

The Officer

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HERE had been several instances in various units of our Armed Forces when all of a sudden some soldiers who had heretofore been normal get into very serious trouble. These incidents usually result in loss of lives and property and a land mark to the Military. True, investigations are conducted on the spot to trace the root cause of the trouble, but the results of the probes are seldom, if ever, utilized, to help prevent similar incidents. A majority of "run-amok" cases could have been prevented by proper leadership measures which are within the ken of the normal, intelligent military leader. One of these measures is the application of positive counseling by the leader. It is, therefore, important that the leader pay as much attention to his role as a counselor to his men as he would to his other leadership roles.

"A personal problem is a personnel problem." In this era of stringent and manpower allocations, it is imperative that all men serving under the unit leader be utilized to the maximum. This can be done if every man discharges his normal role in an

expansive atmosphere free from conflicting interest and undue mental strain. In cases of timely psychological inroads, timely and intelligent counseling can very well spell the way to complete normalcy and maximum efficiency.

The ordinary soldier looks upon the officer for guidance. The officer becomes a father, an older brother, a pastor, a teacher and a friend all rolled into one. During times of the soldier's confusion, the officer is the "friend in time of need" and a "friend indeed." The leader worth his salt acts as a counselor with interest and skill. This role should launch the leader into a project designed to solve a problem of one person but he is also given an opportunity to get insight into the troubles, problems, and prevailing ideas within his unit.

Soldier Problems

Military leaders are generally agreed that problems of the soldiers which lend themselves to solution by counseling could be generally classified as follows:

- a. Soldier-adjustment (Maladjustment, hostility, tensions, malingering, etc.)

As A Counselor

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- b. Soldier-leader (ranks, promotions, assignments, punishments, mess, supplies).
- c. Soldier-family (jealousy, infidelity, money, love, family troubles).

The ordinary soldier, left on his own could very seldom solve these problems. In civilian life he would invariably turn to his mother, wife, father, priest, or lawyer for assistance. In the military service, his ultimate "wailing wall" is his leader upon whom he reposes his trust and confidence. The good leader helps him out with proper application of counseling techniques. He could better prepare himself for this counseling role if he acquaints himself with the variable types of problems he may encounter within his unit.

In this discussion we purposely left out soldier's problems arising from mental instability or neurosis which require the competent services of psychiatrists or psychologists. Nevertheless, even in these latter cases it is the leader's duty to see that individuals beset with these ills are immediately sent to hospitals for observation and treatment.

Purpose of Counseling

There are two basic purposes for the leader assuming the role of counselor. One is that the counseling role will give the leader an opportunity to correct misunderstanding within his unit. Misunderstandings when allowed to continue will lead to quarrels, complaints, derelictions, neglect of duty, indifference to instructions, lack of zeal and consequently loss of efficiency. They will go full circle. Such individual misunderstandings usually mount into big emotional conflicts rendering personnel ineffective; and sometimes misunderstanding gives rise to cases of violent accidents like the usual "amucks." Also, counseling aims to help the individual soldier adjust to his situation. A soldier in civilian life has had his share of experiences, likes, dislikes, aversions, and comes into the Army with his own set of ideas. Acute situational maladjustment may result when he is thrown in the company of several others whose individual characteristics are in variance with his own. He may become a mental case wherein he becomes nervous, irritable, moody, detached



Misunderstandings among members of a unit may lead to lack of zeal and consequently loss of efficiency in the unit. The counselor must strive best to enhance good camaraderie among the unit's personnel.

or even violent. It is the duty of the leader to detect these symptoms and assist commit the mentally ill soldier to competent medical help.

Counseling

We will discuss counseling as the technique of using the personal interview to assist the individual soldier adjust to his surroundings or to his job. The leader must know and understand his men and must take a personal interest in their welfare, before he could aspire to have a well-functioning unit. He can show or pronounce his availability to any of them for straightening out their problems. Beforehand, he can prepare for this role by building up a reputation for understanding, tolerance and objectivity. At the same time, he can provide for a setup whereby individuals could approach

him without the stiffness of formalities.

The Interview

The following are suggested rules for conduct of the counseling interview:

- a. Make thorough a preparation as the time will allow. This can be done by examining existing records of the individual or by exhaustive use of reports and observation data.
- b. Put the counselor at ease. This phase may well determine whether the case will turn into a battle of wits or a cooperative effort. Break the ice by talking about things you know he is interested in.
- c. Inform the counselee that the counselor does not have the answer to the problems.

- d. Be a good listener. After the counselee had loosened up and after both have agreed on the common ground and purpose of the interviews he is asked to relate his full story.
- e. Listen to the soldier in friendly but objective manner. Never display impatience.
- f. Ask questions only when necessary. Questions should be made to fill gaps in the man's story or to stir discourse along essential lines.
- g. Do not indulge in arguments. Don't force your opinions on the man.
- h. Refrain from displaying any kind of authority. The counselee will only shrink farther.
- i. Work out solutions together after the full story. If possible let the solutions come out from the counselee. He should arrive at it with the minimum of advice from the counselor.
- j. The counselee must concur with the solution. Make him believe it will work and that he will be willing to try it.
- k. Terminate the interview skillfully. Tactfully, make him feel that he has done a good thing and that you are sincerely interested in his welfare.



Meetings should always be held between counselor and men to tackle common problems.



The army food service program should be given the needed attention by the authorities. A well-programmed food service will minimize, if not totally erase complaints among the troops.

- l. Follow up the case. See what had been accomplished. Get reports or make observations.
- m. Evaluate your findings. Profit by them. If the case is solved it is possible your counseling technique worked. You may use it again in a similar case in the future. If it failed, use a new approach. Keep trying until you succeed.

The above techniques and principles of counseling show that the proper application or the pay-off comes only after assiduous study and meticulous attention to correct leadership practices. Success in the counselor role comes hand-in-hand with proper practice of the other basic roles of the leader.

For most men, the matter of learning is one of personal preference; but to Army officers, the obligation to learn, to grow in their profession, is clearly a public duty.

—Gen. Omar N. Bradley

Maximum military effectiveness demands the highest kind of business efficiency so as to get the most out of the men, money, materials and time available with which to defend our country.

—General Joseph T. McNarney