

It's time we encourage reading in our units

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NCOs at all levels, it is time we create an internal reading list that encourages the Soldiers under our direct leadership to READ! There are various reading lists suggested at different levels in the military, and each appears relevant and contemporary. It is important that we, as NCOs, read and understand these recommendations, as well as motivate our Soldiers to do the same. Equally vital, we should create localized reading lists that focus on the topics that we, as leaders, consider important. Additionally, to check our learning, we should create a method to have Soldiers report what they've learned.

We urge our soldiers to read a plethora of military publications, for example: *Army Times*, *The NCO Journal*, AUSA's magazine and *Armed Forces Journal*. However, to fully appreciate the contemporary operating environment, Soldiers need to look beyond articles that deal exclusively with military topics. They should up to understand the philosophy, sociology, customs, history and general mindset of our enemies and other groups. By perusing a greater variety of literature, our subordinates can gain a broader understanding of our mission and our world.

Officers at every level have created reading lists for their officer brothers and sisters. A typical battalion commander will have subordinate officers read from a battalion reading list and tie it into their COE, typically with an informal case study presentation or written report as part of their professional development. They may share their understanding of the readings over a brown-bag lunch.

Unfortunately, seldom are their NCOs and Soldiers encouraged to follow that great example. Senior NCOs are typically invited but not required to participate in the unit reading program. Yet, the senior NCO who does engage will find the discussions invigorating as he or she relaxes with educated and articulate Soldiers to compare and contrast the readings, as well as attempt to relate them with current events.

Officers' method of providing reading lists and requiring subordinates to read is a useful tool at any level in the military.

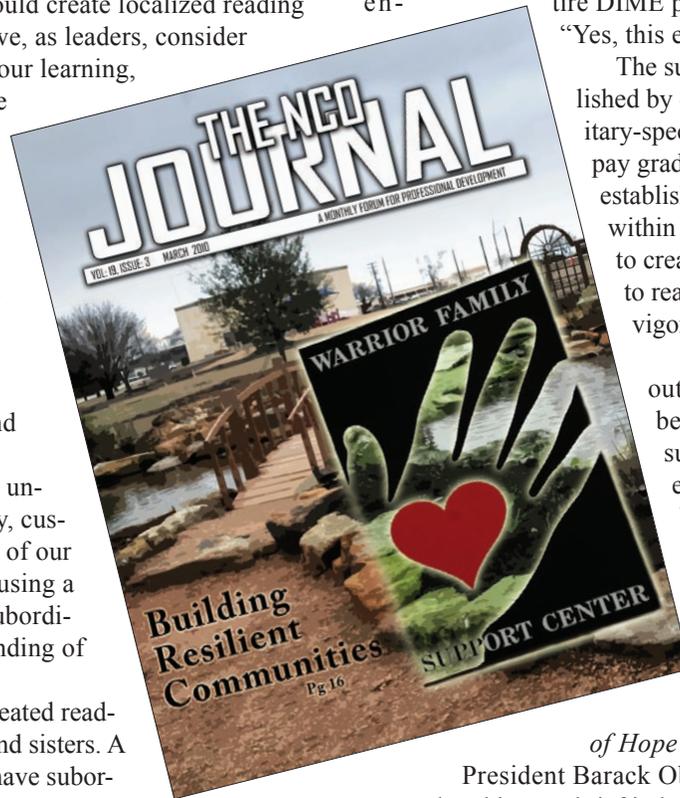
The command sergeant major should follow the officers' example and implement a reading program for the enlisted in his or her battalion. Reading will set a solid foundation concerning where we are now, how we got here and where we are heading as a force. Additionally, it will give our Soldiers some insight into our leaders, both military and elected representatives. Reading will also help Soldiers grasp and understand the political and strategic processes underlying world events. Peripheral readings will arouse and assist with an appreciation of the entire DIME process. The Soldier will think, "Yes, this effort makes sense holistically."

The suggested reading lists that are published by each of the armed services are military-specific and involve readings at each pay grade. However, it is important that we establish some fidelity to the requirement within our individual units. The object is to create a fire within our Soldiers, a drive to read a broader array of literature with vigor and alacrity.

Create a reading list in your outfit with resources that you find beneficial outside of the typically suggested topics. Here are a few examples: *The Accidental Guerilla* by David Kilcullen, *Eating Soup with a Fork* by John A. Nagl, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, *American Soldier* by Tommy Franks, *The Powers of War and Peace* by John Yoo, *The Arab Mind* by Raphael Patai, *Audacity of Hope* and *Dreams from My Father* by President Barack Obama.

What this very brief index suggests are writings in various areas that will hopefully provoke thought and discussion, as well as an appreciation of our leaders. The intent is to give our Soldiers some skills in critical reasoning. This is only accomplished if one is reading material with a message that one could cognitively challenge. Realistically, any literary work that you think will be beneficial to Soldiers and will give them a broader picture of world events is vital. Focus on serious books for serious Soldiers. The occasional fiction read is entertaining, but typically is not relevant, with the exception of the classics, which give one an appreciation of the beauty of the written word – a topic for another article.

By encouraging your Soldiers to get involved in reading beyond thumbing through a professional publication,



you are creating the true warrior-scholar. This is the person who will have an understanding of the “why” behind what we do as protectors of this country. Some may argue there is not enough time; this is an issue regardless of where one serves. Your challenge as a leader is to develop that thirst for reading in your subordinates. Opportunities take care of themselves as one becomes hungry for the continuous knowledge that only reading can provide.

Allow an old ranger to offer a technique. To get your outfit into the habit of reading, have your Soldiers read a book instead of watching a sports event or any television program. The people of the United States do not care if the professional Soldier knows how some silly sports personality chases a ball or drives a car in circles. But, a civilian will feel safe and protected if the Soldier can articulate why he does what he does.

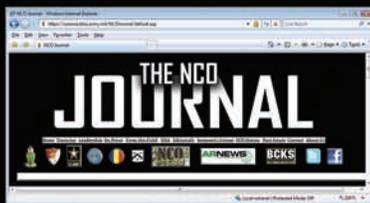
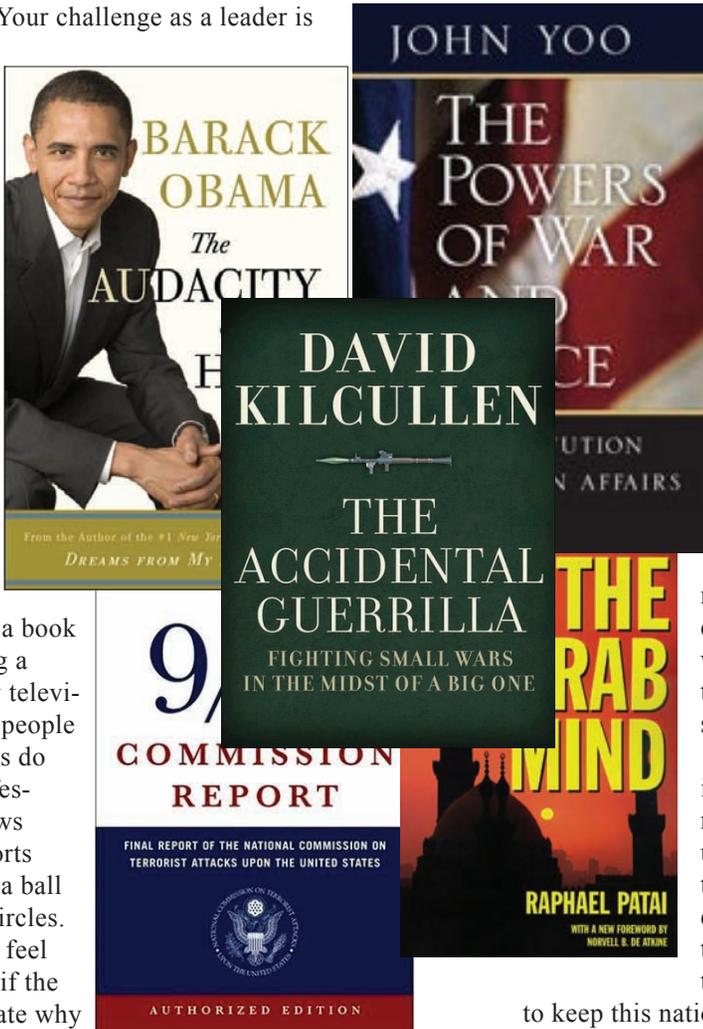
Sadly, after eight years of the Global War on Terrorism,

many of our subordinates and leaders do not understand why we are in this fight. A mindset and appreciation for second- and third-order of effects come from a continuous effort in reading and looking beyond one’s military specialty. Developing a lifelong reader is no different than encouraging your Soldiers to conduct physical training throughout their lives. Reading is PT for the mind, and it reaps benefits immediately and continuously.

The benefits of creating a reading list and energizing your outfit to read are too many to list. At a minimum, your Soldiers will develop a better vocabulary, thereby speaking and communicating with erudition. They will develop clarity in understanding and critical-thinking skills. Soldiers will begin writing to share their experiences; they will seek additional schooling beyond our Noncommissioned Officer Education System. Collateral benefits will come to the Soldiers in how they carry themselves. They will move more professionally as they become more confident in their additional knowledge. They will pass their thirst for knowledge and reading to others and, in turn, others will pass these new skills to yet more.

A secondary benefit suggests the developing warrior-scholar may now articulate the mission outside of his or her MOS and better understand the cultures of the world. Possibly, the well-read Soldier may also be able to influence civilians to move them beyond a “support the Soldier, but not the mission” mindset into truly understanding and supporting our efforts to keep this nation free and assist the peoples of the world.

The best time to start reading seriously is the 5th grade, the second best time is NOW!



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