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from AUSA's Institute of Land Warfare

NCOs for the XXI Century Army

by

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The tremendous success that our Army has enjoyed over the past years can be directly attributed to our great noncommissioned officer corps. But we can and must do better. Technology and doctrine have been in constant change for some time, and will continue to complicate the challenge of leadership. In some facets of our profession we have applied "forward thinking" and "vision." But in many respects we have trapped ourselves in the '70s and '80s, especially in leadership theory and training. We have raised some great managers (people who do things right), but we have not done so well in developing leaders (people who do the right thing). Three ways we could help ourselves become more effective are to: operate and communicate horizontally; read; and recommit ourselves to leading and training.

Operating and communicating horizontally (see figure 1) will initially seem uncomfortable, as the Army is a vertically designed institution (see figure 2). That's healthy for the chain of command but ineffective in the age of information demand. When NCOs get caught operating in the vertical we get into turf wars, filter information, lock out important input and feedback, and restrict our ability to grow. While we demand that all communication pass through a "pecking order" in vertical fashion, our

subordinates are "on line," receiving and transmitting information on their personal computers. As you read this there are NCOs exchanging great ideas on leader development via the Internet.

When we operate horizontally we become what we profess to be, a professional NCO corps, working together for the good of the cause. Operating horizontally provides for mentoring to occur in a smooth and natural manner. It allows information to move quickly and accurately without filtering or embellishment. Horizontal cohesion builds teamwork through positive synergy. It contributes greatly to the elimination of rumors and confusion. The ability to operate horizontally requires us to recognize that we are responsible for caring for, training, mentoring, and informing our soldiers. Our soldiers count on us to do these things; when we fail to do so, we lose credibility with them.

The second thing we can do is read and study leadership. Just as technology has changed, so has leadership theory. Rather than wait for the Army to rewrite its manuals, build your own library now. *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People and Principle-Centered Leadership*, both by Stephen Covey, are two great primers. *How to Win Friends & Influence People* by Dale Carnegie and *Unlimited*

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Power by Anthony Robbins will contribute to your growth as a leader. And don't forget the impact that biographies of great leaders can have on you. There are many, but in this time of change I can't recommend any better than *General of the Army, George C. Marshall* by Ed Cray. When you read to grow, that is to say, for self-development, you will study what you read. You will find yourself trying new concepts and ideas. You will remove limitations you have put on yourself and you will find the challenge of leading more interesting and rewarding.

Thirdly, we can recommit to our responsibility of leading and training our soldiers. Too often today we get caught in concerning ourselves with issues outside our circle of influence. NCOs who spend the day overly concerned with budget issues or carping about already-decided policies waste time, energy and opportunity. If we go to war tomorrow we will go with the soldiers and equipment we have today.

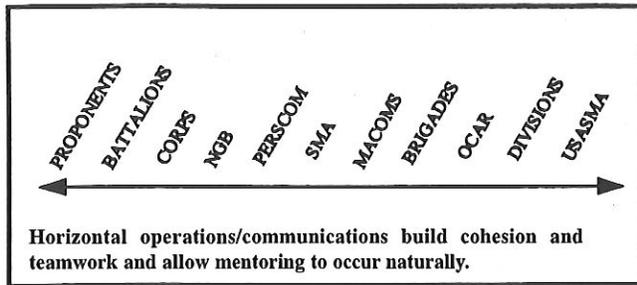


Figure 1

Training and leading are full-time jobs. If you want to see how big each is, take a piece of paper and write "Training" on the top left and "Leading" on the top right. Now list below each area the responsibilities you have to your subordinates. You will run out of paper long before you run out of responsibilities. Recommitting ourselves to leading and training is like spring cleaning the garage. We get rid of junk and outdated ideas that are taking up space and are prohibiting us from storing important and current information, thoughts, and ideas.

The Army will move into the 21st century. The NCO who moves with it will have to be one with vision and 21st century capabilities. Operating horizontally, reading, and recommitting ourselves to our profession will prepare us for the move.

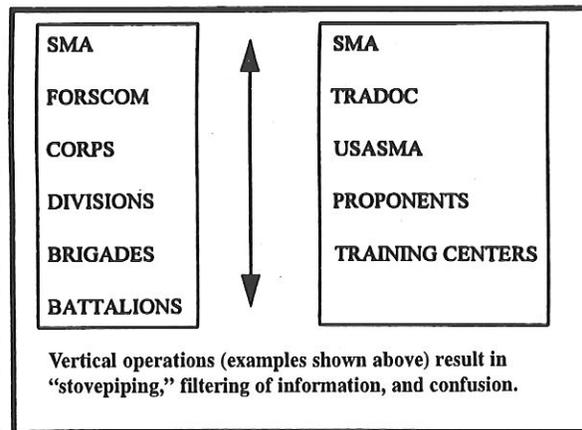


Figure 2

(CSM Robert A. Dare, Jr., is currently serving as Command Sergeant Major of U.S. Army Forces Command.)

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