

Squad Leading

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The whole point of being a leader in the Army is getting soldiers to do what is required when it is required. And no place in the Army is this more difficult than at squad level. At all the other levels of command, a leader's immediate subordinates are professional soldiers—people who have demonstrated that they have the self-discipline and knowledge to do what must be done.

How does a squad leader get young soldiers to do things they don't want to do, or things that may be dangerous for them to do? One way is to mold the members of the squad into a group that has so much of an accepted identity that the members care almost as much about the squad's existence as they do about that of their own families. In other words, the squad must become a family in its own right.

The place to start this process is in team training. The squad leader must start each period of training with a clear statement of the training objective and the part each member of the squad will contribute to achieving that objective. This allows each soldier to see that his portion of the task is critically important to the functioning of the entire squad.

The squad leader should reinforce this idea in after action reviews and critiques, emphasizing the fact that if the squad is to accomplish its mission, each soldier must perform at least to minimum standards.

As its training progresses, the squad should begin to set higher standards of performance for itself and its members. The squad leader must temper these standards, though, with his own professional judgment of their attainability.

In individual training, the squad leader must again make sure all of the squad

members see that each is responsible for the individual performances of the others. The squad leader can use peer training assignments to achieve this; he takes a soldier with demonstrated proficiency in a task and makes him responsible for helping another soldier achieve the same level of proficiency.

As the results of skill qualification tests come in, the squad leader should have the soldiers sit down as a group and go over the tasks any of them had problems with. Then as a group, they should make a commitment to the remedial training of every soldier whose score on the test was less than perfect. People who score 100 should be praised for their performance and given their special rewards, but at the same time they should be counselled on their duty to help the rest of the squad.

In normal housekeeping and maintenance tasks, the squad must also learn that the performance of an individual reflects on the performance of the entire squad. Each member must learn that his individual performance is an integral part of the team's performance.

When the squad leader assigns these tasks, he must explain them the same way he explains a tactical mission. When the soldiers perform the tasks for the first time, the squad leader must train the squad the same way he would train it for an ARTEP mission. After the soldiers develop proficiency, standing operating procedures can be established to make their subsequent performance consistent.

Although a squad leader cannot control his soldiers' off-duty time, he must try to make sure the squad identity is also carried over to those free-time periods, at least to some extent. Planning social functions that all squad members and their families can attend will make it

easier for the soldiers to make their own commitment to the squad, and if their spouses can be made to feel they, too, are part of the team, so much the better.

Picnics are a good way to do this. Logistically and financially, they are fairly easy to arrange and to have everyone take part in. On these occasions, to involve family members more in what the squad is doing, the soldiers can demonstrate some of the things they do during prolonged absences from their families. This will give the family members a better understanding and help them be more supportive of the soldiers.

Using these techniques, the squad leader can eventually turn the squad members into an integral unit—a family in which everyone does his job, secure in the knowledge that every other member of the team is doing the same. Then, unfortunately, some of the squad members will be transferred out and new ones, outsiders, will be transferred in. And the squad leader must begin again.

Now, though, the squad leader's job in training these new people is simpler, because he is usually working with only one or two new people at a time. If he is smart, he will have a squad reception and integration program that will help bring the new squad members into the family.

Again, the squad leader must make sure each member of the team understands his part in the program before it begins. He explains that the new people coming in are going to be made full members of the team and assigns tasks to everyone to make sure this mission is accomplished.

The squad leader appoints another soldier, of the same grade and marital status as the new soldier, to serve as the

new man's guide and sponsor throughout the integration process. The squad leader must choose this individual carefully, and everyone must see the choice as a mark of recognition, because the guide probably plays the most important role in making the new soldier a complete part of the squad.

The squad leader and the sponsor go together to pick the new soldier up and bring him to the unit area. After the necessary and unavoidable administrative tasks at company level are done, the squad leader makes sure the soldier has a place to stay. If he is accompanied by his family, their shelter also must be assured, at least temporarily, before anything else is done. Then the squad leader must find out about any problems that may have come up since the soldier left his previous unit. Then he needs to deal with these problems before any other processing begins.

Dealing with a problem doesn't necessarily mean solving it; some of the problems that arise when a soldier changes assignments may take weeks or months to solve completely. What the squad leader is concerned about at this point is identifying the problems and establishing a plan for solving them. This also lets the new soldier know that his welfare is a primary concern for the squad leader.

Next, the squad leader begins his initial counseling session with the soldier. As with all counseling sessions, this one needs to be done at a time and a place where there will be no interruptions and the new soldier can be put at ease and made to feel that he will be treated fairly and justly.

During the session, the squad leader first finds out some things about the soldier. Two tools are useful in doing this—a personal questionnaire and the soldier's individual training record. The questionnaire needs to be short and to the point—name, rank, social security

number, and next of kin. While the soldier is completing this form, the squad leader can be looking over his training record, making notes on questions he needs to ask to clarify any entries he does not understand.

At this point, it is useful for the squad leader to ask the new soldier to tell a little about his background, what he expects out of the Army, and what he expects out of life. The squad leader's primary purposes in this getting-to-know-you exercise are to start thinking of the soldier as a person and to let the soldier know the squad leader is interested in him as a soldier.

Once these two objectives have been accomplished, the soldier needs to be informed briefly about the squad and the unit to which it belongs. The things that must be included here are any rules, regulations, or expectations that are unique to that unit so the soldier can stay out of trouble. (He can learn most other things about the squad and the unit later by seeing them in action.)

Then the squad leader calls the sponsor in and explains to both soldiers the relationship between the two of them. The sponsor will be responsible for the new soldier for a set period of time, usually two or three weeks. During that time, the two will be inseparable during duty hours and will also be encouraged to spend as much time as possible together after duty hours. If the sponsor is assigned to a detail, both soldiers go. If the new man has an appointment at the personnel actions center, both go. This way, the new soldier will not be put in the position of doing something wrong because he did not know the local procedures.

At the beginning of each day during the integration period, the squad leader must talk to these two soldiers, finding out what has been done and what will be done. This way he can keep abreast of

the current situation and answer any questions that may arise. (This doesn't mean, of course, that they are ignored for the rest of the day.)

This integration period also includes performing the day-to-day duties in the squad, platoon, and company. The sponsor guides the soldier so that he will not feel left out in the cold but learns how things are done in this unit. He must gradually be made a part of everything the squad does.

Finally, after the integration period is over, the squad should have some sort of simple ceremony making the newcomer an official member of the squad.

As the new soldier then becomes more involved in the normal training of the squad, the other soldiers must remember that he hasn't had the benefit of all the training the squad did earlier. As each new training situation comes along, the squad leader must make sure the new soldier understands the objectives and the way his performance will affect the achievement of those objectives.

In other words, as new people enter the squad, the squad leader must continue the steps he used in integrating the squad in the first place.

The process of taking a number of unrelated soldiers and turning them into an integrated squad that will live as a family and function as a team requires the squad leader to put in a lot of hard work and long hours. But watching that team perform—accepting any challenge, and challenging any task—will make all the hard work worthwhile.

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