

# From the FA Commandant's desk

## Caring for Soldiers

*“Caring for your Soldiers means doing all you can to try to help them meet their physical, security, social, and higher needs. Some leaders get the idea that caring for their Soldiers only means ensuring that they have adequate food, clothing, rest, shelter, and necessary weapons and equipment to do their jobs. Providing for these physical needs is critically important, but caring for your subordinates goes much further.”*

*- FM 22-100, p. 234, 31 Oct 1983*

As leaders, we tend to speak in terms of “taking care of Soldiers,” as though that leadership responsibility, while paramount, is the extent of what is expected of us. Yet, truly caring for our Soldiers goes beyond what our modern day doctrine prescribes. You won’t find the quote above translated into today’s ADP or ADRP 6-22 Leadership manuals, but caring for Soldiers, as a character trait of leaders, vice “taking care of Soldiers” has never been more essential in modern Army formations. I’d like to share a few thoughts on meeting our Soldiers’ physical, security, social and higher needs as a reminder for our young leaders and a refresher for our more seasoned leaders. As a commander at multiple echelons, I’ve learned that my investment in caring for Soldiers will be repaid many times over in their recommitment to the mission.

The physical needs of Soldiers go beyond helping them develop the resilience to rebound from the trials of personal and professional stressors. We must commit to ensuring our Soldiers’ access to quality health care. Good and regular medical, dental and behavioral care not only helps us achieve a higher deployability ratio; more importantly, it ensures the fitness of our Soldiers to meet the missions tasked to them. Lead-

ers must monitor the health of their troops by asking the right questions: Are they satisfied with their care provider? Is their care provider responding to their stated needs? If taking medications, are those working as prescribed? If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” personally follow up and alert Medical Department Activity (MEDDAC) leadership of your concerns.

Soldier’s security needs are even more varied in garrison than they are downrange. Be on the lookout for signs of physical or mental abuse, whether hazing in the unit or spousal abuse in the home. Enlist junior leaders in helping you identify warning signs. Visit your Soldiers’ (and subordinate leaders’) homes, but do so in an unobtrusive way. If off-post, do they live in a safe neighborhood? Request your installation provost marshal set up a quarters’ check program for Soldiers and their families who may go out of town for extended periods. Ask your spouse and/or Family Readiness Group (FRG) leader to reach out to unit spouses individually. Young spouses are still learning the ropes of what it means to be part of the Army family and often simply don’t know what they don’t

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know. Experience tells us their Soldier spouses are sometimes less than perfect in bringing home what you'd consider to be essential news for family members. Understand the financial assistance programs available to Soldiers and make sure junior leaders do, as well. With all these efforts, the guiding principle is to create a secure environment, both in garrison and on the home front. A Soldier who needn't worry about their own safety and security or that of their family members is a Soldier who can focus their full energies on the mission at hand.

Humans are social beings, by nature, and the Army shouldn't be expected to fill its Soldiers' social space 24/7. Still, there are ways we can demonstrate care for our troops' social needs. Invite a representative from the garrison education center to talk to your Soldiers about college or technical training opportunities. Ensure unit-wide distribution of Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) opportunities and get plugged in to events happening in the local community. Hold unit organizational and "Jane Wayne" days, where spouses and children can participate in family-themed activities. Recognize your Soldiers with awards, home town news releases and passes. Within public affairs and operational security (OPSEC) guidelines, establish unit social media accounts and use them to disseminate important information to family members and to positively recognize high-performing Soldiers. Our Soldiers maintain extended social media networks; understand those networks and respect them. Remember birthdays and anniversaries and send notes to the spouses; they'll be blown away.

Finally, tend to your Soldiers' higher needs. These include the need for religion, increased competence, serving a worthwhile cause and being needed. Of course, your unit ministry team is well-postured to help address your Soldiers' religious needs, so ask your unit chaplain how they will do that. Be sensitive

to religious service needs during field exercises and plan for those. Look for institutional training opportunities for high-performing Soldiers and (sometimes) use those as rewards. Then, demand your newly-trained Soldiers bring their skills back to the unit and implement what they've learned. Institutional training, whether professional military education (PME) or functional training, increases readiness by adding to the individual and collective skill set. Never treat any

institutional training opportunity as merely a check-the-block exercise. Remember to publicly praise, but keep the discipline private. Spend as much time in informal conversations with your troops as you spend in formally counseling them. They'll

notice the difference.

Empathetic care for the troops is so much more than "taking care of Soldiers." Good leaders show care for their Soldiers and for themselves. When we look after our charges' physical, security, social and higher needs, the investment is repaid with interest, unit trust and cohesion is enhanced and we build readiness.

We have the greatest Soldiers in the world, and with your leadership and dedication, we will continue to be the World's Premier Artillery force; ready to deliver decisive fires, 24/7/365, regardless of weather, in any terrain, quickly, accurately, and Danger Close.

*BG Stephen J. Maranian*

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***"The day Soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help or concluded you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership."***

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***– GEN Colin Powell***

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