



By Michael Burke

You have finally arrived: the pinnacle of what most NCOs aspire to be, a First Sergeant, the *top* of your organization's NCO support channel.

You've been grinding every day: taking care of Soldiers, mentoring young NCOs, and advising junior Officers. The weight of the organization is on your proverbial shoulders. Frankly, you're exhausted.

If you're still reading this, it's safe to assume you are either selected or close to being selected for the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA). You are most likely battling internally. Do you continue serving, or coast gracefully into retirement?

The reasons you think it's time to separate are the same reasons you are so critically needed. You are tired and frustrated because you take care of Soldiers but constantly struggle through bureaucratic limitations or differences in opinion with your chain of command. True, you are your organization's senior enlisted Soldier, but at the same time, you also realize that you don't have the positional power to make the changes you truly envision.

I have good news. Being a Command Sergeant Major provides one major benefit: it offers the positional power to make organizational changes. As a SGM/CSM, you have the freedom to move throughout the formation and interact with all its members. Through discussion, you will be presented with innovative ideas, policy suggestions, and command culture insights. Through reflection, you will be better equipped to identify issues and envision how to implement changes. Once personally bought in, you can then conduct open dialogue with the appropriate command channels and advocate to improve the organization. You are also in a position to mobilize the staff to work through courses of action, solutions, and finally, implement the change YOU envisioned. If the proposed change is above your level, you can interface with your higher headquarters. You can do all this because you finally have a seat at the table where organizational changes are discussed.

Equally, you can impact command climate immediately and lay the foundation for culture change that will move the organization forward for years to come. You are able to create leaders at all echelons that have disciplined initiative, use common sense, and hold each other accountable. By accountability I mean acceptance of diversity and zero tolerance for sexual harassment and sexual assault. The systemic misconduct occurring in our ranks is only going to diminish when leaders and Soldiers at every echelon own the problem, and are empowered to influence positive change.

I graduated from USASMA Class 67. Our motto was "Lead, Learn, and Inspire." After years

of reflection and application, I believe we got it wrong. It should have been: “Learn to Lead through Inspiration.”

Here is the point MSG(P): you are finally about to be able to make the changes to all the things that have frustrated you over the last several decades of service. Soldiers are waiting for you, daresay even begging for you, to come in and lead by example, put their needs first, and mentor their leaders about the Profession of Arms. Spend the next year investing in yourself and family. Have deep discussions with your peers and mentors about the kind of Sergeant Major you strive to be. Most importantly, enjoy this time of little responsibility. When you become a Sergeant Major, you owe your formation the best version of yourself. Every. Single. Day. You’ve got this. Welcome to a new part of the Profession. I promise you it will be more rewarding than you ever imagined.

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