



In 1962, President John F. Kennedy visited NASA for the first time. During his tour of the facility, he met a janitor who was carrying a broom down the hallway. The President then casually asked the janitor what he did for NASA, and the janitor replied, “I’m helping put a man on the moon.”

Take a moment, and reflect on this idea. The janitor knew something that most of us struggle with, the purpose of his work. He kept the building clean so that the scientists, engineers, and astronauts could focus on their mission of putting “man on the moon”. They did not have to worry about spending their time on trashcans, bathrooms, or hallways. He did that for them. He saw where his contribution fit in the organization. He connected his purpose with theirs.

## **We determine our proximity to the objective**

Too often in the military, we think that if we're not the ones kicking in doors, maneuvering a tank, or firing artillery rounds, that our job doesn't matter that much. But it does. The staff captain who works on a slide is freeing up the major to look ahead to the next problem. The administration clerk worries about processing pay and personnel actions so that the infantryman can focus on marksmanship. The mechanic, who works late hours fixing an engine, enables that the Stryker crew to focus on maneuver. It is all connected.

Our proximity to the objective is not determined by an organizational chart or distance from the action, it is determined by our mindset. We are the ones who choose to go to work each day with the mindset of either "I sweep the floors" or "I help put a man on the moon".

## **Leaders accelerate or decelerate this mindset**

While it is an individual choice to determine our proximity to the objective, leaders can either accelerate this train of thought or stand in the way of it. I have heard leaders treat their organizations as if it was made up of Soldiers with competing purposes and I have seen others foster the idea of everyone being essential to accomplishing a single purpose.

When I returned as a platoon leader from Iraq in 2008, I thought I was better than others because I spent my deployment on the streets, not behind a desk. It wasn't until I heard a command sergeant major compare the unit to apple pie that I began to see things differently. He said that every member was like an ingredient. Even if you had the apples or the crust, you still didn't have an apple pie until you had all the ingredients. We cannot fight and win our Nation's wars without every member of the team adding their "piece of the pie". He accelerated the idea that we all contribute to the mission. And that we should all approach our jobs that way.

Great leaders are like that Senior NCO, they make every member of their team feel like a

part of the team, and that their work matters.

### **A culture of putting man on the moon**

Imagine how much better our organizations would be, if everyone believed that their job contributed to the overall mission. Imagine how much happier we would be if at the end of the day we thought our contribution mattered. I believe it is an achievable goal, but it takes work. Leaders need to cultivate this culture and subordinates need to embrace it. As our military prepares itself to fight tonight, we all need to believe that *we are ALL helping to fight and win our Nation's wars.*

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