



NCOS ON

LEADERSHIP

Flexibility, motivation matters

By Michael T. Oliver

Developing good NCOs is about developing flexible leadership behaviors. In essence, exceptional leadership is demonstrating the flexibility of accomplishing stringent mission requirements with Soldiers' varied job skills and motivations.

I've had the opportunity to experience leadership in diverse Army units. First, I was promoted to sergeant as an indirect-fire infantryman. The leadership style in that unit was best described as authoritarian — "Do what you are told." There was little or no negotiation or discussion. Sound familiar? Though this leadership style accomplished the mission, it lacked flexibility in addressing Soldiers' varied job skills and motivations.

Next, I became a telecommunications equipment repairer. This unit's leadership style was, by necessity, much different, mainly because there were several subject-matter experts concentrating on individual projects as part of the same team. Instead of there being one leader directing varied

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combined actions as in the infantry, there was multi-job-oriented, focused leadership. Again, this leadership style accomplished the mission but failed to exhibit the flexibility needed to address Soldiers'

varied job skills and motivations.

True leadership flexibility is underutilized. It's imperative that NCOs synchronize an assessment of mission tasks with Soldiers' skill sets, motivations and other factors. Depending on that assessment, leadership behaviors should be flexibly

adjusted accordingly. It may sound complicated, but it is not; it's just a challenge.

NCO leadership behaviors must adjust to four types of situations and Soldier attributes: being unwilling, being overwhelmed, being untrained and being capable. NCOs should use different leadership behaviors depending on the task and relevant attributes of the Soldier.

If a Soldier is unwilling to do a job

Sgt. Brandon Barnett (right) from B Company, 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, U.S. Army Europe, leads his team up a ridge line Feb. 26, 2009, during a dismounted patrol near Forward Operating Base Lane in Zabul province, Afghanistan.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Adam Mancini

or time is of the essence, the leader might use the **authoritarian** leadership style mentioned above.

If the Soldier is busy and overwhelmed, or if there are stringent time constraints, the leader might adopt a **participative** leadership style — including the Soldier in decisions relevant to accomplishing the task.

If the Soldier is untrained in the task at hand, the leader might maximize a **coaching** leadership style — instructing the Soldier in the needed skills.

Last, if the Soldier possesses the required skill set and is capable, the leader should **empower** the Soldier to accomplish the task to the best of his or her ability and provide assistance, if needed. Soldiers and employees often appreciate this style of leadership.

A summary of the basic leadership behaviors: The authoritarian style involves blind obedience to authority; the participative style includes the relevant individuals in the decision-making process; the coach gives support, listens and leads by example; and empowerment provides subordinates with authority to perform their job.

The flexible leadership model discussed here applies to both Soldiers and civilian employees. Seven years of experimentation confirms that civilian employees appreciate flexible leadership as much as Soldiers do. Both groups have the same basic motivations: to be recognized, to be respected and to be all they can be. Leadership flexibility works because it implements the Army's model of influencing people by providing purpose, direction and motivation while operating to accomplish the mission and improving the organization.

Take pride as an NCO and accept the challenge of leading the greatest Soldiers in the world. They deserve it.

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Know your Soldiers

By Master Sgt. Daniel Murphy →

In these times of constant change in the Army, one of our biggest challenges as leaders is attempting to stay a step ahead. And, one of the most critical leadership strategies is knowing your Soldiers. The more you know what motivates your team, what challenges each Soldier is facing and what personal goals your Soldiers have set for themselves, the more tools you put in your leader toolkit.

As a recruiter for more than 11 years, I've seen a side of Soldiers I never knew existed. I've seen them as Johnny or Susie before basic training. I've recruited in some of the richest areas and some of the poorest areas of the country. I've witnessed the decision-making process of a young lady whose brother is a wounded warrior, and had to hold back my own tears when he came in with a walker to watch her swear in and depart for basic training.

Leading recruiters and serving as one has opened my eyes to a side of people leaders often don't consider. I've held mothers as they cried, stared down fathers who claim I'm "stealing" their children and helped dependents cope with the fact that their loved ones will be gone.

We all come from a unique background. Each of us had a reason we enlisted. For some it was simple: In 1994, one recruit had barely graduated from high school, had no inclination for college and knew that sitting around Erwin, Tenn., would lead to trouble. (Yes, that's my story.) For others, it was a desire to serve.

I often take time to thank the men and women who are enlisting and have enlisted during the Global War on Terrorism. These warriors knew what they were getting themselves into. For some of them, this war has been going on for more than half their lives, yet still more make the decision to enlist every day.

As leaders, I think this is something we must take time to consider. Many of us enlisted when the greatest threats were small international flare-ups that were over in several days. The Iron Curtain had fallen, and the Army recruited with promises of college money and job training. Although those incentives still exist today, they are by no means the only reasons your Soldiers joined. They join because they want to serve. They want to defend their nation. They want to be you.

My challenge to every leader is simple: Sit down with your Soldiers and ask them why they enlisted. Ask them what their living conditions were. Did their parents support their decision? Ask them what they gave up by enlisting. Ask them what they've gained. Take the time to relate your personal Army enlistment experience.

Serving as a recruiter has allowed me to look past the persona or image that individuals want outsiders to see. With something as big as an Army enlistment, they show a part of their soul.

Your Soldier has a goal that you can help them achieve, and neither of you may be aware of it. It could go even deeper, and you could learn something about your Soldiers' pasts that explains their actions today. Knowing where someone came from is very helpful in getting them where you want them to go.

Master Sgt. Daniel Murphy, a student in Class 62 of the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, served as a recruiter for 11 years, most recently at the Military Entrance Processing Station in Albuquerque, N.M.

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