

Gunner's Seat: The NCO's Role in Driving Organizational Change

Dating back to 1775 with the birth of the Continental Army to present day, the role of the noncommissioned officer (NCO) has progressed. In 1778 at Valley Forge, Inspector General Friedrich von Steuben, a Prussian-German Army officer, standardized NCO duties and responsibilities for the Continental Army NCO corps. Today those duties and responsibilities have evolved.

There are several factors that demanded that the role of NCO revolutionize: technological advances, operational requirements, policy changes and societal (generational) evolution, just to name a few. Today our NCO role of accomplishing the mission and looking out for the welfare of Soldiers may sound simplistic, but it has become more challenging than ever before.

The welfare of our Soldiers perfectly aligns with the Army's "people" strategy, and there is no endeavor more important. Exceptional organizations are a direct reflection of the people assigned, above all else. Who are those leaders who had the greatest impact in your life? What set them apart from other leaders?

As I reflect upon my career, these leaders pushed me to be better every day, displayed genuine care and compassion for Soldiers and the profession, and, above all, treated Soldiers as family. They ensured each day was purposeful and productive, and they enforced even the simplest of standards.

John Quincy Adams once stated, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader." Without question, these NCOs were leaders and drove organizational change.

Agnostic to rank, what is your role as an NCO to drive needed change within your organization?

From post-Vietnam to present-day, mission requirements have increased here at home and across the globe. More than ever, NCOs are training partner nations, leading combat operations, advising foreign countries and developing the next generation of leaders to face emerging threats using technological advancements and intuition. Also, suicides, sexual assault/harassment, racism and the lack of diversity and inclusion are cancers within our institution that add to the list of challenges our NCOs must face each day.

The NCO's role in the organization has never been more important. From combat post to motorpool operations and everything in between, NCOs are essential to driving organizational change across an array of challenges within our Army. The problems that plague our Army require all leaders to do their part. We must explore more effective ways to connect with our Soldiers and their families. We must devote the precious resource of time to personally coach, counsel and mentor. Finally, we must positively role-model ethics and professional conduct, and care for our Soldiers as though they are our own sons and daughters. Every mission, big or small, will involve Soldiers.

The welfare of our Soldiers and their families is the mission that never ends. Our people truly are the secret recipe for the success of the organization.

We can all recall leaders who significantly impacted our lives and left an indelible mark within an organization. Leaders, specifically NCOs, create hope and possibility for greater opportunities for Soldiers. Our Army is about change, not only to ensure overmatch of our adversaries, but to also improve policy and procedures that impact Soldiers and their families. We as NCOs are the "backbone" of the Army – empowered and trusted by our civilian and military senior leaders to carry out directives.

As stewards of the profession, we must always remember our oath and be an agent that drives the change necessary to improve our Army and the lives of the Soldiers we lead. By ensuring the welfare of our Soldiers, we will accomplish any mission and remain the most revered NCO corps across the globe!

Armor Ready! Forge the Thunderbolt!

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Acronym Quick-Scan

NCO – noncommissioned officer