

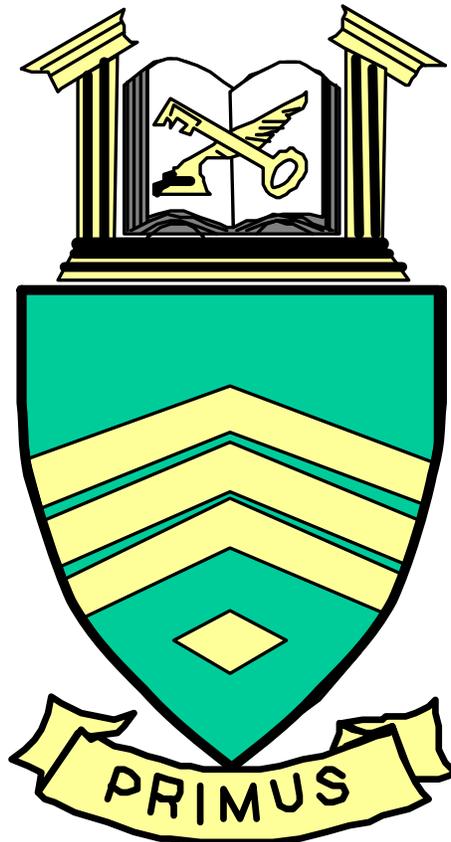
U.S. ARMY SERGEANTS MAJOR ACADEMY (FSC-TATS)

L664

OCT 03

COUNSELING PH2

## STUDENT HANDOUT



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**HANDOUTS FOR LESSON 1: L664 version 1**

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Terminal Learning Objective

Handout-1, First Sergeant's Guide

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**This Appendix  
Contains**

This Appendix contains the items listed in this table--

<b>Title/Synopsis</b>	<b>Pages</b>
<b>SH-1, Extract SH-3, L664 Preresident</b>	SH-1 to SH-1-9
<b>SH-2, Lesson Exercise 3, L664 Preresident</b>	SH-2
<b>SH-3, Situation A, L664 Preresident</b>	SH-3

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## Student Handout 1

### FIRST SERGEANT JOB GUIDE

**This job guide contains extracts compiled by the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy taken from the Center for Army Leadership website. Although not regulatory in nature, it contains valuable information for each First Sergeant in Assessing and improving the unit's counseling program.**

#### The Unit Counseling Program

*Company level leaders must understand the effects of the unit-counseling program on the organization. They must also ensure that all leaders within their organization understand who, when, and how to counsel. A unit-counseling program will only exist and sustain itself with strong leader involvement. Company level leaders must both set the example through their effective counseling of subordinates and assess and improve the counseling program within their units.*

#### **The Effects of Counseling on the Organization**

The primary purpose of counseling is subordinate development, yet the secondary effect of counseling greatly influences the unit as a whole. An effective counseling program strengthens the chain of command while providing opportunity for individual leader development.

**Strengthening the Chain of Command:** A strong chain of command is one where the flow of information is two-way. Not only should the chain of command pass information down, it should also carry information up.

Leaders frequently ask subordinates for feedback or input on decisions, yet subordinates who are not comfortable communicating openly with leaders will not provide honest input. An effective unit-counseling program establishes an atmosphere of open, two-way communication in the unit in which the subordinate's knowledge, attitudes, and opinions are respected. With this type of atmosphere, leaders will better understand and influence their subordinates.

The respect a leader demonstrates toward a subordinate in counseling will be reflected back to the leader, or returned to the leader. Subordinates, as an act of care and concern, correctly interpret effective counseling. Leaders who display this level of caring strengthen their ability to influence those

they lead.

Counseling provides subordinates an excellent opportunity to seek clarification on policies, procedures, standards, and priorities. It also provides an opportunity for leaders to check for subordinate's understanding and perceptions of the same. An effective counseling program is a key tool in establishing and maintaining an effective leader development program within a unit.

**Opportunities for Leader Growth:** Counseling presents opportunities for leaders to learn about their effectiveness, as well as opportunities to gain an appreciation for the complexity and diversity of those they lead. Leaders should reflect on, and learn from, each counseling session. For example, if a subordinate is not performing to standard, a leader should attempt to determine whether there is a communication problem, training deficiency, or an associated resource or equipment problem. Perhaps the issue is not isolated to a single subordinate, but affects the performance of many in the unit. Through counseling, leaders will discover that what motivates one subordinate may not motivate another. Counseling presents an excellent opportunity for leaders to more fully understand those they lead and the effectiveness of their own leadership.

## **Assessing a Unit Counseling Program**

Assessing a unit-counseling program is more than simply determining whether or not leaders counsel their subordinates. It is a matter of determining whether or not leaders counsel at appropriate times and if they counsel effectively. In order to accurately assess the unit-counseling program, leaders must determine the following:

- Do leaders counsel subordinates?
- Do leaders counsel in appropriate situations?
- Do leaders counsel effectively? For example, are the counseling sessions really developmental (creating a plan of action for further subordinate development) or are they evaluative (here's what you did and how well you did it)?

It is easy to assess a counseling program in a very superficial manner. The tendency is to give the counseling program a "GO" based on a very limited amount of information. For example, a leader might conclude that since most squad leaders counsel their soldiers monthly, the unit has an effective counseling program. This may be a false conclusion, as the information obtained does not address how the squad leaders counsel or if they counsel at appropriate times. Both of these points are important.

Leaders must address "who, how, and when" in assessing the unit counseling program. Although these three aspects of the assessment may seem simple, leaders cannot underestimate the complexity of the assessing process.

Given this complexity, a leader must not try to assess the counseling program as merely good or bad, but attempt to accurately determine the status of the program in several areas so that specific improvements may be made. A leader, who has not considered the meaning and complexity of counseling and how the counseling program is assessed, will have difficulty understanding and improving the unit-counseling program.

**Performing the Assessment:** At the company level, leaders attempt to gain information about if, when, and how well counseling occurs. The leader should query personnel of various ranks from different sections of the unit. The leader must pose questions appropriately in order to avoid “begging the right answer.” For example, if the leader asks, “Do you counsel your soldiers?” The answer would surely be “Yes.” A more effective approach is, “Tell me about the last time you counseled one of your soldiers...”

In addition to the comments listed above, leaders should review the current counseling program within their unit to ensure:

- The counseling taking place is not solely for the reason of separating a soldier. The primary purpose of developmental counseling is to develop subordinates, not to separate them from the Army.
- That two way communication is taking place between the leader and the subordinate and that the soldiers are not just signing the counseling form because of an evaluation or unit monthly counseling requirement.

- The counseling sessions are really developmental (creating a plan of action for further subordinate development) and they are not evaluative (here's what you did and how well you did it).
- The counseling sessions are individualized and everyone in the squad/section (for example) does not receive the same counseling session.
- The command emphasis on the unit counseling program and senior leaders are leading by example by conducting productive, developmental counseling sessions.

An assessment of the unit-counseling program is not an isolated action. For example, you obtain information about the program during normal conversations with unit personnel. As you do with maintenance and training, you must continuously spot-check the effectiveness of your unit-counseling program. The assessment cannot be limited to querying unit personnel. Part of the assessment should include counseling records and observing counseling sessions.

The leader may choose to vary the focus on the counseling program and tailor the assessment accordingly. For example, the leader may choose to focus on NCOER counseling for an identified time period. The following is an example of how a company level leader tailored the assessment instrument to assess NCOER counseling within a unit.

1. Do leaders counsel subordinates?
  - Do raters conduct initial and follow-up NCOER counseling?
2. Do leaders counsel in appropriate situations?
  - Do raters schedule counseling during the first 30 days of the rating period and at least quarterly thereafter?
  - Is counseling conducted in a manner that encourages the subordinate to actively participate?

### 3. Do leaders counsel effectively?

- Does the counseling look toward the future? i.e., develop a plan of action to improve future performance rather than simply reviewing past performance.
- Does the counseling address the duty description, definitions of values/responsibilities and standards of success?
- Is there a plan of action to focus the subordinate's actions after the session?
- How does the subordinate participate in the session?
- Are the leader's responsibilities in implementing the plan of action (time, resources, and training) clearly identified and agreed upon?
- Is the follow-up counseling scheduled and does it actually take place?

**Results of the Assessment:** A leader cannot expect to give each category of the assessment instrument a purely negative or positive rating. The assessment may determine that counseling occurs more, or is more effective, in certain sections of the unit, or that the unit is very good at counseling junior soldiers while NCOs and officers rarely receive counseling. There may be ample records to support required counseling, but the effectiveness of the counseling may be lacking.

After a leader conducts an assessment, the leader should note the key findings of the assessment. Each unit-counseling program will have strengths and weaknesses. Leaders must recognize and praise the positive aspects of the program and develop a plan of action to improve the weak areas.

## **Improve or Sustain a Unit Counseling Program**

Using the findings of the assessment, the company level leader must take action to improve the shortcomings of the counseling program. Improvement measures must be specific and tailored to address specific shortcomings. Leaders may use all or some of the following strategies in improving the unit-counseling program.

**Role-Modeling.** One of the most effective methods in improving counseling skills is to observe a skilled counselor. When leaders counsel they are “modeling” proper counseling for their subordinates. Most of us learned to counsel from our superiors’ example, not from what we were taught or learned in a school or classroom environment. Leaders demonstrate effective counseling for their subordinates in both actual situations and staged in role-play demonstrations.

**Education.** Many leaders are misguided or misinformed on counseling related issues. For example, some leaders do not think a leader should counsel subordinates unless there is a policy that mandates counseling. Others may think that since the commander has implemented a system of monthly counseling for sergeants and below, it is not necessary to counsel soldiers on performance concerns that need improvement (or maintained) today. Other leaders may hold the perception that since a subordinate is performing to standard, there is not need for counseling and reserve counseling for substandard performers or problem situations. Leaders must be educated in all aspects of the unit counseling program to include who, how, and when to counsel.

There are several methods to educate unit leaders on the unit-counseling program ranging from formal policy memorandums to informal verbal directives. Leaders should also consider conducting professional development classes within the unit. Utilizing on-post assets available, classes could be coordinated for:

- Effective writing skills
- Communication skills
- Legal aspects of counseling
- Proper use of the NCOER

**Leader Involvement:** Leaders support the counseling program by scheduling time for counseling. Successful counseling requires preparation by both the leader and subordinate. When possible, the leader should counsel the subordinate during the duty day. Counseling, after duty hours, may be rushed or perceived as unfavorable. Leaders also show support for the counseling programs by setting the example through proper counseling of their own subordinates.

Leaders should frequently talk about and encourage counseling. They should continually evaluate the counseling program by talking with their junior leaders and their subordinates. Effective counseling should be praised and ineffective counseling corrected. A leader's attitude concerning counseling pervades the unit. If leaders routinely address the importance of, and the need for counseling, they strengthen the chain of command and promote development throughout the organization.

## **Conclusion**

A company level leader is responsible for the unit-counseling program. An effective counseling program has a tremendous impact on the unit. It helps subordinates develop, strengthens the chain of command, and provides opportunities for counselors to improve their understanding of leadership. A company leader must: 1) understand the fundamentals of counseling, 2) perform informal assessments of counseling within the unit, and 3) improve the unit counseling program through role-modeling, education, and leader involvement. An effective unit-counseling program is a dynamic system of skilled leaders helping their subordinates develop. It cannot be dictated with a policy memorandum or an evaluation system. It takes time, energy, and effort to develop and sustain an effective unit-counseling program. Leaders who invest in developing unit-counseling programs are investing in the future of their subordinates and of the unit.

**LESSON EXERCISE 3**  
**PLAN TO IMPROVE OR SUSTAIN UNIT COUNSELING PROGRAMS**

Requirement: Analyze situation A in SH-3-1. Develop a plan to improve or sustain the unit-counseling program. Your plan must include:

1. An explanation of why the counseling program in situation A of SH-3-1 needs improvement.
2. A description of how an effective counseling program affects the organization.
3. An assessment of the units counseling program based on the information provided.
4. A specific plan describing measures to improve the counseling program in the organization. The plan must address logical employment of any or all of the following:
  - role modeling
  - education
  - leader involvement
5. The plan should address the deficiencies noted in the assessment as well as any strengths for sustainment. You must explain specifically how you will employ any or all of the above strategies.
6. A plan to assess the impact of the improvement measures described in 4 above.

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**Situation A**

You are a new leader in your organization. Today you witnessed “counseling” in your unit. All morning the soldiers went about recovery from the recent field training exercise, while the NCOs and officers filled out counseling forms. After lunch, NCOs and officers presented each soldier and NCO with a counseling form and told them to sign if there were no questions, or go to the “appointment line” if there were questions. You had never witnessed this sort of “mass counseling” before.

You were wondering if this was a normal occurrence and asked one of the lieutenants (LT) to explain. He explained,

It’s the battalion commander’s policy to counsel soldiers monthly. There just isn’t time to sit down and talk to each soldier. In this unit the mission comes first, and counseling is one of many things that gets placed on the back burner. The current system is perfect; no forms ever need to get back-dated, a lot of time is not wasted “talking,” and those personnel who want to talk, have the opportunity to do so ... although everybody knows getting in the appointment line is not the thing to do!

As the LT explained the system, you witnessed one of the top mechanics walking by looking dejected. You approached this soldier and asked him about his glum expression. He explained,

My squad leader just gave me my counseling form. He wrote, “I am not recommending you for promotion due to poor performance.” When I questioned what he was talking about, he said he wasn’t recommending anyone in the squad due to the low Operational Readiness (OR) rate. When I tried to explain that the deadlined vehicles were all awaiting parts and that there was nothing I could do about it, he told me to be quiet and that there wasn’t anything I could tell him about the motor pool. He told me that a skilled mechanic finds ways to keep the vehicles up. He blew up and said, “You just don’t get it! Good mechanics with a little common sense and initiative will know how to take care of things.”

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