
To follow the routine of the service, to become occupied with the care of its fodder and lodging, to march when the army marches, camp when it camps, fight when it fights—for the great majority of officers this is what is meant by having served, campaigned, grown gray in the harness. For this reason one sees so many soldiers occupied with trifling matters and rusted by gross ignorance. Instead of soaring audaciously among the clouds,

such men know only how to crawl methodically in the mire. They are never perplexed and will never know the causes of their triumphs and defeats.

Every military organization—as Frederick suggests—has those who soar and those who “crawl methodically in the mire.” Our Army needs leaders of character who can soar audaciously and capitalize on the knowledge, experience, critical judgment, ideal values, and deep

thinking of the true military professional. The end product will be character, the kind that becomes the decisive factor in battle.

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Loyalty

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In any unit people talk and think about loyalty. Bosses demand it, for themselves and their organizations. It follows that the soldiers in the trenches, the subordinates, ponder how loyalty is perceived by the boss. But saying “Be loyal” is not a simple, two-word end-of-transmission solution. The various aspects of loyalty are more complex than that.

Loyalty, according to Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary is “faithful allegiance to a leader, organization, or course.” Army Field Manual 22-100, Military Leadership, classes loyalty as a leadership trait and defines it as “the quality of faithfulness to country, the Army, seniors, subordinates, and peers.” In this sense loyalty transcends rank and applies with equal force to corporals leading crews and teams and to generals leading divisions and corps. It is universal and fundamental.

Loyalty is critical to a proper organizational climate in a unit, and its presence can be felt throughout a unit. Its directions point upward, downward, and laterally. When it works properly in all directions, the leader or commander senses that the unit is cohesive, supportive, and responsive. In turn, the soldiers in the unit feel they are being cared for and are part of

a team organization that truly looks out for its people.

Upward loyalty means being loyal to the boss, to the leader, to the commander. Downward loyalty is the leader’s loyalty to his subordinates, his people, his team. Lateral loyalty is loyalty to adjacent organizations, units, and sections; it has to do with being a team player. (In the eyes of some leaders, downward loyalty is the most important kind.)

In discussing loyalty toward the boss or leader or commander, the key thing to remember is that “the boss is the boss.” He must be followed and obeyed; otherwise, disorganization and disunity set in. The missions and objectives of the unit must be supported. The boss’s problems and worries should be the subordinate’s problems and worries. A unit has to reflect its boss, and people have to be responsive. To think otherwise runs counter to the tradition and history of effective, high performing combat units. The ultimate proof of loyalty upward occurs in battle, where units must respond instantly, without question, in the face of deadly enemy fire.

A significant aspect of loyalty to the boss is the flow of information upward. The boss must be kept informed. This does not mean intruding on his time for

trivial matters. After all, he is a busy man and his time is precious. But he needs, routinely, to know three things—the subordinate unit’s goals, challenges, and scheduled events. As one technique, all three can be presented to the commander (at battalion level and higher) through a published quarterly training program, updated by monthly informal review meetings between commanders.

A training program clearly states the unit’s goals for the coming quarter; it notes any shortfalls or problems or challenges that may be facing the unit; and the calendar serves as a schedule of events. When the boss gets a copy of the training program or is briefed on it, he has a chance to add to or delete from it. In addition, he is informed, and a contract is established between him and the subordinate commander. The boss knows what the subordinate is planning to do and when he is planning to do it.

Upward loyalty sometimes means telling the boss he is wrong, and this requires real moral courage. How does a subordinate leader do this? First, he makes sure he is right. Unless the decision or policy in question is of immediate importance, he should sit on it for a couple of days, making sure he understands it fully and

seeking the counsel of fellow leaders. He questions the staff and the boss himself to make sure he understands the various issues, positions, and facts. When he is reasonably sure of his ground, he goes to the boss and lays out the facts; he states the problem, draws out the lines of disagreement, and explains how the position or decision may hurt the unit or its mission. He makes it clear from the beginning, of course, that he will support the final decision, regardless of what it may be.

Another important point is that if the subordinate wins and the boss's decision or policy is changed, he should be humble. He should make the boss feel good about it. And he should tell his own subordinates and the staff that the decision was changed for the betterment of the unit because of the wisdom of the boss. And indeed it was.

How about loyalty downward—to the soldiers in the trenches? Loyalty to subordinates takes many forms, some of which are easily forgotten. Setting and enforcing high standards is one of the most vital of these aspects. Being loyal to subordinates starts with setting proper standards and maintaining the discipline required to make the unit good. Being easy on people, causing them not to measure up, leads to a bad unit; this is the ultimate in disloyalty to the men, because in battle it can get them killed.

PROPER EXAMPLE

A leader reinforces a sense of loyalty to his subordinates when he sets a proper example for them to follow. Setting the example is a leadership principle that serves to set the tone of a unit. When a leader sets a clear example for his men, he is being loyal to them, because this reduces any frustration and confusion they may feel about standards and conduct. They know that in the absence of orders or instructions they can do as the leader does without fearing a negative reaction or punishment.

Conversely, a leader who sets a poor standard for his men is doing them the ultimate disservice. A poor example causes confusion about a leader's purpose and his standards and serves to unhinge unit morale. A leader who sets the example his men should follow finds himself

leading a more enthusiastic and effective unit.

Training that is geared to the demands of battle also reinforces loyalty in a unit. Properly conducted, such training helps the men because it increases unit effectiveness and reduces battle casualties. When a leader cares for his men, when he is loyal to them, he trains them in a realistic and challenging manner so they are physically, mentally, and psychologically prepared for the rigors of battle. Battle is tough and demanding, and so must be the preparation for it.

It follows that standards, training, and discipline are closely interwoven so that each supports the others. When a leader sets battle-oriented standards and reinforces them with tough, realistic training, he also reinforces the state of discipline and combat readiness in a unit.

REWARD SYSTEM

Part of demonstrating to subordinates is taking care of them through a system of awards, letters, and efficiency reports. Good people should be rewarded and brought to the forefront so that they will be selected for the promotions, assignments, and schooling they deserve.

Properly taking care of the good soldiers also means punishing the bad ones. Rewards, ratings, and promotions must be commensurate with duty performance and potential for positions of increased responsibility. If everybody, including the poor soldiers, gets good ratings, the system becomes corrupt. The soldiers in the unit lose faith in the reward system. Promotion and selection boards lose faith in the ratings of the commander. As a result, the good people suffer. They are less motivated toward high performance, and unit effectiveness is reduced.

Perhaps the best way for a leader to convey a sense of loyalty to his subordinates is simply to express his thanks to them. Too often leaders look for the big piece of pie for their people and forget that it is the little bits that really make a difference in unit morale over the long run. A leader should thank his soldiers when they have done good work just as he would point out mistakes to them if they have done bad work. Such demonstrations of appreciation will bring soldiers closer to

the unit and the leadership chain.

The most critical aspect of loyalty may be trust, because it implies that one person can rely upon the character of another. How does a leader build trust and thereby promote loyalty in his subordinates? First, he should try to identify problems in the unit. Second, he should seek solutions to the problems and should support his subordinates as they work to solve the problems. And third, he should be careful not to overreact to bad news and lash out at subordinates. If he does, he simply will not be told the bad news, but this does not mean the bad news will go away.

The third aspect of loyalty, lateral loyalty, is the type that leaders, section chiefs, and commanders share with their counterparts in adjacent units. It is the essence of helping others, of being team players. It means that whenever it is morally and physically possible, organizations help adjacent organizations by sharing their talents, resources, and skills in a routine, unflinching manner.

Commanders and leaders who understand lateral loyalty do not regard adjacent units as their enemies. They work to make their own units good without fretting about being outdone by a fellow unit commander. Such a commander evaluates his unit in terms of his own standards and fosters friendly competition that is positive, wholesome, and constructive. But when a sister unit is in a jam, he helps out. That is lateral loyalty.

EXTRA DIMENSION

As a final note, loyalty is a powerful leadership trait that adds an extra dimension to unit spirit and preparation for battle. Loyalty is essential to team building. It must flow up, down, and laterally within a unit. But this sense of loyalty does not automatically exist in a unit; it must be developed by the unit's leaders through hard work and dedication to mission and men.

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