

Chapter 15

ROLE AS A COMMANDER

Amy L. Jackson, PA-C, MPAS; Curtis Aberle, RN, MSN; Avery J. Carney, PA-C, MPAS; John F. Detro, APA-C, MPAS, MSS, MEd; Robert S. Heath, APA-C, MPAS; David L. Hamilton, PA-C, MPAS, MPH; James G. Pairemore, APA-C, MPAS; Christopher Pase, APA-C, MPAS; Bill A. Soliz, APA-C, MPAS; and Richard A. Villarreal, APA-C, PhD, MPAS

Introduction

The diverse operational, clinical, and administrative backgrounds of Army physician assistants (PAs) give them a competitive edge for command. Command opportunities for PAs exist at all levels in nearly every type of medical unit. However, not every PA or officer is well suited for command. Neither is command an automatic path to promotion, although command will distinguish a PA from their peers. PAs must seriously consider the choice of taking command. The hours are long, the decisions are tough, and the risks may be high, but the personal and professional gratification is immeasurable. Army medicine needs great leaders, and PAs who are ready and willing should answer the call.

Why Command?

Serving as a commander has been the highlight of my military career. When you become a commander, you are given a great deal of authority and responsibility. You are charged with taking care of America's sons and daughters. Every decision you make or fail to make has an impact.

—Colonel John F. Detro
240th Forward Surgical Team, 2010–2012
187th Medical Battalion, 2016–2018

Command is about solving problems every day. No single person has a greater influence or effect on a soldier's life than the commander. Every decision the commander makes can result in great soldiers that will become future leaders. That is a legacy which will span years and generations. PAs have the experience and skills both medically and operationally to make a real difference for Army Medicine as commanders.

—Colonel James G. Pairmore (Figure 15-1)
Public Health Activity Hawaii, 2017–2019
14th Combat Support Hospital and Task Force Medical-Iraq, 2019–2021



Figure 15-1. Colonel James Pairmore, Commander of the 14th Combat Support Hospital, Fort Benning, GA, 2019–2021.

As a medic charged with helping teammates navigate through a convoluted military health care system, I became a PA to have more autonomy in helping soldiers with their care. However, as a 2LT PA, I found that others in health care leadership positions could propagate obstacles to access to care. Despite the bureaucracy, I was able to set up systems to improve soldier care. As a Major, I accepted the opportunity to be a “Charlie MED” commander in an Airborne Brigade Combat Team – only because I was at the right time and right place – no recruiting, just showing value as a PA and potential as a commander. The April Fool’s Day change of command was simple, and then I had a seat in the tactical operation center (TOC). PA commanders can improve soldier care, evacuation, and return to duty. They do this by applying resources to streamline the systems and processes of pre- and post-deployment health processing, en route care, primary care, and readiness care from the perspective of a provider and line medic. In those 30 months of command, I experienced some of the most rewarding times of my Army career – developing and mentoring medics, NCOs, and officers to do better every day. Many of a commander’s successes come from setting conditions to let others excel – usually by getting out of their way and allowing teammates to innovate and collaborate!

—Colonel David Hamilton (Figure 15-2)
Company C, 173rd Brigade Support Battalion,
Afghanistan, 2008–2010
Public Health Command District Fort Bragg, 2013–2016
9th Hospital Center, 2019–2021

All Army PAs possess the essential tools necessary to command successfully. Many of us were leaders, NCOs and officers alike, before becoming health care providers and leaders in medicine. The IPAP curriculum not only hones our medical knowledge, but that is just the start. Through invaluable operational experience, we refine the soft skills and personal attributes necessary to best care for the sick, ill, or wounded, and while serving on many staffs. The very basis of our profession as Army PAs requires mastery of three necessary clinical core qualities: genuineness, respect, and empathy, the same crucial building blocks for any commander, at any level.



Figure 15-2. Colonel David Hamilton receives the 9th Hospital Center colors from Colonel Robert Howe II, Commander, 1st Medical Brigade, during the change of command of the 9th Hospital Center (formerly the 21st Combat Support Hospital), 1st Medical Brigade, Fort Hood, TX, from Colonel Jeffrey Yarvis, December 12, 2019. Photograph courtesy of Corporal Yanira Green.

Long ago, in what seems like almost a different lifetime, my battalion commander, LTC Joe Martin (now, VSCA GEN Martin), planted the seed of command. In one of our mentorship sessions, as we decided on my next three broadening assignments, he told me something that I found profoundly inspiring. He said, “Doc, the essence of the Army and our profession is command.” He went on to say that it was an absolute must that I pursue and seize any/all opportunities to command soldiers. Fast-forward to today, nearly 9 months into Battalion Command, and I know precisely what LTC Martin was telling me 16 years ago.

It is an awesomely powerful and deeply rewarding experience to command. To recognize and demonstrate to soldiers that they are our most precious commodity. To push and inspire soldiers to be the very best version of themselves. Likewise, I endeavor at all times to give soldiers in my command the very

best of myself. My leadership philosophy is simple: to lead, you must first serve. This is how I view servant leadership – serving among those you lead. My company commanders understand this and that I expect them to do the same, because the best organization is only as good as its leader(s). Commanding is so much more about selflessness than I ever imagined, and it reinforces my belief that as Army PAs, we understand that more than anybody in the AMEDD. We need more PAs to understand this and trust in the robust, diverse, and rare amalgam of skills that they bring to the table. We need more Army PAs to seize the guidon and just lead!

—Lieutenant Colonel Christopher C. Pase
Troop Command, Martin Army Community Hospital, 2019–2021

Commanding soldiers is the very pinnacle of Army leadership and culture. After creating a vision and communicating a vivid picture of the desired end state, you have the privilege of serving, shaping, and mentoring them in the execution of your intent. Done correctly, the commander sets the organization's climate and cultivates the formation's talents towards mission accomplishment and success. Command and leadership precepts transcend either operational (TO&E) or fixed facility (TDA) domains.

Army PAs are well suited to command at all levels because we have medical knowledge and operational experience coupled with an innate perspective and understanding of Army medicine from its most pure and fundamental tactical origins. The tenants of leading, rallying, and developing young soldier medics in the field or around the Battalion Aid Station hold true at all levels and variants of command.

Command is not for the faint of heart nor those unwilling or unable to devote themselves to their teams. You will be expected to lead in and through times of both trial and triumph. In my experience, the greatest reward is to be empowered and purposed to create a space and format to facilitate the patriotic service of our nation's sons and daughters and having the honor to watch each of them grow, mature, and achieve in the process. For me it's the epitome of absolute purpose and fulfillment! It doesn't

come easy, but what truly worthy in life does? As an Army PA if you are up to the task and provided the opportunity – don't hesitate! FROM THE LINE, FOR THE LINE!

—Lieutenant Colonel Avery Carney
601st Medical Company (Area Support), Iraq, 2007–2009
98th Medical Detachment (Combat Operation Stress Control), 2014–2016
US Army Health Clinic Grafenwoehr, 2019–2021



Figure 15-3. On June 13, 2019, Colonel Bill A. Soliz assumed command of the Joint Special Operation Center (JSOC) Joint Medical Augmentation Unit (Special Mission Unit Command Select List) at the JSOC Compound, Fort Bragg, NC.

Photograph courtesy of Joe Belcher, JSOC command photographer.

I thought I had the best job in the Army being a leader of soldiers and a PA as I was able to take care of people and lead change for the better. That was until I became a commander. Commanders are responsible for everything that happens and does not happen within your formation. You have the authority to set policy, the presence to inspire and instill a positive influence, and the ability to change people's lives for the better. All while accomplishing the mission of your command, which for most of us is saving lives in time of war. There is no better reward and self-gratification than to help others become better and save lives. People are your priority and relationships are everything.

—Colonel Bill A. Soliz (Figure 15-3)

California Medical Detachment and Presidio of Monterey
Army Health Clinic, 2015–2017
Joint Medical Augmentation Unit,
Joint Special Operations Command, 2019–2021

Requirements to Compete for Command

PAs may compete for command at any level; however, company and detachment command depends on being at the right place at the right time, and competing when opportunities arise locally or through the Assignment Interactive Module (AIM.2) for O5A Army Medical Department (AMEDD) immaterial positions. These O5A opportunities may include brigade support battalion medical companies and forward surgical teams or medical center and community hospital companies. Command candidates attend and graduate from the appropriate professional military education, such as Captains Career Course, Command and General Staff College, Intermediate Level Education, and Senior Service College, in addition to appropriate pre-command courses (local and major command-driven).

Competition for command is stiff. It takes incredible professional stamina to remain on active duty after 20 years of active federal service, which includes maintaining deployability, health, and fitness. Recent Army chief of staff guidance, reflected in military personnel (MILPER) messages,¹ requires commanders at the battalion, brigade, and above to be fully medically ready and able to participate in and lead unit physical training.¹ Candidates competing for command must attest to the ability

to pass an Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT) without an alternative event. Commanders must also be deployable worldwide without a waiver (medically and administratively).

Command Selection List Board Process

PAs most frequently enter the command path through competing within the command selection list (CSL) O-5 (lieutenant colonel) and O-6 (colonel) boards for battalion- and brigade-level commands (Table 15-1). CSL command is a formal Army selection process in which eligible personnel must request consideration (opt-in) and prepare their board file (similar to the process for a promotion board).¹ It is important to note that officers can only compete at the O-5 level during the first 3 years of eligibility. Commanders who have completed an O-5 level command are the most competitive for O-6 level commands. The types of CSL command fall into three subcategories: operations (eg, field hospital, multifunctional medical battalion, hospital center); strategic support (community hospitals, clinics, troop commands, public health activities, research facilities); and training and recruiting.

CSL boards are conducted 2 fiscal years before the command positions open. The command selection board opening is announced through a MILPER message and posted on the HRC website, alerting all officers in the zone of consideration (ie, those eligible to compete for the specific board). Within AIM.2, officers opt-in and indicate preference for commands. It is highly encouraged for those not interested to opt-out. Data collected from officers who opt-out informs Army senior

Table 15-1. Command selection list categories.

Code	Subcategories	Competitive grouping
M6AP	AMEDD operations	AN, MC, MS, SP, VC
M6AR	AMEDD strategic support	AN, MC, MS, SP, VC
M6AT	AMEDD recruiting/training	AN, MC, MS, SP, VC

AMEDD: Army Medical Department; AN: Nurse Corps; MC: Medical Corps; MS: Medical Service Corps; SP: Medical Specialist Corps; VC: Veterinary Corps

leaders about the reasons for not competing and informs future boards. Candidates who opt-in should give preference to commands where they feel they will thrive and succeed. An officer does not need to command the most complicated organization to be successful and potentially obtain a next higher level of command, but they must be successful, and it should be enjoyable.

Candidates must attest in writing that they will take the command offered and that they are physically and mentally fit for command. Declining the slated command, once offered, is generally with prejudice (ie, preventing the officer from competing for future commands). When opting in for CSL, officers should be ready to move based on the needs of the Army, in the time frame defined by the MILPER CSL announcement.¹ It is vital to remember that if a PA does not get slated in the command of preference, success depends on pursuing excellence and doing one's best, no matter the circumstance.

To prepare for CSL consideration, officers should review their officer records brief (ORB) for correctness and currency. All pending officer evaluation reports (OERs) should be completed and submitted to HRC by the OER cutoff date in the MILPER message announcing eligibility for the CSL. Officers should obtain a current ACFT and be prepared to report the score and date in the fitness attestation. A current periodic health assessment is also recommended. In short, a competitive board file is current and validated, including an updated ORB, supporting documents from the interactive Personnel Electronic Records Management System (iPERMS), and slate of recent OERs that paint a picture of a motivated, well-balanced leader with the professional stamina to endure the demands of command.

HRC holds the CSL boards at the Department of the Army (DA) secretariat (a panel that puts together all DA boards). Board members vote to develop an order of merit list (OML), with both principal and alternate selections. There are twice the number of alternates as principals. The DA secretariat uses the preferences and OML to place officers within respective subcategories; for example, an officer who is first on the OML will get their subcategory of choice. The results are released in two stages, referred to as a split release. The names are released after being approved by the chief of staff of the Army (CSA), and several months later the slate of specific commands is released, as follows:

- 1. By-Name Release.** Following the board and review by HRC's Leader Development Branch (LDB), Health Services Division (HSD), the list is forwarded to the CSA for approval. This approval allows for the release of the principal and alternate list. This early release provides some predictability to officers, who now know they will be taking command in 2 years. If activated, those positioned high on the alternate list of the OML could potentially take command up to 2 years before the principals.
- 2. Slate Release.** Following CSA approval of the by-name release, the LDB assembles the AMEDD's six HRC branch chiefs to slate officers within their selected subcategories to specific commands, with guidance from the CSA and the surgeon general (TSG). The team begins with the first officer on the OML and works down the list until the last officer is slated. In addition to the OML, considerations include candidate preferences; the Exceptional Family Member Program and Married Army Couples Program; candidates' knowledge, skills, and attributes; and other factors. Following this process, the slate is briefed at multiple levels before being released. The LDB chief briefs, in the following order: the HSD chief, the director of the Officer Personnel Management Directorate, the HRC commander, Army G1/4/6 staff, TSG, the vice-CSA, and finally the CSA. Once the CSA approves the slate, it becomes official and is released through the HRC webpage. This year's colonel (O-6) CSL board met in August, and the slate will be release around March or April 2021.

Non-CSL Commands

PAs may choose to compete for non-CSL commands or commands not selected by a centralized process. In the past, the majority of these commands were filled locally. However, with the development of the AIM.2 marketplace, all officers who are eligible can compete. These opportunities include company commands (for captains [O-3]), forward surgical teams (majors [O-4]), and combat and operational stress control teams (majors [O-4]). PAs considering competing for command at the company level should first discuss this opportunity with their HRC assignment officer.

Additionally, TSG requested that the most complex commands be removed from the CSL process to allow senior AMEDD officers to

better align talent for these organizations. These senior nominative commands (SNCs) include medical centers, medical brigades, and the largest research facilities. These commands were previously referred to as CSL Level II, requiring an officer to have commanded once at the colonel level to be eligible, but were removed from CSL in 2016. Today, a board composed of AMEDD general officers and one Army competitive category general officer choose these commanders in a single day. Board members establish the OML and then immediately discuss the principals and slate them using the same criteria as with the CSL. The slate is established and a General Officer Steering Committee (GOSC) meeting is established to brief TSG and gain their approval. Once the slate is approved, it is released by HRC. Currently, several Army PAs are completing CSL colonel-level



Figure 15-4. Colonel Robert Heath provides remarks upon receiving the colors as the Fort Drum Medical Activity commander from Brigadier General Michael Place (commanding general, Regional Health Command–Atlantic) during the change of command ceremony on August 9th, 2019, at Fort Drum, NY. Photograph courtesy of Colonel Robert Heath.

commands, making them eligible to compete for SNCs in fiscal year 2022 (Figure 15-4).

Ready for Command

PAs are not typically groomed to serve in command, so preparation can be a challenge. However, PAs possess a wealth of knowledge and experience that makes them ideal candidates for command. These experiences vary, but time as a primary and special staff officer, noncommissioned officer (NCO), and perhaps even first sergeant provides PAs with a sound foundation. Embracing the idea of commanding is a psychological process in which one crosses from a comfortable role (seeing patients every day, serving as a medical advisor, teaching) to a new, unfamiliar situation. To prepare for command, a PA must establish the mindset for command and stop thinking like a staff officer. It will also help for the PA to complete any unfinished personal and professional business, close out administrative issues from their last position, and get their family settled in the new environment.²

Command Preparation Assessment and Training

Recent changes in Army chief of staff policy require battalion and brigade commanders to attend the Pre-Command Course (PCC) through the School for Command Preparation at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, before taking command, or shortly after, in cases of late notification or activation from an alternate list.¹ The following represents the phased approach to completing pre-command requirements: Phase I, Army Branch Immaterial; Phase II, Specific Command Training (recruiting, modified table of organization and equipment [MTOE] operational, initial military training, garrison); Phase III, Branch/Functional (AMEDD PCC); Phase IV, Senior Officers Legal Orientation course (for those eligible).³

Seasoned, recently retired brigade commanders are the small group leaders at PCC who provide and lead valuable presentations and discussions. Rare opportunities exist to meet and hear from principal Army senior leaders and the Army staff. Small group work allows commanders to share experiences and develop command products such as introductions, philosophy, training guidance, and terms of reference.

Advice from Brigadier General (Retired) Halstead

This section is adapted (with additions) from a typewritten document labeled “To: Future Commander, From: COL Becky Halstead, as of 04/19/01” (typed communication provided to then-MAJ Amy Jackson from COL Kirk Whitson, July 2014). The document describes command duties and includes useful advice.

Before Arrival

1. Make contact with your new unit and rater. To get acquainted with current issues and become familiar with key personnel prior to arrival, ask to be included in the distribution of pertinent email traffic.
2. Review biographies of key leaders; know who they are.
3. Review key briefs, including the last quarterly training brief, annual training guidance, current quarter training guidance, current review and analysis briefings, and command and staff briefings.
4. Prepare a change of command speech (incoming commanders should be very brief).
5. Draft a leadership philosophy, considering what matters to you and identifying expectations.⁴ Consider having a shared command philosophy with your NCO counterpart (both may sign the document). This demonstrates that the command team of commander and senior NCO are in agreement. A commander should have a vision that identifies the organization’s culture and provides a picture of its desired end state.⁵
6. Prepare an introductory brief, something that tells people who you are and where you come from. This can often result in finding common ground with people.

Duties: First 30 Days

1. Review and publish appropriate policy letters. Make command policies concise and direct. Research the various regulations that govern each policy subject and ensure that referenced regulations are current. It is also appropriate to look into higher headquarters’ policies to ensure that your policies align with unit policy.
2. Request and review higher headquarters’ CCIRs (commander’s critical information requirements). Events such as death, injury, accident, incapacitation, or misconduct of key leaders; loss of

sensitive items; classified information breaches; sexual assault or harassment; or driving under the influence, arrests, and incidents with military police involvement often demand timely notification and reporting to various levels.

3. Commanders must understand public affairs and media relations. They need to tell the Army story in a timely and truthful manner while observing operational security measures. Public affairs officers can provide additional guidance to ensure appropriate and successful media relations.
4. Establish a “battle rhythm” that applies up and down in the organization. Be conscious that changes you make in the first 30 days may have second- and third-order effects. A battle rhythm will help organize the daily meetings, giving structure to the work week while also identifying “white space” (time that is available). It is critical to establish and stick to a predictable rhythm of meetings and times to manage specific recurring tasks. Incorporate battle rhythm events into your calendar and, if desired, allow your executive officer (XO), command sergeant major (CSM) or first sergeant, and personnel officer (S1) to manage access to your calendar. Having your staff and subordinates adhere to a routine schedule whenever possible will preserve your much-needed time to do things commanders must do: decide, proactively plan, guide, mentor, counsel, set policy, contemplate, write, predict, discipline, enforce, and communicate. Many other, routine tasks may be performed by the staff or XO.
5. A rating scheme is a published document that identifies the rater and senior rater for all officers, as well as the rater, senior rater, and reviewer of all NCOs. Civilians also have rating schemes. Have your administrative assistant establish the rating scheme for all, publish it for visibility, and review it regularly with your key staff to ensure it is accurate and appropriate.
6. Meet with the CSM (or first sergeant depending on type of command), the commander’s “right hand,” and the subordinate leaders (eg, company commanders and first sergeants in a battalion command, or platoon leaders and platoon sergeants in a company command). Provide them the command philosophy and discuss priorities. Remember to provide officer evaluation report support forms (DA Form 67-10-1A⁶), which define the officer’s goals and objectives for the rating period and are later used to validate

- contributions. Rated service members should receive the support forms from the two supervisors over them (rater and senior rater).
7. Ensure that all leaders in the organization conduct initial counseling of their subordinates on expectations and standards,⁴ and discuss how each leader will support their subordinates in achieving their goals. Counseling, which may also be event-oriented, provides feedback for performance. Spot-check leaders to ensure they are completing all counseling.
 8. Conduct both required command climate^{7,8} and safety surveys⁹ (your equal opportunity representative and safety officer, respectively, will assist you with this), followed by additional surveys in 12 months. Army command policy⁷ states that a company-level unit will have a command climate survey conducted within 30 days of a new officer assuming command, followed by another 6 months after that and a third 12 months later. Above the company level, initial command climate surveys will be completed within 60 days. Command climate assessments assist commanders in establishing an effective organization and maintaining a positive, harassment-free environment. In conjunction, equal opportunity officers can conduct sensing sessions at various personnel levels: E-4 (specialist) and below; E-5 (sergeant) to E-6 (staff sergeant); E-7 (sergeant first class) and above; company-grade (second lieutenant, first lieutenant, captain, and warrant officers); and field-grade officers (majors). Sensing sessions can be conducted by the inspector general or equal opportunity officer. If the inspector general conducts a sensing session, any issue or allegation that arises during the meeting must be addressed by the inspector general.¹⁰
 9. For key additional duties, put key individuals on written appointment orders and establish programs (see below).
 10. Initiate and conduct key meetings (incorporating them into the battle rhythm) such as a training meeting, command and staff meetings, and legal briefs (in which the organization's legal advisor briefs all current and ongoing non-judicial and judicial punishment actions).

Advice: First 30 Days

1. Request and review all officer record briefs (a one-page summary of the career, assignments, overseas tours, demographics, etc, of an officer). This is a way of getting to know the officers under your

charge and also helps you assign the right officer to the right position, based on their experiences and expertise.

2. Develop and foster relationships. Key people to engage with are one level up and lateral XO's and staff officers, support personnel and support agencies such as the judge advocate general, medical providers and leaders, the chaplain, installation support leaders, Office of the Inspector General staff, and Criminal Investigations Division staff. Ensure you receive the blotter (a report of all crimes, property damage, and other incidents) from the provost marshal's office.
3. Make a point to visit subordinate units, going to their location, and allowing them to set the agenda.
4. Assess the environment and avoid major changes. Look for quick wins. Be open and flexible. Be positive and avoid overreacting when negative things happen. Discover the resources that are available. Use post agencies to assist soldiers.

Duration of Command

1. Always consult the legal advisor in matters involving money, financial liability, investigations of property loss, and Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) actions. When in doubt, CYA (contact your attorney).
2. Remember the roles of your leadership. The XO or deputy commander runs the staff. The CSM oversees the first sergeants. Good commanders support their staff and empower them to do their jobs, hence affording the commander the time to command. Delegation is a tool that commanders use to empower individuals. A clear and concise intent with left and right parameters (proper resourcing) can be enough for a good staff officer or subordinate commander to develop a concept and execution plan. For more information about mission command, refer to Army Doctrine Publication 6-0, *Mission Command*.⁵
3. People are watching to see how the new commander handles things. It is easy to command when no problems occur, but your subordinates will pay attention to what you do and say when things are difficult or stressful. Their acceptance and trust must be earned.
4. You should personally meet as many people as possible in your command and tell them they are trusted to do what they need to do on a daily basis. Attending training and observing your subordinates

- performing their daily duties can give you an appreciation for what the soldiers and civilians are experiencing. A good leader will go to see soldiers where they live and work, which they will appreciate.
5. How one commands is an art; not everyone will do it the same way. The commander must, however, ensure that everyone in the command adheres to the organization's values and principles of legality, morality, and integrity. The intent is to build depth in the organization and develop leaders to make good decisions.
 6. Be present and approachable. Have an open-door policy.
 7. A good technique for ensuring good order and discipline is to establish policies that incentivize and reward good behavior.
 8. Command team relationships are paramount. Nothing should be allowed to drive a wedge between the commander and their senior enlisted advisor; they should disagree behind closed doors and always be in agreement in public. Building a solid relationship with the first sergeant or CSM is essential.
 9. Leadership is a privilege. Enjoy every day that this opportunity brings.

Thoughts Shared from Previous Battalion Commanders

What to expect for a new commander can be summed up in seven words: "you don't know what you don't know." How-to books and regulations are out there but until you go through it yourself as a commander, you do not know. In the first 90 days of being a commander, I had a suicide and a sexual assault in my command. Fellow commanders helped me realize what I didn't know and got me through those difficult times. So I recommend:

- *Make friends with fellow Commanders/Senior Enlisted Advisors (SEAs) of the same and higher levels; more than likely whatever you are going through at least one of them has been through and can offer advice.*
- *Make yourself available to your subordinate and peer Commanders/SEAs; the bonds that you form will help you out of tough situations.*
- *Remember when giving an order to a junior Soldier how you*

felt when an order was given to you at that rank; it will give you a perspective on commanding like nothing else.

- *Treat the E-1 and the O-6 the same, if all are treated the same (eg, awards, investigations, UCMJ), then there will never be a reason for your integrity to be called into question.*
- *Lastly, providing they are legal, ethical, and moral, carry YOUR superior commander's orders out to the best of your ability; this will create an environment for a successful command.*

—Colonel Richard A. Villarreal
Troop Command North,

Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, June 2013–July 2015

As a previous company and battalion commander, I want to pass along several thoughts about my experience, things to do and things to avoid. I hope that my notes may impart some concepts to hold to and ideas to consider that will help PAs be successful.

Do:

- *Start by communicating your vision and who you are, and keep delivering your message!*
- *Set goals early, know what you want to accomplish, and purposefully plan.*
- *Create your battle rhythm, guard time for administration, PT, and lunch!*
- *Be authentic. Be “all in” for your organization.*
- *Build trust in your organization through teambuilding and put it on the calendar.*
- *Be mindful of other people's time; keep meetings to an hour if possible for expectation management.*
- *Recognize NCOs as the backbone of the Army and allow them to do what they do best.*
- *Enable others to act through empowerment.*
- *Create space for the organization to create value for their organization and community.*
- *Go to the fringe of your unit footprint and see what life is like out there! Then look back and gain perspective on how things*

appear from that vantage point.

- *Gather with your people! Know your “squad,” their passions, their talents, their personal and professional pursuits.*
- *Legal and Inspector General (IG) folks are inner circle-type, bring them into the fold.*
- *As a commander, your higher command wants your input on the packets (awards, legal, actions) that come from your desk. Give your recommendation, don’t just pass it along.*

Do not:

- *Allow separation between you and your senior enlisted advisor. Be present together, and agree in the open, disagree behind closed doors.*
- *Command in fear of taking a risk; have courage, this is what you signed up for; lead.*
- *Spend most of your time in your office; get out and see the organization and the people. Take the opportunity for unscheduled one-on-one time as it presents itself.*
- *Delay legal packet processing. You should meet with the lawyer once a week if there are active legal cases and know the status of every one.*

Other thoughts:

- *If you are seeking to make a culture change in your organization, look to those doing positive things and doing it right. Recognize a squad or platoon that all passed their APFT. Recognize the unit for hitting a goal of days without driving under the influence (DUI). (One of my posts used to have the day counter for how many days the division had survived without a DUI . . . and we all knew that when we reached a certain point, it meant we would get a pass!)*
- *If you hear people say, “my commander” versus “the commander,” you’re doing something right.*
- *If you have young soldiers or trainees, you must have a presence in the barracks: leadership presence. Soldiers need to know that you are going to visit. The adage of “soldiers do what the commander checks” is a real thing. Monitor maintenance in the barracks and workplaces and engage when there*

is a critical need (electricity, water, heat, air conditioning) or when things are taking a tad too long.

These are not the “end all, be all” to a successful command; however, they will surely help you get started, along with all the other guidance from successful commanders in this chapter. Lead well!

—Colonel Amy L. Jackson
Echo Company, 704th Division Support Battalion, 2001–2002
Academy Battalion (Provisional), later designated as
188th Medical Battalion, 2015–2017
Keller Army Community Hospital, 2020–2022

These are the seven principles I apply when in command.

- 1. Trust is the bedrock of any successful organization. The commander must allow for individual development by providing clear guidance while allowing subordinates to employ disciplined initiative within the commander's intent. As a commander, you must be willing to write off and taking responsibility for these mistakes. Only by allowing subordinates to make mistakes in training will they be ready for war.*
- 2. Mission Command: Your subordinates must understand what is important to you for it to become important to them. Effective leadership requires that you establish a clear command philosophy while providing subordinates with an achievable vision and mission statement. Every member of the team must understand both and must be able to execute in your absence. Your vision and mission must be nested with your higher headquarters.*
- 3. Balance: It is your calling to inspire the team to accomplish any mission while also balancing the individual and family needs of your Soldiers and Civilians. The mission must be accomplished, but as a leader you must balance completion of the mission with care of your team.*
- 4. Command Climate: You will know when your unit has the right command climate when personnel are fighting to stay within it. The commander must set the right example for oth-*

ers to follow. Sergeant Major of the Army Richard Kidd once stated, "Soldiers learn to be good leaders, from good leaders." Timely recognition and discipline are important. When a Soldier/Civilian makes a mistake requiring discipline, my direction to subordinate commanders is to remain impartial and unemotional. Deal with the situation in a professional manner regardless of the eventual outcome. Even good Soldiers make mistakes.

5. *Key Enablers:* It is important to quickly establish a positive repertoire with key enablers to include your legal team, Equal Opportunity Advisor, SHARP Advisor, and the Inspector General to name a few. If your organization includes GS or Contract employees then you should establish an early working relationship with the union representative and contract Contracting Officer's Representative. Your first engagement should not be during a crisis.
6. *Support Your Boss:* As a leader, it is important to be frank and honest with your Commander, but once the discussion is over, it is important to own the decision whether or not it aligns with your recommendations. Never disagree with your boss in front of your subordinates and never tell the team "we are doing this because the boss said so." Once the decision is made you own it.
7. *Leader Development:* The commander is responsible for ensuring the unit has both a formalized and informal leader development program. In many cases, informal mentorship will have the biggest impact. Leader development is an investment in the future of your organization and the Army.

—Colonel John F. Detro
240th Forward Surgical Team, 2010–2012
187th Medical Battalion, 2016–2018

As a Commander, everyone will look to you for how you will set the tone. Everything you say and do will influence that tone. If you are positive, they will be positive. The command will get their energy from you. How you respond to bad news and crisis will have tremendous impact on the command and the people

you lead. Trust is the foundation of relationships; you cannot lead effectively without it. Your people really just want to know the answer to three things about you: Are you competent, do you care, and can I trust you? Lead Well!

—Colonel Bill A. Soliz
California Medical Detachment and
Presidio of Monterey Army Health Clinic, 2015–2017
Joint Medical Augmentation Unit,
Joint Special Operations Command, 2019–2021

Conclusion

In closing, command is both a great opportunity and a privilege. It is key to remember that a command is a marathon, not a sprint. PAs bring a wealth of knowledge and experience that makes them ideal for command. Commanders should go into command prepared. They should let soldiers know what is important to them and what they expect. A commander's most important responsibility is to take care of their soldiers and their families. No one can command from behind a desk. Commanders should watch their soldiers train and work; they should delegate and empower subordinates to do their jobs; and they should ensure that their soldiers have everything they need to succeed and complete the unit's mission. Command is a vitally important position, both challenging and fulfilling, in which PAs can excel.

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