



By 1LT Koskinen, John J.

A common company-grade belief is that being the Headquarters and Headquarters Company Executive Officer (HHC XO) is a great looking job on paper, which nobody wants. In my first few months as an HHC XO, I found that accomplishing anything was difficult. It was as if I were Sisyphus, the mythological Greek king who was doomed to forever keep pushing the boulder up the mountain.

There is no good instruction manual on being an HHC XO for a junior officer. So, I decided to write one. This guide draws from my own experiences as an HHC XO, and from my two years of enlisted time serving in an HHC in various roles. These are my lessons learned, my observations, the things I wish I did better, and hopefully a guide to success. If you're an HHC XO, whether you wanted to be or not, this is my advice to you.

### ***1) Accept that your company is structured differently.***

This seems simple, but it's the hardest thing about your job to accept. Other than your one or two organic platoons, the battalion staff makes up the majority of the company. The staff doesn't work for you, and their number one priority will be their section's staff function, not the company, and not the commander's property.

This makes it more challenging to get Soldiers, especially staff, to complete company-related tasks. Whether it be company mission requirements, reporting, vehicle maintenance, or participating in company training meetings, it's an uphill struggle. This relationship is best illustrated by examining HHC equipment maintenance and accountability.

Each staff section has its own vehicles. The point of friction is that you will rely on the few lower enlisted personnel in each staff section to accomplish all user-level maintenance for all assigned equipment. They are likely the most knowledgeable, and in most cases, the property is assigned to them as the users.

High turnover in staff sections can result in complications during both inspections and changes of command. There will be many hand receipt holders, which makes property accountability difficult. Unlike a company that has platoon leaders for delegating tasks and establishing property continuity, an HHC is more reliant on section NCOICs and ten-level soldiers who maintain the equipment, fill taskings, and whose primary job is working for

their section OIC.

## ***2) Understand how your commander exercises command.***

Command in an HHC has asserted two ways. The first is through property and supply. Command and supply discipline is important for every commander, but for an HHC this is a major part of how command authority is exercised on a daily basis.

The second way to exercise command is through facilitating individual training for staff required to deploy or maintain readiness. This also includes additional MOS specific training for organic enabler platoons needed to execute their unique mission set.

The HHC XO needs to keep these two things in mind. As an HHC XO, you will have to be more involved in property because there is a great deal of property, spread across many hand receipts, which change sub-hand receipt holders frequently. Since this is one way your boss exercises command, be prepared to constantly increase your situational awareness on the status of your equipment.

Also, keep in mind that this equipment and your supply support to the battalion commander is extremely visible. This shouldn't make you uncomfortable, but it's all the more reason to keep yourself in the know and ensure you are able to understand equipment shortfalls and challenges.

I avoided a Sisyphean moment by dispelling with the notion that there was no point in an HHC XO in the field during two combat training center rotations. The reality is that in a tactical environment, the HHC commander is responsible for securing the tactical assembly area and assumes the role of the base defense commander. The XO has a new boulder to push uphill in addition to battle tracking your attached and organic enablers and resourcing. This new boulder is the maintenance of your company's security posture alongside the company first sergeant.

Yes, this means putting members of the staff sections in security positions. I found success in setting up a security posture by working with a dependable senior NCO who was appointed Sergeant of the Guard (SoG) by the commander. The SoG was always aware of the commander's intent, was able to ensure staff fulfilled their perimeter security requirements and brought points of friction and resourcing requirements to my attention.

This allows an HHC XO to address issues in real-time and to be a better sounding board for the commander. No matter the mission, a successful HHC XO builds relationships with the staff and works to create a symbiotic relationship between the staff and the company. The success of an HHC Command depends on it.

### ***3) Be a leader who can communicate and be prepared to repeat yourself a lot.***

The Army defines leadership as providing purpose, direction, and motivation. Where does an HHC XO fit into this? You are the boss of only a small operations section, most of your company outrank you, and you have to answer to several people.

Providing purpose works best when dealing with company requirements. I understood that providing purpose and direction lay in my ability to explain my commander's intent and how it nested with tasking, requirements, training, and the battalion commander's intent. Giving direction often followed, but it was still a constant endeavor.

I would often refine directions and repeat intent throughout the day via phone calls or discussions in my office. The same is true if your HHC has enabler platoons. The key difference between attachments and HHC organic enabler platoons is that they often are the go-to for short suspense taskings. You have to listen and be in constant communication with them so their mission doesn't become doing what the S-Shops don't want their Soldiers to do.

Finally, you need to be ok with repeating yourself and asking for things multiple times. In my experience, most of my interactions in my daily work saw me interact with the staff NCOICs. Unlike my other XO peers, I didn't have a small group of platoon leaders to turn to with a platoon of manpower. You can and should use e-mail, texts, and calls, but in the end, nothing beats a face to face conversation to get the point across.

An excellent working relationship with the battalion XO is key to success. When I was unable to get the staff on board to accomplish a task, I could communicate the friction point to him. That's the power of working with the staff sections senior rater. They want to see your company succeed, and they will provide a little extra motivation that my command team and I needed to complete the mission. We weren't stuck pushing the boulder up the mountain.

#### ***4) Always work, communicate, move, and execute as a member of a command team.***

As mentioned above, having a good working relationship with the battalion XO was one key to my success, but even more important is your comradery with your first sergeant and company commander. Like all XOs, you will work by, with, and through your first sergeant to accomplish mission requirements. The first sergeant often provides the direction and motivation needed in an HHC.

The HHC First Sergeant is directly involved with the mentorship of all the NCOs on staff. Daily conversations with your HHC First Sergeant are the most effective way to fulfill company taskings, conduct command maintenance, and meet training requirements.

*Remember, you work for your company commander:* Your job is to keep their company running and ensure their intent is met. The best way to make these efforts as seamless as possible is an open-door dialog. I had an office adjacent to both of my HHC commanders as an XO. The door between our offices remained open to ensure we talked throughout the day about any issues or planning considerations that inevitably came to light. My first sergeant did the same, making it easy for the three of us to be on the same page.

In the end, the commander makes the decisions, but when the HHC command team is in sync, progress and mission success follows.

#### ***5) Motivation in an HHC is hard to cultivate, but it's not a scarce resource.***

To be candid, many Soldiers don't want to be part of an HHC. They want to be back in a regular line company, back with their peers, doing the job they were trained for.

I felt that as an NCO on battalion staff. As a 2LT, I felt that I was a mere place holder. As an XO, I noticed this strikingly evident feeling in others by the lack of effort some staff sections put into company training meetings.

However, at the end of the day, you need to buy into your company and sell it to others. Your efforts and presence reflect on others more than you think. When the HHC puts effort

into training, FRG events, and overall cleanliness of company areas, you can see a difference in attitude.

My command team began inviting staff sections to participate in cross-training. The reception we got from Soldiers was surprisingly positive. This impacted the groupthink, and now simple taskings like cleaning weapons echo with sounds of improved morale. That is not to say that motivation isn't still a continuous struggle. You can't get discouraged if some Soldiers don't care, your positive attitude and work ethic *will* make a difference.

## **6) *Be Present.***

Part of presence is simply making sure you do your rounds. As an HHC XO, you have access to the staff. This allows you to know what might affect your company sooner, allowing you to prepare your company and fellow XOs for those challenges.

The other is placing yourself at the point of friction: the Motorpool, the Armsroom, the Tactical Operations Center, the Railhead, whatever it may be. This gives you an idea in garrison or in the field if your commander's intent is being met. Are the trucks being maintained? Have the weapons been serviced this quarter? Does the staff have what they need for this training rotation? Are they even thinking about it? These are the questions that can't be answered by staying behind a desk.

## **7) *Take pride in "XO-ing".***

This applies to all company level XOs. Accept that "to XO" can be used as a verb. It means resolving problems and conflicts while ensuring the regular performance and timely execution of the organization in any situation.

This requires that you know how to navigate the digital bureaucracy. Use online programs such as GCSS-Army and LIW to remain aware of company maintenance programs and supply processes. Always look at your Equipment Status Report. Stay up to speed on all training events and their requirements, such as land and resourcing.

Keep in mind that while you don't have a cohort of platoon leaders to task, you do have new 2LTs and young NCOs that need to be mentored and developed. They can help you with

resourcing and running ranges and equipment inspections. Ensure that additional duties and equipment rooms are all in acceptable condition.

To succeed as the HHC XO you must be able to clearly communicate your commander's intent while understanding how they exercise command. You must provide purpose to the individual company elements. By consistently being present and engaging with those elements, you'll see the necessary action to take, and the cultural changes, if any, that need to be made. You will be able to leverage your organization's make up, however unique, towards accomplishing your mission.

There will always be another boulder and another mountain for an HHC XO. But unlike Sisyphus, you will be able to get each boulder to the top of its mountain and look back with pride at your company's success.

*1LT John J. Koskinen is an engineer officer who serves as the executive officer (XO) for HHC, 6th BEB, 4-25 (ABN). He is currently in his 10th year of active-duty military service. Prior to commissioning, he served more than six years as an enlisted member of an armored crew and later a civil affairs specialist. He holds an MSc in International Politics from the University of Edinburgh and a BA in Political Science from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.*

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