

# COUNSELING SOLDIERS-

## Providing Opportunity to Grow

By SGM Martin J. Moreno

**A**s a leader responsible for the important task of discussing the performance or guiding the career of other Soldiers, it is necessary to review the purpose, and most effective methods, of counseling. We need to stop occasionally and ask ourselves whether we, as counselors, are performing this critical function as well as we are possibly able. For instance, how can you make counseling work for you? Are we, as leaders, performing the right counseling at the right times? Or, how does “Old Counseling” change with the new non-commissioned officer efficiency rating system?

Before addressing the topic of counseling, I took some time to revisit Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 6-22.1, *The Counseling Process*. Although I feel confident in my ability to counsel Soldiers, I have not always followed the guidelines provided by the ATP to make the experience as formal as it should have been or to document the event as carefully as I should have. Throughout my career as a non-commissioned officer (NCO) responsible for Soldiers and their development, I probably did not provide the best counseling service to my Soldiers. I did not take the time to refine my counseling skills as well as I should have. I think these statements likely apply to the majority of NCOs that I have known who have developed bad counseling habits such as counseling only to meet dictated requirements or rigidly

following a check sheet intended only to serve as a general guideline for the counseling session. On the other hand, there are those NCOs who understand the incredibly important utility of the counseling session to keep a wayward Soldier on track or to provide invaluable recommendations for the career progression of an especially talented Soldier. You decide where you fall. Those NCO leaders who take the “easy” route and do not offer the full services and intent of the counseling session to their Soldiers are passing bad habits to those Soldiers. These practices need to end if we want to develop Aviation professionals. We must put people first and that does not happen if the Soldiers under your watch do not have established guides, goals, and limits.

While counseling occurs at all levels, the chain of command reinforces the standards for its framework at every echelon. That raters and senior raters counsel their Soldiers on measurable expectations with regard to mission success and professional development is paramount to the development of the Aviation professional.

The obligation of a university is to make the student its most important asset by assisting the student’s integration into the academic environment, providing every reasonable opportunity to the student to complete his studies, and to help place the student in his chosen career field. A

university will help chart a student’s path to success for multiple reasons. Some are: social obligation to educate and train the young, return on investment from existing alumni contributions, high graduation rates, and to encourage future alumni contributions. Similarly, the Army has an obligation to make it understood to the Soldier that he is the Army’s most important asset. We have the obligation to integrate the new Soldier into the Army’s way of life, train the Soldier to become a professional in his chosen field, mentor the Soldier throughout his development to improve his skills and enhance his professional development, and counsel the Soldier on a regular basis to keep him on course and on glide path. As military professionals, we become intensely mission focused. We frequently forget that the Soldier is an essential component of that mission.

How do you get the message across to the Soldier that they are important? While conducting an inspection of one of our organizations counseling records, I found that one platoon sergeant might rate upwards of 20 NCOs. This does not sound too bad until you understand that he has to invest time in planning each counseling session and then take the time to actually conduct the counseling session. If that platoon sergeant has allotted an hour for each counseling session, he is spending a minimum of 80 hours a year performing this supervisory responsibility. These counseling sessions only cover the

required quarterly counseling sessions, and exclude reception/integration, crisis, transition, or promotion counseling.

Now look at the senior rater for the same company who might senior rate upwards of 50 NCOs and perform counseling twice a year on those 50 Soldiers. Remember, the actual time spent in the counseling session does not include the time for preparation of the evaluation. Additionally, these are only NCOs, not the enlisted Soldiers that also require counseling. The time expended on these events is significant. The point is this - how does a rater or senior rater manage counseling if he does not have it scheduled? *Ad hoc* counseling sends a message to the rated Soldier that "it doesn't matter, it's not that important." Take time to create a schedule and follow it for the benefit of the Soldier and the organization. Commands mandate six-month training schedules and physical readiness training schedules but never make counseling schedules a priority until they become necessary through poor conduct or through command inspection requirements. Take time to develop Soldiers and prepare well thought out development plans for them. They deserve it.

### Counseling Support Tools

When I arrived at a new duty station in 1992, my section sergeant took the time to discuss my future in the Army, my objectives, and my educational

goals. He directed me to make an appointment with the education center and suggested that I consider getting my Federal Aviation Airframe and Powerplant License (A&P), "like the other guys." On his recommendation, I made an appointment with an education counselor who identified the importance of establishing long-range military and civilian goals. I was intent on becoming a career Soldier and gave little thought to any long-term civilian objectives; however, the counselor took the time to educate me on the importance of having different goals and how, if properly aligned, I could be successful in both arenas. Today, I have my A&P, an Associate's Degree in Applied Science, a Bachelor's Degree in Business, and a Master's Degree in business. I attained these goals because one person took the time to sit down with me and chart a path for success.

Three tools useful in charting, measuring, and recording a Soldier's progress are the Evaluation Entry System, the Army Career Tracker (ACT), and the Digital Training Management System (DTMS). I have found that many NCO leaders resist using these tools due, in part, to what I refer to as "digital atrophy." They do not completely understand or do not feel sufficiently confident with their knowledge of these systems because of the rapid pace at which the tools are developed and implemented. Additionally, senior leaders do not

support the Army in establishing these systems of record as important.

Many leaders provide counseling in various fashions by employing experiences from past personal counseling events. Whether the counseling happens on a preprinted form or a napkin, scanning and uploading those documents will assist in ultimately understanding where a Soldier fits in the unit's mission, how his career progresses, or how his personal development plan will be met. The Evaluation Entry System's Counseling Management Report tool allows anyone within the rating chain to see the counseling sessions that have occurred and determine whether the supervisor has completed counseling in accordance with regulation. However, what goes into the counseling is a very different topic of debate.

Since the announcement of the new NCO Evaluation Report (NCOER), I have listened to many Soldiers/NCOs discuss the intricacies of writing the NCOER. I have always questioned the intent of "how to write the NCOER." Are we, as leaders, trying to write something about performance we expect to happen or are we summarizing the progress of the rated individual we have monitored through the rating period? For NCOs, sections IV (Performance Goals and Expectations) and V (Performance Evaluation, Professionalism, Attributes, and Competencies) on Department of the Army (DA) Form 2166-9-1A, *NCO Evaluation Report Support Form* are a discussion between the rated Soldier and the rater. It is important to understand that it is a discussion because, too often, we allow the Soldier to dictate what might go in these blocks. As a leader, you should provide the rated Soldier with a potential list of objectives related to achieving excellence in your unit. The objectives should align with daily duties and scope, areas of special emphasis, and appointed duties. Each task should be quantifiable and have clear attainable objectives. For instance; an additional duty of Key Custodian should





have an objective of maintaining 100% accountability of assigned keys and obtaining a “commendable” or better rating on anticipated inspections. The rater should indicate improvement or degradation of the duty during each rating period. The rated NCO should know exactly where he stands in the performance of his assigned duties. The measurement of those objectives will write the evaluation report. We need to report what is accurate for the health of the organization and the Army.

The ACT is an emerging tool that is available to the Soldier to track individual training, education objectives, and monitor career development. Once in widespread use, ACT will be a great tool for Soldier and mentor/supervisor interaction. Supervisors should be encouraged to set down at the earliest point possible in his Soldier’s careers to map out a path to success. How convenient it would be for a first sergeant to see these individual development plans when making decisions on human resource management. If we implemented the ACT early in the Soldier’s career, no one would have an excuse for not populating Part IV, Performance Goals and Expectations on

the DA Form 2166-9-1A, NCO Evaluation Report Support Form.

The third tool available for counseling is the DTMS. The DTMS provides leaders with a perspective on relative training in accomplishing the unit’s mission essential task list. This tool can help a supervisor determine whether his Soldiers are meeting the required objectives established during their counseling sessions. Additionally, DTMS along with the Digital Job Book found within the Army ATN will allow leaders to see where Soldiers are in tracking their professional military experience. Also, leaders will validate a Soldiers training with regard to their Individual Critical Task List produced by the proponent center of excellence. This task list will standardize the type of training a Soldier needs to become a professional in his chosen field. The DTMS confirms that, contrary to popular belief, the institution does not make the expert; it is the organization that develops the expert.

#### **Providing Opportunity to Grow**

Creating opportunity where there is none is probably one of the most difficult issues today as we are faced with constant rotations to the combat training centers,

supporting combat operations, and required to complete more mandated training than is manageable. Deploying an organization is probably old hat by now. So where is the opportunity beyond those already mentioned? The Army Aviation Branch has become increasingly dependent on contract maintenance to the point where we have tarnished the trust in our own maintenance support personnel. In an era of shrinking resources, we have seen fit to grow maintenance and other contracts to compensate for a downsized military. We understand that our leaders are adapting to a tough environment; however, the pendulum has reached the apex as we continue to drawdown, contend with decreased funding, and restructure once again in order to remain relevant as a Branch.

There are opportunities to encourage professional growth. Leaders can choose to create Aviation Academies within their footprint to allow Soldiers and NCOs to grow through cross training geared toward certification in their profession. Unit commanders can leverage the Federal Aviation Administration’s (FAA) Joint Service Aviation Maintenance Technician Certification Council A & P Program, managed for Army Aviation

professionals by the 128th Aviation Brigade. The program provides various training valuable in building a foundation in aviation knowledge and paves a path to certification with no additional cost to the Soldier or the unit. Additionally, combat aviation brigade commanders can establish free written exams within their footprint for all aviation military occupational specialties (MOS) (aviators included) provided by the FAA. I encourage command teams interested to contact the 128th Aviation Brigade for assistance in establishing this capability for Soldiers within their units. Creating these academies for soldiers will allow for more training applicable to their career field, provide more learning opportunities, and build confidence in their abilities.

### Start Earlier

Why do we have such a great turnover with the Utility Helicopter Repairer MOS (15T)? Although there are many individual considerations, I can say, from experience, that the opportunity to develop beyond a parts replacer or a door gunner is very limited. Unfortunately, if you are good at your job, your leaders are less likely to allow you to do what you desire to do to improve yourself. Thus the exodus.

Jack Welch, former Chief Executive Officer of General Electric, believes that employees can be broken down into three performance groups. Welsh believes that the top 20% of people should be treated like stars. "Make them feel loved, hug them, give them cash, give them rewards in the soul and wallet. Do everything for

them. For the middle 70%, show them what they need to do to get in the top 20%. For the bottom 10%, tell them why they should move on. Do it over a year or so. Tell them what their shortfalls are, tell them they're in the bottom 10%, don't give them a raise, and ask them to leave. Tell them 'Over the next several months, [we'll] work together to get you in the right place.'

We in the Army Aviation enterprise need to take an active role in developing future war fighters sooner than later, because catch-up training in the institution is counterproductive. We can change the branch through effective communication of expectations in counseling at all levels - and it begins at the top.



<sup>1</sup> Bulygo, Zach. "Lessons on Winning and Profitability from Jack Welch." Kissmetrics Blog. A Blog About Analytics, Marketing, and Testing. Web. 3 March 2016. < <https://blog.kissmetrics.com/winning-and-profitability/> >

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### Acronym Reference

<b>ACT</b> - Army Career Tracker	<b>FAA</b> - Federal Aviation Administration
<b>ATP</b> - Army techniques publication	<b>MOS</b> - military occupational specialty
<b>A&amp;P</b> - Airframe and Powerplant License	<b>NCO</b> - non-commissioned officer
<b>DA</b> - Department of the Army	<b>NCOER</b> - NCO Evaluation Report
<b>DTMS</b> - Digital Training Management System	

