duty.

They play a vital role in their subordinates' professional development, providing constructive feedback, identifying areas for improvement, and offering opportunities for growth and advancement. By investing in their Soldiers' success, NCOs ensure the Army remains a dynamic and adaptive force capable of meeting the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

Stewards of the Army Profession

The Army profession is built upon a set of core values that define who we are and what we stand for as an organization. These values serve as a moral compass, guiding every Soldier's actions and decisions, from the newest recruit to the most seasoned veteran. NCOs are entrusted with upholding and promoting these values in their units.

Integrity is perhaps the most fundamental of these values. NCOs are expected to embody it in everything they do. They must be honest and forthright in their dealings with others and hold themselves and their Soldiers accountable for their actions. By maintaining the highest standards of integrity, NCOs inspire trust and confidence in their leadership and foster a culture of honesty and transparency in their units.

Respect is another core value at the heart of the Army profession. NCOs must treat all individuals with dignity, regardless of rank, race, gender, or background. They must create an environment where every Soldier feels valued and empowered to contribute to the mission to the best of their abilities. The same is expected from subordinate Soldiers. Respect goes both ways and shows discipline and understanding of the profession.



Staff Sgt. Vincent Schimke teaches Soldiers how to operate a .50-caliber machine gun May 17, 2019, at Fort Hunter Liggett, California. Whether conducting individual training or leading collective exercises, NCOs ensure Soldiers are prepared to meet challenges they may face in combat or during peacetime operations. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Kevin Spence)

By fostering a culture of respect and inclusivity, NCOs strengthen the bonds of camaraderie and cohesion that are essential for unit effectiveness.

Ethical leadership is a critical facet of effective leadership. NCOs are pivotal in fostering a climate of trust, respect, and integrity in their units. By exemplifying the Army values, NCOs set the standard for ethical behavior and conduct among their Soldiers. They hold themselves and others accountable for their actions, ensuring that the principles of right and wrong are always upheld.

Through their unwavering commitment to ethical leadership, NCOs contribute significantly to the moral and ethical foundation of the Army profession, earning the trust and confidence of their superiors, peers, and subordinates alike.

Conclusion

The role of the NCO in strengthening the Army profession cannot be overstated. As guardians of discipline, mentors and role models, and stewards of the Army values, NCOs play a pivotal role in shaping the Army's culture and ethos. Through their leadership and example, they inspire trust and confidence in their Soldiers and ensure the Army remains a professional and ethical force capable of meeting the challenges of the modern battlefield.

As the backbone of the Army profession, NCOs embody the principles of selfless service and sacrifice at the heart of being a Soldier. As such, the role of NCOs in strengthening the Army profession cannot be stressed enough. NCOs are the X factor in fighting and winning the next war! ■

Command Sgt. Maj. Raymond S. Harris, command sergeant major of Training and Doctrine Command, enlisted in the Army in 1996 as an Infantryman. He has served as a rifleman, machine gunner, automatic rifleman, Bradley gunner, team leader, squad leader, platoon sergeant, first sergeant, and command sergeant major. His civilian education includes an associate degree in business, a bachelor's degree in homeland security, and a master's degree in leadership studies.



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