So there I was ankle deep in the muck. I was a new E-5 assigned as a Squad Leader over 4 soldiers knowing that was relatively small, even by the Army Reserve Standards. I was not only assigned as Squad Leader, but filling an E-6 slot of the Senior Mechanic. My knowledge of both maintenance operations and leadership needed to be improved quickly.

After the first Battle Assembly (BA) weekend I found that the unit as a whole lacked leadership. Worse than that they had a toxic leadership, bringing down soldier moral. Hell, it took all of 2 hours before I found out my soldiers had not been getting paid for previous BA’s where they had diligently performed their tasks.

So there I was knee deep in the muck. With little mentorship as to the duties of a Squad Leader and no mentorship as to the duties of the Senior Mechanic, I had to learn quickly. After all, “…All Soldiers are entitled to outstanding leadership…” On my own time outside of BA I read the units maintenance SOP, which had not been updated in over a decade, and the unit’s policies. I had a lot to accomplish during next month’s BA.

I said some things to my higher leadership that needed to be said and set a plan in motion. Over the course of the next 8 months the resiliency of my soldiers, and myself had brought the units vehicle operational status up from less than 30% ready to 40% ready. However, I had a long way to go and was still lacking support from my Senior Leadership. My Motivation began to fall, I began to quickly forget one of my basic responsibilities. Accomplishment of my mission, accomplishment of the unit’s mission.

So there I was waist high in the muck. I had just left a meeting with the First Sergeant and I was being moved from the Squad Leader position to the Platoon Sergeant position, replacing the old Platoon Sergeant who was leaving the unit. An E-5 filling an E-7 roll, how am I going to do this? Remembering the Warrior Ethos of I will never quit and I will never accept defeat, I had no other choice but to fulfil the role and move forward. After all I now had 20 Soldiers depending on my leadership.

Upon reviewing the metrics I quickly learned my Platoon was under strength, had a 70% AFPT failure rate, a 30% nonparticipant status, 20% in a non MOSQ status, let alone the improving, yet 40% readiness of the companies vehicles. So there I was shoulder deep in the muck. In the absence of a First Sergeant, answering directly to the CSM as to why my metrics were so poor. Phone call after phone call and being highly scrutinized, being an E-5, it seemed as if nothing I was doing was working. Nothing I was doing was proving my worth as an NCO.

Over the course of 3 years the company went through 3 Commanders and 4 First Sergeants, yet the First Line Leaders remained the same. There was much disconnect and morale was at an all-time low. Yet I was still able to slowly bring my Platoon’s metrics to a more acceptable standard. We were now catching the eye of the Brigade CSM and Brigade Commander. Why was our company failing? Many meetings and phone calls took place at all levels of the unit and problems were addressed one by one.

The much needed support from my Commander and First Sergeant began to return and I was able to make significate progress in the development of my soldiers and readiness of the vehicles. By the end of the third year I was able to drop the APFT Failure rate to from 70% to 30%. Bring all my soldiers to a participating status, either by recovery or discharge. Along with bringing the companies vehicle readiness up to 80% from the previous 40%. I found myself back to ankle deep in the muck and still making progress.

After the three years I was finally on the PPRL for a much deserved promotion and was promoted within a month of being on the list. However, I was to remain in the unit until completion of the unit’s deployment to the Baltic Region in support of Operation Atlantic Resolve. What was our mission? To stand up a new company. Again I was up to my shoulders in the muck. I completed many tasks throughout that deployment from assisting the Command Team in establishment of SOPs, establishment of funding codes, and development of the new Companies objectives and scope of work. One thing was different this time. I had a clear understanding of what needed to be done, as I had spent the last three years rebuilding my Platoon.

Why do I tell this story? Because when we become an NCO we can quickly find ourselves in positions where we must provide excellent leadership with little knowledge. As new NCOs we are more prepared than what we think. The army values that are instilled upon us from day one set us up for success.

**Loyalty-** dedication to the army mission and your peers

**Duty-** the responsibility to complete the tasks handed to you

**Respect-** Communicating to and trading others how you would want

**Selfless service-** taking time away from your personal life to accomplish the mission

**Honor-** acting in a manner that will not discredit the military or your unit

**Integrity-** acknowledging when you are wrong or don’t know

**Personal Courage-** Taking on tasks you would have never done otherwise

How does this relate to being an NCO? Well, pull out your NCO creed, read it, know it, and let’s compare with direct quotes from it.

**Loyalty-** “I will be loyal to those with whom I serve; seniors, peers, and subordinates alike.”

**Duty-** “My two basic responsibilities will always be uppermost in my mind—accomplishment of my mission and the welfare of my Soldiers. I will strive to remain technically and tactically proficient. I am aware of my role as a noncommissioned officer. I will fulfill my responsibilities inherent in that role.”

**Respect-** “I will be fair and impartial when recommending both rewards and punishment.”

**Selfless Service-** “All Soldiers are entitled to outstanding leadership; I will provide that leadership. I know my Soldiers and I will always place their needs above my own.”

**Honor-** “As a noncommissioned officer, I realize that I am a member of a time honored corps, which is known as "The Backbone of the Army". I am proud of the Corps of noncommissioned officers and will at all times conduct myself so as to bring credit upon the Corps, the military service and my country regardless of the situation in which I find myself.”

**Integrity-** “I will not compromise my integrity, nor my moral courage.”

**Personal Courage-** “I am aware of my role as a noncommissioned officer. I will fulfill my responsibilities inherent in that role.”

You see, the NCO Creed is merely an elaboration of the Army Values we learn from day one. From day one the Army expects us to be a leader, to be an NCO, we just don’t know it yet. From day one the Army is setting us up for success to accomplish anything thrown our way. As I found myself over my head in what I thought was a complete mess and left out to dry with no skills to accomplish my task, I was wrong. From day one the Army was providing me the skills to be the NCO, to be the leader, and to be ready to take on anything. The same goes for you, the Army is setting you up for success.