Productivity and Mission Accomplishment

CAPTAIN JOSEPH P. AVERY, United States Air Force

Having had some experience in the Army as well as in the Air Force, I believe the problems of management, leadership, and training are pretty much the same in both services. In fact, I got the idea for this article as a result of reading the excellent article by Captain Samuel K. Rock, Jr. — "Training New Lieutenants" — published in the November-December 1984 issue of INFANTRY. I was surprised at how well the particulars of his training article also applied to new lieutenants in the Air Force.

I recently completed an assignment as a missile maintenance officer with a Minuteman missile wing at Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota. I found that assignment particularly challenging, partly because of a work area of hundreds of square miles and partly because of the weather, which varied from nearly 100 degrees below zero to 100 degrees above. During extended periods of cold weather, cabin fever developed among the personnel, maintenance became difficult, and morale problems increased rapidly.

But as a former paratrooper in the 82d Airborne Division, I realize that these leadership and operational problems are quite similar to those that confront commanders in the Army's combat arms — accomplishing the mission, maintaining readiness and morale, and squeezing as much productivity as possible out of their subordinates.

No matter how harsh the environment, the first priority for any leader is to accomplish his mission or, to state it another way, to avoid mission failure. And in peacetime or wartime, the causes of mission failure are many.

For example, a careful review of some marginally successful U.S. or joint military operations in Europe and North Africa during World War II reveals that mission failure or near failure could often be attributed to one or more of the following specific causes:

- Communications failure.
- Decision-making failure.
- Intelligence and information failure.
- Preparation and contingency failure.
- Insufficient training and discipline.
- Improper coordination.
- Equipment failure.
- Leadership failure.
- Individual failure.

During Operation TORCH in Northwest Africa, for example, a paratroop task force was enroute to Algeria, assuming that the French would not oppose the landings, when in fact the French decided to do just that. Unfortunately, the task force was not notified of the change because a shipboard radio operator had not been assigned the correct radio frequency to alert the planes as they flew over the Mediterranean. There are also other examples, of course — the military intelligence fiasco and radio communication failure during Operation MARKET-GARDEN, and the incident in which members of the airborne 504th Regimental Combat Team over Sicily were fired upon by their own ground troops and naval forces.

Air Force missile commanders and Army infantry leaders today face some of these same problems because of faulty equipment, information that is not properly disseminated, and personnel who are injured because of inadequate training or discipline. These problems, in turn, can seriously affect a unit's productivity, and, thus, its ability to accomplish its mission.

Fortunately, there are certain steps that leaders and supervisors can take to achieve greater productivity and help overcome the problems that often lead to other failures. These steps involve greater emphasis in the areas of organizational communication, integration of tasks and activities, and personnel motivation.

Effective management and leadership techniques provide the foundation for organizational productivity. But what combination of procedures and personal characteristics actually makes a manager or a leader effective? Although I cannot identify a set of traits that *all* successful leaders possess, most highly successful leaders do seem to have in common the following six characteristics:

They respect all people. Successful leaders consistently demonstrate a genuine respect and admiration for *all* individuals, regardless of their particular jobs or ranks or social positions. Unlike some managers, they do not feel they are "lowering" themselves when they communicate with or praise their subordinates. They tend to view themselves as being on the same level, but with different or higher levels of responsibility.

Their basic attitude is, "We are all members of the same team, so let's work together to accomplish the mission."

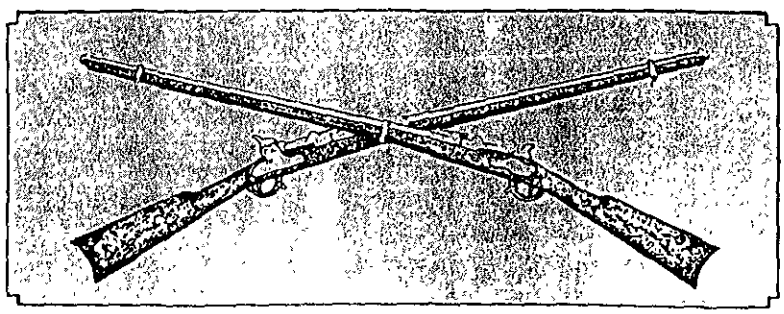
They take pride in their work. Successful leaders perceive their work as representing *them* and reflecting their dedication to the job. As a result, they take considerable pride in their work and demand from their subordinates high quality products and performances.

They trust and develop their subordinates. Successful leaders believe that unless they demonstrate trust and confidence in their personnel, the productivi- [illegible] ctiveness of their organization [illegible] ver even near its peak, and they themselves will never receive the respect they need to lead effectively. They expect the temporary failure of new or inexperienced personnel, however, realizing that initial failure often toughens an individual, provides wisdom, and eventual- [illegible] improves his long-term productivity and worth. (History has proved that from the ashes of failure rise some of mankind's most outstanding achievements and triumphs.)

They hold people accountable and permit them to do their jobs. A leader's f [illegible] tion is not to do everyone else's job [illegible] to make sure each person does his own job. Regardless of a leader's management position, unless he holds people accountable for their work, permits them to do it, deals with them on an adult-to-adult level, and disciplines them when they need it, he will find that gaining their [illegible] ct and loyalty will be difficult, if not impossible.

They appreciate people. Successful leaders continually display a sincere appreciation for the daily productive efforts of others. They do not feel uncomfortable praising their subordinates when praise is appropriate. These successful leaders show appreciation not only for a person's exceptional and special efforts, but also for his everyday contributions.

They know what is going on in their organizations. The best managers and leaders do not sit in their offices waiting for the world to come to them. They get out and see what is happening. By visiting work centers, communicating with people, and discovering both the problems and the promising areas, managers soon become more knowledgeable about their organizations. They also reap the added benefit of not having to hold as many meetings to get things done.

These six keys to productivity are not the entire answer, of course, but these observations may serve to provoke the thoughts of both new and experienced Infantry officers and improve their effectiveness in their respective organizations. This improvement, in turn, should lead to more effective mission accomplishment.

Captain Joseph P. Avery, USAF, is assigned to the Air Force ROTC Detachment at the University of North Carolina. He holds a master's degree from Rutgers University.