

On Leadership: Sponsorship
Lt. Gen. Jim Lovelace
Command Sgt. Maj. John Fourhman

Editor's note: This is the seventh in a series articles on leadership by the Commanding General and the Command Sergeant Major.

CG: First impressions are lasting impressions, and a Soldier's first real impression of a new unit comes from his or her sponsor. Although Soldiers and Families remember a variety of unique and personal experiences from each tour of duty, typically the strongest of these memories include their first few weeks and their last few weeks ... how they were welcomed, and how they were fare welled. Families are so vitally important ... our strength on this team and as this team relies in a significant way on them. We can improve the reception of new Soldiers and Families when they arrive into USARCENT... and as leaders, we will.

CSM: I've said that leaders motivate and mentor Soldiers so they can become better leaders. The first opportunity to do that with incoming personnel comes from sponsorship. Getting the Soldier and Family on board from the start, especially in a unit like ours, where parts of the unit are deployed for six months or a year at a time is essential. The Army is the strength of the Nation and Families are the strength of the Army.

A strong, effective sponsorship program is the most critical component of properly receiving and integrating new Soldiers and Families. The concept of sponsorship involves critical tasks to ensure we correctly embrace newcomers. Many have it just right, or have it more than right - going above and beyond standards. Yet, there are still Soldiers and Families who have recently arrived in USARCENT without a sponsor. The CG and I know, because we ask. This is unacceptable.

CG: Both the CSM and I place a great deal of importance on the sponsorship program. Sponsorship, like other programs designed to improve unit readiness, is a commander's program that is executed by leaders. It is a command responsibility to ensure that the right people are being assigned as sponsors, and that these sponsors know the standard. In order for a sponsorship program to be effective, units need active participation from the entire chain of command... young soldiers, noncommissioned officers, and officers. Leaders have the

responsibility, as well as the individual sponsor, to know the standards and to follow through with the newly assigned Soldier and Family.

CSM: It is important when a new Soldier comes to a unit, that someone from the unit reaches out, sponsors them and shows them the way. Sponsors should be at least the same pay grade or one pay grade senior to the Soldier he or she is sponsoring. The sponsor should be responsible, knowledgeable and a good ambassador of the unit or command.

The first step in the process is making contact with the incoming Soldier. Contact should occur before the Soldier departs the losing unit, and it should consist of a letter or e-mail, followed by a personal phone call. Personal contact makes a big difference. The sponsor should inquire about any special needs and also direct the Soldier to resources such as the USARCENT web page and the DoD OneSource and relocation websites at www.militaryonesource.com and www.MilitaryHOMEFRONT.dod.mil/moving. Once contact is established, the sponsor maintains contact and assists the Soldier and Family by staying abreast of issues like finance, billeting, housing and child care/schools.

CG: Taking care of Soldiers and their Families is not only the right thing to do, but is a vital component of doing the mission and protecting the force. By preventing problems before they occur, leaders ensure that Soldiers are trained and ready and that Families are self-reliant and prepared to sustain themselves during deployments and other times. Good sponsorship just boils down to caring about Soldiers and their Families... in two words: good leadership.

CSM: Caring occurs on a daily basis, routinely taking care of routine matters, in a thoughtful and exemplary way. I appreciate everyone's efforts in this regard...you *are* making a difference. And I thank you for that.

CG: Leaders make things happen ... the right things, in the right way, at the right time.

CSM: And that includes the important area of sponsorship.

Patton's Own!