

Quality? Yes!

By SFC G.B. Patrick

The Army's focus in all areas is quality. The Army Chief of Staff says "Short of war, Total Army Quality is my number one priority." I respect his priorities and support them completely.

The results-oriented operating philosophy I have developed for my office includes integrity, customer focus and satisfaction, commitment to excellence, teamwork, respect for the individual and continuous improvement. While we do not always fully meet the standards we have set for ourselves, we constantly do our best and learn from our mistakes.

My personal philosophy is to do the right thing, do the best that I can, treat others the way they want to be treated, and avoid saying "I can't." When difficulties are encountered, I coach fellow team members to first and foremost rely on their training, and then look for opportunities to meet the challenge at hand by adapting, improvising and by using common sense.

Quality is ultimately judged by the soldiers to whom we provide service. Quality does not equal perfection; however, it does mean measuring your progress toward meeting the needs of your customers whether they are internal or external — soldiers or civilians. I am concerned that some of the Army's leaders do not realize quality does not mean perfection. The concept that some soldiers do make mistakes but can recover from them is foreign to many leaders. It is my belief soldiers who have made mistakes deserve another chance to succeed, especially if they have previously proven themselves to be honest, hard working, motivated, competent and intelligent.

As the senior personnel supervisor for the Office of the Chief of Staff, Army, I venture to say that most soldiers would

think I have a spotless record. That is not true. I used poor judgment more than once early in my career. Luckily, the restricted fiche Article 15 was still an option. How did I survive, recover and continue to succeed? There are several reasons. My personal drive and desire to excel were two reasons. Also I was given the opportunity to remain in the same unit to prove I was truly an exceptional soldier. The unit took a big chance on me but it paid off for them. I must thank SFC (Ret) James E. Parrott and MAJ Judith Oliveras for their faith in me. If they had not been in my corner, risking their reputations and the unit's reputation, I assure you that I would not be the soldier I am today.

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I believe the general mentality in the Army is that soldiers who have committed some infraction or who have had an Article 15 cannot be quality soldiers. I have observed, especially in the eyes of young soldiers, a perception that there can be no recovery from an honest mistake or an Article 15. The purpose of non-judicial punishment in a healthy, learning organization is, in my opinion, to punish the soldier for wrong doing and allow him to continue to be a soldier. But, on many occasions, we don't do that. We don't give second chances anymore. We say, "He has an Article 15. We don't want him. He is a slug!" Or, "Let someone else give him a second chance. We can't take the risk in our unit or agency." What happened to the old adage "develop a soldier's potential and

allow him to learn from his honest mistakes."

The Army leadership is not to be blamed totally. Society has assisted in fostering a "no forgiveness" attitude. When kids make mistakes and have problems with the police, we often tell them, "You screwed up. You're a loser." What do kids do when they hear that? They say, "Okay, I'm a loser. So I will continue to act like a loser." Society helps program our kids to believe they cannot recover from problems. This is an enormous waste of human potential.

How can we change this mentality in the Army? How do we shift our paradigm? We start by taking the time to truly know our soldiers' strengths and areas that need improvement, and we continuously mentor them and teach them. We recognize the quality soldiers and allow them to learn from their mistakes. We invest in our soldiers as people and not just in their training. We genuinely care about soldiers and we give good soldiers, who have made mistakes, a second chance, even if that second chance is within the same unit or agency. Often, soldiers who have made mistakes perform at higher levels as a result of their mistakes. Let's keep the quality soldiers in the Army — even if they have made a mistake. Continuous learning and improvement is the goal, excellence should be encouraged, but let us be honest with ourselves and with each other. None of us are perfect. Our mission is to be trained and ready for war, but wars are fought and won by quality soldiers who possess not merely a high degree of training, but who are also highly motivated and who firmly believe their leaders trust and support them on their journey to become the best they can be. ■

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Perfection? No!