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Counseling Soldiers is Effective Yet Overlooked

“Iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” King Solomon.

Counseling is an effective tool for forging Soldiers but is not taken seriously in my unit. When it comes to counseling, my unit only sees the DA Form 4856, not what goes in it or how Soldiers are improving or declining. The classes I have received here in BLC have given me a clearer view of the Army’s purpose behind counseling and the corrections I can make at my level. In reflection, I will go over what counseling looks like at my unit, what I learned about counseling in this course, and the improvements I plan to implement in my unit.

“Shoot! It’s the end of the month! All team leaders go do your counseling today, I don’t care what is on them, and I need to see that they are done.” My Platoon Sergeant. The view of counseling in my unit is negative. All my platoon cares about is the paper being done, not the improvements the Soldiers can make. Even with negative counseling to make a “paper trail,” it is never looked at or acted upon. All the First Sergeant wants to see is a thick stack in the counseling packet. This attitude toward counseling bleeds down into the Squad Leaders and Team Leaders who just do the forms to “get it over with.”

This is not what the Army intended when they started doing counseling. The purpose of counseling is to show your Soldiers where they are in their careers and Soldier progression. This is a tool for leaders to show their Soldiers what they are doing

well and what they need to improve on. One of the big lessons I took from the class on counseling is the different ways to counsel Soldiers. We focus so much on the form and making sure it is filled out correctly, that we overlook the content of the counseling. This is why I started with the old proverb from King Solomon saying, "Iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." Counseling allows us as leaders to sharpen our Soldiers' skills, forces us to observe them, and lead those Soldiers through their progression.

Changing the culture of counseling back in my unit is going to be an uphill battle. Though it may be a hard fight, it is an endeavor I am willing to take on. Here are some improvements I plan on making in my section that I hope bleeds into my platoon, then to my company. One unconventional idea I plan to implement is having my Soldiers counsel me on my leadership. I do not receive counseling from my Section Sergeant, the only time I have; it was very generic and it did not show me how to improve at my job. My Soldiers need to know they can evaluate my leadership and that I want to be the best leader for them. If they disagree with my decisions, I can hear them out and explain why I made it. Maybe I made the wrong decision on something, and it is effecting my relationships with them; this is the time to "clear the air."

In conclusion, as leaders, we need to be observing our Soldiers and counseling them to make them better. The counseling form is an excellent way to do this, but it goes beyond that into our interaction and involvement in our Soldiers' lives.

To end this paper, I am putting in an excerpt for the book, Leadership Strategy, and Tactics by Jocko Willink. "If you care about your people, you won't coddle them at all. You will push them hard. You will train them hard. You will make sure they

understand the tactics of war and the weapons and radios and how they operate. You will ensure they are in the top physical condition and prepared for the mental and emotional stress of combat so you can give them the highest probability that they and the rest of the team return from the battlefield. If you care about your people, you want them to go home to their families.” I plan to use counseling to form this hard training and improve my Soldiers.