



What It Means to Be an NCO

By Staff Sergeant Scott R. Stainbrook

Editor's Note: As a class assignment, Soldiers attending the Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course, Phase II, Class 01-09, were asked to write a short essay on "What It Means to Be an NCO." Staff Sergeant Scott R. Stainbrook's article was selected for publication in this issue of Army Chemical Review.

Self-confidence, the abilities to listen and communicate, and a view of the larger picture are all skills required of a noncommissioned officer (NCO). The mission of an NCO is to fulfill what we call the "backbone" of the Army. We are individuals who can hear and understand a mission and then take the necessary steps to make it happen. It is an honor to serve as an NCO because I take pride in leading my Soldiers to success. I take pride in contributing to the wider goals of my unit by helping other people succeed. These tasks require me to invest in individual Soldiers, to lead a group of people by instruction and example, and to properly represent the missions and morals of the 82d Airborne Division.

As an NCO, I must know and lead each Soldier under my command. I make it clear that they all must succeed, and I do what is necessary to ensure that each of them is a strong, able part of our group. This requires me to pay attention to their strengths and weaknesses. I work with them to ensure that they are able to physically perform their duties, and I also ensure that they understand how to be a Soldier. Since the Soldiers under my command are paratroopers, they experience the importance of knowledge and ability every time they jump from a plane. As their NCO, it is my duty to help each of them overcome their fears and apply their knowledge in every exercise. An NCO must ensure that each Soldier understands the importance of training.

As I pay attention to every Soldier under my command, I also understand that the job of an NCO is to create a strong unit of Soldiers. If I am their leader, I lead them as individuals and as an entire team. My job as an NCO is to spend time every day ensuring that my team is in top physical condition. I push them beyond what they think they can do. An NCO also must lead a team in such a way that commands respect and builds trust. If I am going to get the job done and fulfill orders every day, I must have Soldiers under my command who are ready to obey my leadership without question. They must give it their all! This is necessary for mission accomplishment and individual safety in combat. An NCO must lead in a way that sets an example of excellence. I also must ensure that my team feels challenged and

respected for their hard work. This requires me to communicate clearly and to keep my word with my Soldiers. I do not require anything of my Soldiers that I am not willing to do along with them. If you are a good NCO, you teach by example as well as by instruction.

While I spend a lot of time investing in individual Soldiers and the entire group of Soldiers under my leadership, I also work with my superior officers. A lot of my job as an NCO requires me to report on missions, to help make things happen for my superiors, and to understand the needs of my unit. I must be a good communicator in order to represent my Soldiers well to my superiors and to represent my superiors well to my Soldiers—this is the most challenging part of being an NCO. NCOs are held accountable for all actions of the Soldiers under their control, and they are also held accountable for all missions and tasks assigned to those Soldiers. When making decisions, NCOs must keep the larger picture in mind and consider the needs of their units. As the Army's "backbone," an NCO must relate to all parts of the unit to get a job done. This often means personal sacrifice or letting go of personal expectations so that Soldiers succeed and the mission is accomplished.

An NCO must work alongside the Soldiers, communicate with all areas of the unit, and solve problems to make the impossible happen. These everyday jobs point to the ultimate goal of an NCO—to bring every Soldier home safely and to serve the Nation with excellence. In war and at home, an NCO is responsible for the safety and success of Soldiers. An NCO is accountable for every mission and jump and for the lives at stake. All of these things are for the ultimate good of the Nation. If an NCO fails at leadership, communication, or problem solving, Soldiers do not follow orders or do not perform to their highest potential, which can lead to a failed mission, injury, or death. If NCOs fail, they fail the entire unit—every Soldier they lead and every Soldier who leads them. This means that NCOs must always challenge themselves to be better, work harder, and learn more every day. Good NCOs place the needs of their unit, their Soldiers, and their Nation above their own needs.



Editor's Note: The following are excerpts from other Class 01-09 essays.

All in all, I feel that being an NCO is the best way to influence our forces. We are where the rubber meets the road.

—*Staff Sergeant Roland Turner*

I build on the foundation that was laid by others to instill in my Soldiers what it means to be an NCO. I help them strive to be future leaders and to replace me as an NCO one day.

—*Staff Sergeant Theresa Y. Stepp*

NCOs are professionals and always stand for what is right and just. Although danger takes many different avenues of approach, NCOs welcome the challenge of it and defeat it.

—*Staff Sergeant William O. Baker*

NCOs do not spread discontent or question leadership. They never put themselves in a position to have their professionalism, integrity, or respect questioned. They must follow the NCO Creed in every aspect of their daily lives.

—*Staff Sergeant Antonio Preston*

To be an NCO is to be a leader, to be an example for Soldiers. I truly believe that there is no other profession that gives you more personal gratification than training and taking care of people on a daily basis. At no other job are leaders more involved in the well-being of their subordinates.

—*Staff Sergeant Keith Pyron*

NCOs must teach, instruct, and be role models for Soldiers. They must give Soldiers someone to emulate.

—*Staff Sergeant Contreras Rodrigo*

As an NCO, I teach, coach, counsel, and mentor my Soldiers—teaching them what a leader is and grooming them to become one. My Soldiers can expect me to be a caring leader, compassionate and stern. I will take care of their needs at all times, enabling them to focus on performing their jobs to standard.

—*Staff Sergeant Jorge L. Rivera*

The making of a good NCO begins on the first day of their military career. It starts with the outstanding leadership provided by a current NCO. That is the beauty of the NCO Corps—it is a self-regenerating organization.

—*Staff Sergeant Patrick Fuller*

I work side by side with my Soldiers, setting a good example and ensuring that they are the best they can be. I've worn many hats during the course of my duties—mentor, father, teacher, disciplinarian, and friend. NCOs are the first-line supervisors in the Army, the ones who know each Soldier's strengths and weaknesses.

—*Staff Sergeant David Kennedy*

The officers in my unit give complete freedom of judgment to the NCOs downrange. They have confidence in our knowledge and proficiency; therefore, we are able to accomplish our mission much more quickly and efficiently.

—*Staff Sergeant Justin R. Rinearson*

The day I became an NCO was one of the greatest days of my life. To teach Soldiers the skills needed for growth and development fills me with satisfaction. One of my most memorable times was when I promoted one of my Soldiers to sergeant.

—*Staff Sergeant Jerry Perez*

Leading by example, maintaining moral and ethical qualities, and doing the right thing exemplify what it means to be an NCO. It means not just working to meet the minimum standard, but consistently striving to do one's very best.

—*Staff Sergeant Rayon Everett*

Being an NCO requires you to be professional and tactful at all times. The ability to influence and motivate a Soldier is one of the greatest skills an NCO can possess. I mentor Soldiers and watch them develop into outstanding NCOs themselves.

—*Staff Sergeant Adrienne Barnes*



My most important task is to be a part of my Soldiers' lives—the first one to congratulate them on their accomplishments and the first one to correct their mistakes and help them learn from those mistakes.

—*Staff Sergeant Angel M. Luna Colon*

I take everything that I learn from my leaders and pass it down to the Soldiers in my unit. It is my responsibility to ensure that Soldiers are fully trained and ready to accomplish the mission.

—*Staff Sergeant Joshua Stone*

Being an NCO is to guide, teach, train, and lead those Soldiers who will be taking your place when you are dead and gone so that the Army lives on.

—*Staff Sergeant Raymond Ross*

NCOs are leaders. We are charged with training Soldiers in the way they should go—whether to take responsibility for their actions or to accomplish a mission with little or no supervision.

—*Staff Sergeant Yolanda V. Owens*

It is my responsibility to ensure that Soldiers are properly trained and equipped—mentally and physically—to handle the rigors and stressors of being in combat. To be a leader who has positively influenced numerous Soldiers gives me the feeling that I have done my job.

—*Staff Sergeant Kevin Blundell*

NCOs are the driving force behind the world's best Army. We are the carpenter's hammer that strikes the nail with precision and power.

—*Staff Sergeant Bryan T. Waddell*

Getting promoted is always a major accomplishment, but becoming an NCO is a life-changing event. It means always taking responsibility for your actions and that of your Soldiers.

—*Staff Sergeant Charles Claude*

Today's Soldier needs a strong NCO leader more than ever before. NCOs must instill the Warrior Ethos in all Soldiers and train them to work as a team. An NCO is one who takes charge, takes initiative, and takes care of business.

—*Staff Sergeant Mark Foster*

Being an NCO means (1) being comfortable with—and confident in—yourself and your decisions; (2) being able to dish it out AND take it; (3) applauding your Soldiers when they excel and, especially, if they pass you up; (4) leading by example and never taking the easy road; and (5) knowing how to take advantage of knowledge from all sorts of people.

—*Staff Sergeant Laura E. Kaihlanen*

NCOs are the enforcers of rules and regulations. They are trainers and mentors. They are the cells that come together to form organs, the electrons that stabilize atoms to keep them from ionizing and becoming radioactive.

—*Staff Sergeant Rafael Cabrera*

Our sole purpose is to mentor and mold Soldiers so that they can take our place as leaders one day. We train to lead and lead to train for ultimate mission accomplishment. The NCO is the foreman; the Soldiers, artisans.

—*Staff Sergeant Serena Occhino*

The Army NCO— No one is more professional than I...