

Leadership aspects of instilling pride

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NCOs who understand the importance of morale and esprit know that instilling unit pride contributes significantly to combat readiness.

Unit pride consists of four fundamental components: the establishment of a positive command climate, confidence in the members of a command, trust in the organization and a strong sense of affiliation to a specific unit.

Command climate

Command climate is the conduit for developing unit pride and morale. Soldiers need to feel that their leaders are receptive to their needs. The fulfillment of those Soldier needs establishes a certain command climate. That climate evolves into a strong sense of identity for the command and its leaders. Only the leader, regardless of the level, can set the stage for the development of a positive climate in a unit.

Leaders create a positive command climate by “focusing” the unit. They explain expectations of proficiency, leadership and Soldiers for the next six, 12 and 18 months of training. Then, they encourage senior leaders to delegate to subordinates. They teach, coach and mentor the officer/NCO relationship in leadership and training.

Leaders establish a positive climate by consistently and promptly recognizing good performance. Soldiers link good performance to such simple signs as hand shakes, pats on the back, certificates of achievement, small-unit leadership badges, immediate presentations of marksmanship awards at unit formations and specialty awards such as public recognition of professional excellence. For example, leaders miss an excellent

opportunity if they fail to pin an expert infantryman’s badge (EIB) to the chest of a Soldier who completes the grueling competition. Public ceremonies with dignitaries and families can follow, but the Soldier will never be prouder than the moment he earns the expert infantryman’s badge or any badge of distinction.

Another important factor in building cohesion centers on the frequency leaders talk to Soldiers. Most leaders will readily claim they have an excellent rapport with the troops but that perception is often one-sided. In addition to normal operations, NCOs should brief their platoons and squads daily. Remember, informed Soldiers perform better than Soldiers who must consistently grasp for information about training schedules, leader expectations and unit policies.

Confidence

Confidence is the faith or belief that one will act in a right, proper or effective way. In a military unit, Soldiers must have confidence in themselves, their fellow Soldiers and in their leaders. Gen.

George S. Patton once called self confidence the twin brother of leadership. In Patton’s estimation, a confident Soldier was a trained Soldier. Above all, units with enormous pride share the common feature of well-trained troops at every skill level. Professional competence is directly related to confidence. Competence is also a function of grade. Specialists are expected to know more about their weapons than privates because they teach privates how to use them.

Team leaders and squad leaders have the primary responsibility to train Soldiers. Fulfilling this responsibility begets confidence in the Soldiers and leads the Soldier to confidence in the leader. Self confidence contributes to and frequently creates success. Successful completion of individual tasks manifests itself in successful completion of the unit’s collective tasks and ultimately the training mission.

Soldiers must also have confidence in their fellow Soldiers. They must feel comfortable that the Soldiers on their left and right can be depended upon to perform their specific tasks to standard. Gunners must know their assistant gunners are as familiar with a crew-served weapon as they are. Team members



must know that they may take over the team and assume the mission if casualties occur.

Confidence in the leadership also breeds loyalty to the unit's leaders. Often, we make a great deal about loyalty being from the bottom up. However, loyalty from the top down is just as important and unfortunately less prevalent. Leaders have the responsibility to ensure that subordinate leaders and Soldiers entrusted to their cadre have opportunities to be competitive for advancement. Demand high standards and insist they attend military and civilian schools. Soldiers may initially not appreciate your insistence; however, they will know you care and this breeds loyalty.

Trust

Trust in one's organization is another indispensable characteristic of units known for their pride and camaraderie. As proficiency increases in units that concentrate on small-unit training, so does trust. The more times small units meet or exceed the standard, the more cohesion evolves. Training becomes a team effort and leadership is participative.

Leaders build trust by actions not by words. Trust is not easily obtained, but it is easily lost the first time the command fails to lead properly or train its Soldiers. Soldiers constantly assess the dependability and effectiveness of the unit's leadership. They're the leaders' most staunch advocates and most severe critics in an on-going process. As this trust evolves between the leader and the Soldiers, a sense of belonging to the unit and a desire to excel will prevail.



The same trust is true in senior-subordinate relationships. Commanders must empower subordinates with the authority and responsibility to execute missions. Junior NCOs perform better if they believe that the commander and senior NCO support channel have trust in their abilities to execute assigned tasks. Hold leaders personally accountable for their subordinates. There may be growing pains with this approach, but once everyone comes on board, leaders will have a winning team.

A sense of belonging

The final ingredient in establishing pride in a unit is the development of a sense of affiliation to a winning organization that's rich in tradition and that cares for the Soldiers in the command. Moreover, it's not enough to feel like you are just a part of the team.

Leaders must welcome each young Soldier and family to the command as they would want to be welcomed themselves. The leader must assign a sponsor who is receptive to a newly arrived replacement. Commanders and first sergeants should interview all newly arrived Soldiers. They must inculcate that Soldier in the proud heritage and traditions of the unit. It's OK for platoon sergeants to proudly state their platoon has the most EIB recipients in the battalion or the best squad automatic weapon gunner in the company.

Special activities that distinguish one unit from another are tools that create unit pride. Some units sponsor home-away-from-home events, such as unit Christmas parties, family nights at the dining facility, boxing smokers or





unit support for a local school or charity. Consistent, purposeful unit activities such as monthly battalion runs, company teams in all post athletic leagues, maintenance competitions to determine the best driver in each category are also useful. Formal dining-ins and dining-outs also contribute to the unity of the command. These activities promote cohesion and enable family members to be part of and enjoy the traditions of the Army.

Family functions such as unit religious retreats and organization days may also create a sense of affiliation to the command. Strong family support groups also send a clear signal to the families that they're as important to the command as the Soldiers themselves. Make families proud of what their Soldiers do for the Army.

Finally, don't disregard the Soldiers in planning activities to generate pride. Some of the best ideas we observed in units came from individual Soldiers in command information classes. One Soldier asked if it were possible to obtain a distinctive battalion certificate to commemorate participation in a major international exercise. Battalion or company coins of excellence are also popular with troops. Some companies post company honor rolls to list the names of NCOs and their squad members who won squad tactical competitions.

Make the Soldiers feel special to be members of a winning team. Solicit Soldiers' comments, let them help plan events, suggest ideas and make them part of the team. The first sergeant and platoon sergeant must play the role of cheerleaders and encourage the Soldiers to excel. Challenge the Soldiers to continue the proud legacy of the Soldiers who preceded them. Build the identity of the company and the battalion. You

will know you're successful when Soldiers begin identifying and boasting about their squad and platoon, as well as their company and battalion.

Conclusion

NCOs make major contributions to establishing pride in their respective units by being mindful of the qualities and characteristics Soldiers like to see in their organizations. It's the spirit of the Soldiers who follow and the leaders who lead that produces combat-ready units. Well-trained and well-led Soldiers are confident of victory. They ensure success because they have confidence, trust and strong association to units with a rich heritage.

Does your command have such squads, platoons or companies? You don't even have to ask the leaders because you can see it on the faces of the Soldiers. When they salute smartly and thunder out the name of their regiment or company, you have Soldiers who are proud of their heritage, Soldiers who will fight and win this nation's wars.

Editor's note: This article originally appeared in the Winter 1993 edition of the NCO Journal. At the time this article was written Command Sgt. Maj. Ron Semon was the command sergeant major, U.S. Corps of Cadets, U.S. Army Military Academy, West Point, N.Y., and Lt. Col. Cole Kingseed was an associate professor of history at the Academy.

