
Keys to a Good Officer and NCO Relationship: *A Perspective from a CSM*

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In my time as a battalion command sergeant major (CSM), I communicated consistently and often with my commanders and officers in my organization. The communication in most cases existed both ways and allowed for shared understanding. At the beginning of the relationship, I believe what helped most was conducting an initial counseling that clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and expectations. Once everything was clearly defined, I had the ability to operate inside of those areas freely; however, over time and in certain situations, this could change, especially when trust was built and maintained. Additionally, whenever I had the opportunity to advise my commanders on areas that I felt were critical for the success of the organization, I took it. This occurred in garrison, during training, and even while deployed. If I failed to speak up or advise my commander or junior officers, I was not being a relevant NCO in the organization. Having served at multiple echelons where I've had an officer counterpart, I have found that applying the areas I discuss below makes not only the relationship successful but also makes the organization successful.

In most organizations, officers and NCOs are paired together to lead those formations. These teams build, prepare, and train their organizations for the future and the unknown of what they could be asked to do. To be successful, they must be able to work together for one cause and one purpose — their organization. In my opinion, some areas that can help ensure this success include developing good communication with each other, understanding each other's roles and responsibilities, and having clear expectations. In addition, NCOs need to ensure that they are being good advisors to their officer counterparts. It is key to note that these teams will not always agree on everything; however, what comes out of those disagreements is important. Have arguments behind closed doors and never disagree in public; this can cause turmoil in the organization that will eventually produce a toxic climate and culture. Officers and NCOs should do the best they can to work together and know each other.

Communication

"Remember, teamwork begins by building trust. And the only way to do that is to overcome our need for invulnerability."

— Patrick Lencioni¹

Communication is a critical piece of an officer and NCO team; they need it to lead the organizations they are responsible for. If there is a breakdown in communication between these two individuals, there will probably be one throughout the entire organization. This is not a great situation to be in. Communicate with each other consistently and often. Doing so will keep everyone informed and able to better perform their duties. Communication is expected throughout every organization and at each echelon of leadership. Building trust in these relationships can heavily weigh on the ability to communicate with each other. Talk to each other and subordinates constantly. Doing so will build better shared understanding in the organization.

Understanding Roles and Responsibilities

"Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success."

— Henry Ford²

Leaders have duties and responsibilities they are either told they have or that they put on themselves to do. In the officer and NCO relationship, it is helpful to understand each other's roles and responsibilities. Doing so sets a clear picture on what each will take care of in the relationship. In some cases, do these roles and responsibilities cross paths? Absolutely! As stated before, these relationships should be working for one cause and one purpose — the organization that they are leading. If either is there for his/her own cause and purpose, the organization will feel these effects. Help each other be successful, and the organization will be successful.

Clear Expectations

"Always do everything you ask of those you command."

— GEN George S. Patton³

As a leader and a Soldier, it helps to have clear expectations of what to do. This is also important when it involves an officer and NCO team. As these leaders start building a relationship, it is key to address what is expected, which can also tie into their roles and responsibilities. A good way to do this is through initial counseling, or this could also occur for specific situations. Either way, verbally stating expectations to each other is a good way to feel more comfortable and be able to maintain a positive relationship. I feel that if the relationship is good enough, both the officer and NCO can give

each other expectations. It should not be a one-way street. Having no stated expectations, however, can cause confusion and frustration for all involved. Be clear on what is expected.

Being a Good Advisor

"True courage is being afraid, and going ahead and doing your job anyhow..."

— GEN Norman Schwarzkopf Jr.⁴

As NCOs, it is our responsibility to advise our officer counterparts. We should give them advice on the enlisted Soldiers in the organization, training, and anything else that we are asked for input on. Failing to do this means you have failed those officers and failed the NCO Corp. Will the officers always take the advice that is given? No, not always. That does not mean they do not trust your input; they are the ones that are responsible for what that organization does or fails to do, and they may see something else you do not. Do not let this discourage you; continue to be a good adviser to them, giving feedback they ask for or deserve to receive. It is our responsibility to do so. If officers and NCOs build a good relationship, advising will be easy. Just like senior NCOs mentor junior NCOs, senior NCOs should also advise and build a relationship with the junior officers in their organization. Doing so makes these officers better, especially when they advance to the level that NCO is at. Additionally, it will build more trust and confidence in the NCO Corps.

Conclusion

As NCOs, we must be participating members of these

teams. If we sit back and do nothing, our roles are irrelevant. It may be frustrating at first, but once we start communicating and roles, responsibilities, and expectations are clearly defined, it will get easier. Additionally, it is important that NCOs advise their officer counterpart; it is our duty to do so. If we do not do these things, we cannot make these relationships work, the organization will notice, and it will have impacts that are sometimes hard to recover from. Building an officer and NCO team can be difficult, but applying these areas may help, and the time together will be rewarding.

Notes

¹ Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

² John P. Munoz, "Coming Together, Keeping Together, Working Together," *Peoria Magazine*, 2010, https://www.peoriamagazine.com/archive/ibi_article/2010/coming-together-keeping-together-working-together/.

³ Porter B. Williamson, *Patton's Principles: A Handbook for Managers Who Mean It!* (NY: Touchstone, 1982).

⁴ GEN Norman Schwarzkopf, Academy of Achievement, <https://achievement.org/achiever/general-h-norman-schwarzkopf/>.

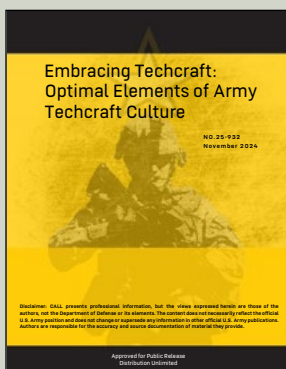
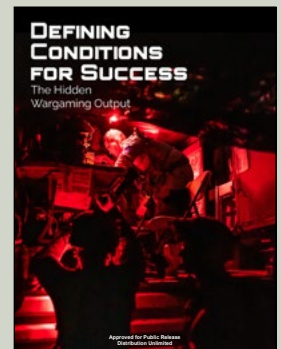
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