

Principles of a Staff Officer

1. PRINCIPLE: Establish a reputation for excellence and competence at the earliest possible time.

TECHNIQUES:

a. Your first written action or briefing should be as good as it is possible to make it. Long hours invested early on will pay dividends later by making easier to get your work through. Take pride in your work.

b. You can't over coordinate. Do this at all stages. It's one of the best ways to get the information and support you need to complete an action and to avoid unnecessary non-concurrences. If you have the responsibility for an action, you also have the responsibility for initiating coordination with other staff officers, units, and agencies. Don't assume that no one else is affected - you will probably be wrong. If you are not sure whether something you are working on affects another staff officer, check with him; than act accordingly!

c. Cooperate with other staff officers. Give their requests a high priority; don't hold their papers. You get paid back in kind.

d. Keep your facts straight. Write things down. Ask questions, even if they seem dumb. If you are perceived as being "flaky" - unsure or frequently incorrect about things - your productivity and success will be limited.

e. Help subordinate units - Call on subordinate unit commanders at the earliest possible time. Gain their trust by helping their staffs solve a tough problem. If it's not necessary to tell your boss about a problem that you helped a subordinate unit solve - don't. (Use judgment.) Do things for subordinate units; present their case fairly to your bosses and you will gain their trust.

f. Give freely of your time to subordinate commanders and their staff officers. Even though you may be pressed for time, never give them a rush job.

g. You may not say no to a subordinate commander unless:

(1) The boss (your commander) has expressly forbidden it.

(2) It is prohibited by regulation.

If your answer to these two questions is no, you may only recommend disapproval to your commander.

h. Follow-up. Your success as a staff officer will largely depend on how well you follow-up on actions. Your follow-up may keep something on track or result in early completion. As your action, you should be knowledgeable on the current status.

i. Be dependable. When you offer to do something for someone, do it and provide feedback.

2. Principle: Learn the players - establish good relationships.

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TECHNIQUES:

- a. Call on subordinate commanders on their ground.
- b. Get to know other staff sections/officers/agencies.
- c. Get to know secretaries. They can get you or your paper in where it needs to be fast - if they want to.
- d. Make friends with SGS - he influences the assignment of actions and keeps suspenses.
- e. Make contact with support agencies - Headquarters Commandant, AG Printing, the motor pool, graphics, protocol. They find it harder to refuse someone they know.
- f. Get to know your counterparts in higher headquarters, lower and adjacent units and activities.

3. PRINCIPLE: Quickly acquire the important knowledge pertaining to your job.

TECHNIQUES:

- a. Read the plans (contingency, war, GDP, etc.). Many staff officers have only a vague knowledge of plans. If you have a sound, basic knowledge, you can become an "instant expert."
- b. Learn and use the admin office SOP and AR 340-15.*
- c. Learn all you can about the funds your section controls/budgets/is responsible for. This is real power. A good plan is only as good as the funds available to support it.
- d. Read the policy files.
- e. Learn the pertinent regulations.
- f. Read the files to find major problem areas.
- g. Find out what your subordinates really do by taking time to talk to them individually - pays dividends in that they think they are important in your eyes.

4. PRINCIPLE: Define your duties.

TECHNIQUES:

- a. Find and read your job description.
- b. Insist that you and your boss follow the procedure required by AR 623-3 with regard to completing DA Form 67-9-1 (OER Support Form).**

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c. Find out what the bosses' real priorities are. They may not be in writing.

5. PRINCIPLE: Dealing with the Chief (or the head of your staff section).

a. He is looking for people to solve problems, not to create them. When presenting a problem, also discuss possible courses of action and provide a recommendation.

b. Ask him for guidance at appropriate steps in the problem-solving process.

c. Learn his idiosyncrasies - what gets him fired up.

d. Don't waste his time - you'll find that you'll be able to see him more easily if you don't.

e. Keep him informed, especially if the commander tells you something directly.

f. Don't waste time trying to guess what the problem is or what the brass wants. If it isn't clearly defined, ask the boss.

6. GOOD GENERAL PRINCIPLES:

a. Don't surprise anyone but the enemy.

b. Be fair - especially when you can influence taskings or rewards going to subordinate units. They have long memory and are sensitive to injustices.

c. Be open and aboveboard.

d. Priorities - do your boss' work first.

e. Bad news doesn't get better with time.

f. Support the Headquarters Company Commander. Keep your troops, their billets, and your equipment sharp.

g. Clear your suspense files with the SGS periodically. Always meet your suspenses. If you think you will need an extension, ask early.

h. When you don't have anything to say - don't say anything; particularly at meetings. Nothing disturbs people more than a guy who wastes everyone's time at a meeting by talking just to hear himself talk.

i. Keep files on all actions.

j. Rehearse briefings.

k. Pay attention to detail.

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7. THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

- a. Be wary of assuming new areas of responsibilities early on. Some staff officers and sections will try to dump things on the "new guy".
- b. Watch out for "staff favorites"; keep your distance from them. Don't align yourself with anyone, especially when you are new. Treat all the other staff officers equally and fairly.
- c. Make Memorandums for Records - some people have been known to deny things. More importantly, it preserves data and provides an audit trail.
- d. Get a clear direction from the boss before jumping in with both feet - do this by asking clarifying questions at the time of taking, then return to your desk and dash out a messy but pertinent view of the problem, and a description of the final product. Take this butcher paper analysis and plan back to the boss the same day and brief him on what you heard him say how you intend to produce the product.

8. PRINCIPLE: LEADERSHIP SKILLS FOR STAFF OFFICERS**

- a. Listen before talking.
- b. Keep team members informed and coordinate their efforts.
- c. Be available and responsive to your people.
- d. Develop a balanced team of organizers, advisors, controller, and conceptualizer.
- e. Allocate work based on capabilities.
- f. Encourage respect and understanding among team members.
- g. Delegate work which is not essential for you to do.
- h. Set the example and demand high quality.
- i. Set achievable performance goals. Always press for improved performances.
- j. Involve your people in problem solving.

* This AR is obsolete but left in IOT maintain emphasis learning how that your staff organization works.

** Updated to the new AR.

*** From "High Performing Managerial Teams" by Margerison and McCann, Leadership and Organizational Development Journal, Vol. 5, Number 5, 1984.