

PROFESSIONAL FORUM



Staff Leadership

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The myth persists that staff members are somehow excused from the hard responsibilities of leadership. As the myth goes, adjutants, supply officers, and operations NCOs are only supposed to attend to reports, files, range schedules, and other "administrivia." Company commanders, platoon leaders, first sergeants, and squad leaders are the ones who lead and make the tough decisions that affect the soldiers.

Although the latter statement is certainly true, the former is incomplete. Staff officers and NCOs, while managing their areas of expertise, must also exercise that most important element of combat power—leadership.

Staff members do not have close contact with those whom they support, and their influence is more often felt than seen by the soldiers. The leadership a staff member exercises is therefore different from that of a company commander. The two roles themselves are different, and the Army has different expectations of them. But there is common ground that all leaders share regardless of their branch or duty positions, and this common ground is effective leadership.

Field Manual 22-100 outlines 11 principles of leadership that act as guidelines for all leaders, including those who serve on a staff. Among these are: having technical and tactical proficiency, making sound and timely decisions, and attend-

ing to the training and welfare of their subordinates. If staff members will practice these principles, they will develop a more effective staff organization that can provide better support for the commander, the soldiers, and their families.

Staff members must exhibit the good leadership character traits that the field manual stresses—courage, competence, candor, and commitment. Additionally,



they must have unquestioned integrity, self discipline, and initiative. By striving to develop these traits to an even higher level, a leader can improve his personal credibility, professional competence, and leadership ability. The practice of good character traits in their daily duties is also an important way for staff members to display good leadership qualities.

Leaders in staff positions must have skills in management and administration, because much of their time is spent with

planning, personnel management, and resource considerations. But throughout the mission planning process, a staff member will also find many opportunities to practice the principles of leadership.

Unfortunately, planning for post support missions, field training, and even routine activities too often lacks the influence of the leadership principles. A mission that seems well planned at brigade or battalion level may appear chaotic at squad level. The reason may be that those who developed the plan simply forgot about those who would have to execute it. The convenience of the planner must yield to the reality of the situation. If staff members adhere to the leadership principles, this will not happen and the result will be increased unit readiness, more training time for the commander, and a greater degree of coordination in all of the unit's efforts.

A staff member must concentrate more on leadership for two reasons: First, the style of staff leadership is different from that of command leadership, and it concerns itself more with decision making and sound planning. Second, the chain of command may not expect leadership from the staff, just management skills. The practice of leadership by the staff needs to be recognized as being crucial to the successful accomplishment of a unit's mission.

For staff members to assert their lead-

ership, though, the proper climate must exist in the unit. The staff officers and NCOs must feel that the chain of command supports them. Certain areas, of course, must be left to those with command authority, but a well directed staff will know what these areas are and will not make any effort to interfere with them. Within the staff members' own area of expertise, however, any discouragement or stifling of initiative will decrease their capacity for leadership. A command climate that fosters initiative, and recognizes that staff officers and NCOs are also leaders, will benefit from the positive influence of that leadership.

A spirit of teamwork is also vital to the effectiveness of staff leadership. Efforts to affix blame usually overlook the real cause of a problem and, more important, the way to prevent it from happening again. More effort directed toward preventing mistakes and less toward finding fault will make better use of the principles of leadership and will help maintain a

more cohesive climate.

Staff members who uphold the principles of leadership while also managing their own areas therefore need to have their efforts rewarded. Even simple comments from the commander offered to recognize an individual staff member can have an encouraging effect and will go a long way toward fostering the proper command climate for leadership initiative. Reinforced leadership is better, stronger, more effective leadership.

All officers and NCOs in today's Army must have a commitment to leadership regardless of their branches or job titles. Without this commitment, commanders cannot command effectively and staffs cannot function as efficiently in supporting the commanders.

Staff officers and NCOs can improve their leadership skills by studying and applying the 11 principles of leadership and by ensuring that their personal character is strong and steady. Those who will try can better develop the traits described in

the manual. But the formula is not complete without the addition of command support and reinforcement. A proper climate will allow staff leadership initiatives to flourish, and a fair system of encouragement will further strengthen those initiatives.

A staff that is made up of leaders will be able to provide better support to the commander and his soldiers. At the same time, a commander who realizes this and develops his staff members as leaders will benefit from the positive influence of that leadership: The soldiers in his unit will be better served, their families better supported, and their training for war more realistic.

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The Soviet AK74

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is another in a recurring series prepared from unclassified sources by the Threat Division, Directorate of Intelligence and Security, U.S. Army Infantry Center, at Fort Benning.

The Soviet AK74 is hailed by some Soviet and international sources as the best assault rifle in the world today. It was first introduced in 1974 to selected Soviet forces and first seen in public in the May Day parade in Moscow in 1977.

This weapon is the latest in the Kalashnikov assault rifle series. The original was developed by Mikhail Kalashnikov to capitalize on the strong points of the World War II German MP43 and MP44 rifles. AK assault rifles, in one variant

or another, have been used in every world conflict of the past 25 years. The chain of evolution has included the AK47, the AKM, and now the AK74. The AK74 family includes a light machinegun (RPK74), a folding stock version (AKS74), and a submachinegun (AKSU74).

The AK74 continues the well-known reliability of the AK47. It is extremely effective when fired on automatic because of its muzzle brake compensator (MBC), which is the best in the world today. This MBC limits the characteristic rise of round impact and causes no more recoil than a standard .22 caliber long rifle bullet. The AK74 will deliver a high volume of accurate fire.

The magazine is plastic and twice as heavy as an M16 magazine, but it is rug-

ged and is grooved to accept 15-round stripper clips to facilitate loading.

The effective range of the AK74 is 450 to 500 meters, which is greater than that of either the AK47 or the AKM. This does not mean, though, that the AK74 is a sniper weapon, because the improvements in the system—such as the MBC and the accurate 5.45x39mm round—do not in themselves make better marksmen.

The AK74 does have some weak points:

- Its extremely loud report has hospitalized some Soviet soldiers during range firing.
- Its muzzle flash is three times that of the AK47.
- It can easily be defeated by body armor.
- The safety has not been changed in 40 years; it is still loud to operate and