

Respect in the military

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I've been in the military for 22 years. During that time, I've heard the debate from officers, senior noncommissioned officers, junior noncommissioned officers and junior enlisted that respect between Soldiers is "earned," not automatic. Where are the lines drawn with respect for each other when it comes to peer groups, friendships, off-duty hours and in the work place? Soldiers are confronted with this dilemma each day as they make choices on how to deal with each situation.

Interaction within a peer group, sergeant first class to captain for example, is acceptable by Army standards. But, at what point do personal friendships built between two Soldiers cross the line? Within this peer group, I've experienced respect, camaraderie, loyalty, trust and confusion. As a senior NCO, it's my duty to protect my officers in any situation; cover their backside when needed, and clear the path to make sure they can complete their mission. When officers in my unit complete their task, it means I've completed mine. This is where respect is earned; in the trenches. Getting the job done with both seniors and subordinates is the best way to gain needed trust and loyalty.

Confusion occurs when officers and senior NCOs try to do too much by themselves. Micromanagement within this peer group has no place. I've witnessed the demise of officers who don't lean on platoon sergeants who know how to do their job and are willing to shoulder their share of the responsibility. In turn, I've seen the results of ineffective senior NCOs who will refuse to shoulder the responsibility bestowed upon them and forced officers into micromanaging roles. In these cases, I've found that lack of communication and respect for each other hinders the development of effective leaders.

Micromanagers don't trust their subordinates to get the job done and forfeit opportunities to delegate authority. This is where respect from your subordinates is lost. Soldiers who work for you must feel needed and have legitimate jobs. Giving a subordinate a meaningless task only compounds the problem and creates discontent.

The key to healthy peer relationships is maintaining your military bearing and keeping open lines of communication in all situations. There has to be mutual respect for each other if a friendship is going to foster. Soldiers need to respect each other's rank at all times, but it's absolutely acceptable to have friendships within your peer groups.

The lasting effects of well-fostered relationships built on trust and loyalty are camaraderie and the building of a cohesive team.



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Respect is one of the Army core values and guides us as Soldiers. If you respect yourself, respecting others will be easier, and respecting each other goes a long way in the Army. Keeping junior enlisted informed about missions and activities, and empowering them with responsibilities shows they're important to the team. Respecting Soldiers of any rank instills the confidence to complete any task and hurdle obstacles in the way.

I've experienced peer-group friendships that will last a lifetime. These friendships are built on a firm foundation of mutual respect and admiration for one another. There is no secret remedy or grand illusion regarding how to make

all of this work. There isn't an Army regulation or DA Pam that teaches you how to treat other Soldiers. When I look back at situations that have caused discontent or a perceived lack of respect for someone, it's usually tied to poor communication. Two-way communication can alleviate this confusion. As Soldiers, it's everyone's responsibility to respect the person standing on your left and right.

Is there an answer to the question, "Is respect earned or is it automatic?" Not really. Each Soldier has to look inward to find their beliefs and values to come up with the answer.

The Army teaches us to say, "Yes sir," or "No ma'am," and "Yes sergeant," and "No sergeant." These responses are ingrained in us early in our careers which ensures proper discipline and protocol as Soldiers. I only hope that as I walk by an officer or enlisted Soldier, I receive a crisp salute in return or a greeting of the day. It's the simple things that are required by the Army that make the difference within our organization. Respecting yourself, your unit and the Army will give you a sense of worth and guide you through your career, whether you're a Soldier with two years of service or someone like me with 22 years.

Editor's note: Sgt. 1st Class Paul Rieks is deployed at Contingency Operating Base Speicher in Tikrit, Iraq. He is the public affairs operations NCO in charge for the 135th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, Iowa Army National Guard.



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