



By Josh Suthoff

Like any field grade I have spent a significant amount of time thinking about counseling. How do you effectively communicate to subordinates what you are looking for in them to be successful? I cherish my company grade years, but I have realized that the field grade and staff years really separate the best officers and non-commissioned officers from the rest of the pack. The ability to adapt and the level of agility become more easily discernible among the senior ranks. The maxim in organizations I have worked is, "Staff Dominance" (outperform your adjacent or higher headquarters). Be the best. But what does that look like or how do we get to the best?

I enjoyed my time as a battalion executive officer because I was able to influence many younger officers and NCOs and I understood that I directly affected how they saw and enjoyed their profession. Personally, I experienced very little counseling in the early years of my career and was determined to do things differently. One-on-one initial counseling is a great way to provide clear expectations and also learn a lot about subordinates. I have never believed in the massive memo-style counseling statements that explain in excruciating detail every aspect of a staff person's job and obvious adherence to Army values. I think we can

narrow down the qualities of a good officer/NCO to a few traits, my initial counseling format has little more than the bolded points below:

**Answer the mail:** Very simply, do what your boss tells you to do. Staff members should never have their own priorities, but constantly be working those of their boss. Leaders, especially at the pace the Army works, do not have time to run down answers to tasks after they are given. If your boss has to ask you twice about the status of priority task, you have probably failed. Once a subordinate has shown they can be given a task and come back on their own with the answer, they are well on their way to the circle of trust.

**Be proactive:** Self-starters are great to have in any business, but proactivity has to be disciplined and focused on the mission and priorities. Traits one and two are tied together. A staff member can't be successful if they have the traits of one without the other. An officer or NCO is a powerful asset to the team if they can be given a task, provide timely updates, and provide courses of action or a solution. More importantly, their supervisor knows that they can focus on other areas if that level of staff dominance is present.

**Physical fitness:** This is common sense... staff members are Soldiers too, and the first to be judged when they skip physical training. Taking time for PT is a must. It helps get the creative juices flowing and also gets people away from the office.

**Mental toughness:** Staying calm and even-keeled is a must and sets the tone in an organization. The minute you start losing control, it can spread to peers and subordinates. Mental toughness also ties the above traits together. You need mental discipline to be proactive, provide results, and also keep yourself balanced. The better the work environment you create, the better the results.

Finally, as a professional in the US Army I think it's important to remember that - **The people are the brotherhood, the organization is the machine.** I have made lifelong friends in the Army and would do anything for them. However it's important to remember that the Army is built for one purpose, to win the nation's wars. Those who don't or can't perform will be replaced, and staff is no exception. These are strong words but it's important to be clear that the staff plays a huge role in a unit's success. Every member of the staff must have or work towards the aforementioned traits for a unit to be successful, regardless of the situation. They must work towards staff dominance.

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