



UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS  
MARINE CORPS RECRUIT DEPOT/WESTERN RECRUITING REGION  
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9 Sept 13

From: Commanding General, MCRD San Diego/WRR  
To: All Officers and Staff Non-Commissioned Officers  
Subj: Colonel Zinni's SNCO Letter

Marines- since the attached letter first came to my attention fourteen years ago, while I served as the CO of RS Richmond, I have passed along a copy to the Officers and Staff NCOs of every unit I've commanded.

The wisdom herein is timeless. It contains the words, "the traditional view that the Staff NCO is the backbone of our Corps is absolutely correct." This letter remains one of the best written descriptions of the role of the Staff NCO, and the criticality of an effective Officer and Staff NCO team, that I have run across.

As we transition from twelve years of tough combat, the importance of the Staff NCO... as a team mate with his officer counterpart, as a keeper and enforcer of our standards, and as the conscience of his unit... has never been more critical.

Read this letter and consider its message. It stands as an inspiring mark on the wall for each of us as we take on the challenges of this proud command.

  
J. W. BIERMAN



UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

5TH MARINE  
2ND MARINE BATTALION (4) (MARB), 1ST  
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NO REPLY NEEDED TO:

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25 Apr 89

From: Commanding Officer  
To: All Officers and Staff Non-Commissioned Officers  
Subj: THE STAFF NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICER

I have been fortunate in the 24 years that I have been a Marine Officer to always have had a high quality Staff NCO at my side. From the time I joined my first rifle platoon in 1965 to my current position as a Regimental Commander, a Staff NCO has been there to advise me, to teach me, to motivate and encourage me, to ensure I provide the very best leadership to our unit, and to guarantee things were properly done according to the spirit and intent of the directions I gave or received. The value of the Staff NCO, for me, has been the experience, knowledge and, example he brings to the unit. He has been there. He has successfully come up through the ranks. He knows how to best translate orders and directions into efficient and effective action by the Marines. The traditional view that the Staff NCO is the backbone of the Corps is absolutely correct. The image of the Corps is embodied in the Dalys', Quicks', Basilones', and other legendary SNCO's of our past. These were men whose courage and expertise built confidence and esprit along the chain of command from above and below. They made things happen on the battlefield and in garrison. Staff NCO's enforce the standards, be it in combat or in peacetime. They are the conscience of the unit and the keeper of those high, tough standards that separate the Corps from other military organizations.

The mission of the Staff NCO's is not only to make better Marines but also to help make better officers. I would not wear the grade insignia I do now if it were not for the Staff NCO's I have been blessed to serve with. Long ago some wise man knew that the experience and proven performance of a senior enlisted man when combined with the education and training of an officer made an unbeatable team. Together they form and lead the ideal military units. The key is that we ensure each of these leaders possesses and maintains the skills and character required of their grade and that the relationship they develop is built on trust, mutual respect, and a clear goal to accomplish the mission of the unit while tending to the welfare of their men.

With few exceptions, a unit that fails or does not live up to our expectations will have as its root cause for its problems the lack of this quality team. An officer cannot do a Staff NCO's job and he should not try to. A Staff NCO cannot back off from his responsibilities and get by with minimal or marginal performance without the unit suffering. The Corps has always possessed the lowest ratio of officers to enlisted of any service, yet we have

maintained standards of discipline and combat performance unsurpassed by any military force in history. Why? It is because our Staff NCO's have been strong enough and trusted enough to carry the load without an officer in every leadership spot.

The primary role of the Staff NCO is to develop the individual Marines and Sailors in his unit into the very best. The primary role of the officer is to develop the unit into a team that functions together as the very best military organization. They work together toward the same objectives with the Staff NCO always prepared to assume the role of the unit leader in the absence of the officer. Each of them should keep the other informed. Each should seek advice from the other. Each should feel confident enough to express his views in a professional, respectful manner. Each should understand the responsibilities of the other and not try to do his job or interfere, micro-manage, or criticize - publicly or privately.

What follows is some advice on making this all work. Seek the advice and counsel of other senior officers and Staff NCO's who seem to have a working team going for them. This is especially important for newly commissioned officers and newly promoted Staff NCO's. Always attempt to have things handled at the lowest possible level in the leadership chain that can appropriately and effectively handle it. Supervise and inspect but don't do the job for subordinates. There will be mistakes, but we learn from mistakes and leaders can be in a position to help subordinates without getting in their way or frustrating their attempts to learn how to lead.

Sometimes personalities will conflict. The best thing to remember if this happens is to keep the relationship on a professional level and keep the welfare of the unit and the men as your first priority. Don't focus on the personal side of the issues and avoid confrontations. Remember the junior man must always make the adjustment - someone may be doing the same for you that is junior.

The key point to remember is that the officer and Staff NCO are a team. They bring different backgrounds with them to their leadership positions but there is good reason for that. No unit will succeed if this team doesn't work well together. I wouldn't trade what I have been given by the Staff NCO's I have known in the Corps for anything. To me they are the Corps.

Sergeant F1,

  
R. C. ZANNI  
Colonel USMC