

From the Gunner's Seat: No 'Easy' Button

During my tenure as the Armor School command sergeant major, I have geared my quarterly "Gunner's Seat" article toward reinforcing our critical role as noncommissioned officers (NCOs) within the Army's sustained-readiness model. With the constant churn of both U.S. Army Central Command-oriented and regionally aligned forces deployments, fulfilling our duties takes on a greater, immeasurable level of importance. I like to title this role as "setting the conditions for victory" because of the following responsibilities we bear in building the foundation for collective training and combat success:

- We ensure our Soldiers are both administratively and medically ready, and proficient in their warrior tasks and battle drills, as well as in their Skill Level 10 tank-crewmember or cavalry-scout tasks.
- We identify and develop the potential for Soldiers to become the next generation of NCOs who will carry the Army into its next chapter, all while coaching and mentoring the young officers who will be future commanders long after many of us have moved on to the next chapter of our lives.

These responsibilities do not fade just because the unit deployed on a rotational deployment or in support of a contingency operation. In fact, it is more critical that we take ownership of them. NCOs at echelon must not only apply their energies to the current operation or task they are on, but must look to the series of follow-on missions to ensure the unit is just as combat ready on the 20th mission as it was on the first. This can only happen if we continue to do the following, even when deployed:

- Continue to take "ownership" over the readiness of our Soldiers and the resiliency of their families at home station;
- Give our current and future leaders the skills they need to accomplish their duties by sending them to their respective professional military education (PME) courses and to functional courses either at home station or at Fort Benning;
- Identify young Soldiers who have the potential to be your replacement and get them to the board if they are meeting the Army standard (not a unit one);
- Continue being positive role models, even in times of adversity, to encourage the top performers to stay with the team; and
- Support those who don't want to or shouldn't stay with the team with adequate time to prepare for transition.

Granted, these "tasks" are not as easy as they sound, and conditions on the ground will always have an impact on our ability to accomplish some of them – for example, conducting combat operations will trump sending a Soldier to PME – but it should be a constraint of that magnitude before we hit the "easy" button and withhold a Soldier from attending a school or for a unit to not conduct a promotion board. As an Army, we've done a great job in reducing the backlog for PME, but as a branch we have more work to do in getting healthy at the sergeant and staff-sergeant grade plate, and that can only be done by sending eligible specialists and sergeants who are within Army standard to the board.

For those who don't demonstrate the potential, do the counseling, impose the bar if applicable, and either change the behavior or support them on the transition from Soldier to civilian.

To be transparent, I could have done this better as a platoon sergeant, first sergeant and command sergeant major, so know that I have scar tissue on this topic as well; we must collectively do better for the health of our branch.

Finally, with the turn of the year, the 2020 Sullivan Cup and Armor Ball are coming upon us. Put your crews through the paces and pick the best crew to represent your unit at a world-class tank competition, which will include tankers from the National Guard, Marine Corps and a number of our allies and partners. Competition builds excellence, excellence builds pride and **PRIDE IS CONTAGIOUS!!!!!!**

CSM KEVIN J. MUHLENBECK
Command Sergeant Major
U.S. Army Armor School

Acronym Quick-Scan

NCO – noncommissioned officer

PME – professional military education