

## PARTNER WITH PARENTS

### EXERCISE

#### Scenario #1 Misconduct

John is a sixteen year old C/SSgt. At the squadron meeting two weeks ago, you noticed he was wearing an eight-inch Bowie knife on his hip and had been showing it off to various cadets.

"Hey, Cadet Shepard," you said to him, "nice knife, but we don't wear knives in uniform, plus this is just a squadron meeting, it's not like we're in the field, so there's no need for a knife today. Please keep it put away and don't wear it anymore."

Last week's squadron meeting had run as planned, so you thought, but afterward, your son, a cadet, innocently mentioned to you that Cadet Shepard had worn a knife with his uniform (under the ABU blouse, not visible), and had quietly showed it off to a few friends.

Tonight, as soon as Cadet Shepard walked into the squadron, you noticed the sheath for that long knife was peeking out, mostly obscured by the ABU blouse. Somehow realizing that you had noticed the knife, Cadet Shepard defiantly states, "It's a birthday gift from my grandfather. He was a Pararescueman in Vietnam. I'm not taking it off."

Just then, at that very instant, the cadet's dad appears in the building. Mr. Shepard strikes you as a rebellious sort of man. He rides a Harley, wears long hair and a Fu Manchu moustache, sports lots of tattoos, and you can't help noticing, is wearing a knife on his hip.

"Hey, John," the dad says, "you forgot your hat in the car. Here."

You have an opportunity to talk with Mr. Shepard. What do you do? For the purpose of this exercise, we won't get into how you would respond to the cadet himself.

#### Hallmarks of a Good Response

- ❑ Shake hands. Ask the dad if he has five minutes to speak privately with you. *This reduces potential for confrontation; if the cadet were present, the dad may feel he has to stand up for his son. It also reinforces idea that the adults are in charge and consequently see the world differently from youth.*
- ❑ Ask if the dad is aware that we don't allow knives to be worn and that you've spoken with John about his. *By starting with a question, you show you give the dad the benefit of the doubt and aren't making unsubstantiated accusations.*
- ❑ Acknowledge that the knife is a special gift and that John is understandably proud of it. *Doing so shows that you understand this matter is charged with emotional content and is subtly different from what might mistakenly be seen as garden-variety disobedience.*
- ❑ Appeal to the grandfather's status as a pararescueman. "PJs are elite, and so they're superbly professional. I'm sure your (father) grandfather would tell you that there's only one way to wear the uniform - the right way." Ask the dad to help reinforce this message at home. *Showing respect for the grandfather helps show your lack of hostility.*
- ❑ Mention that we should consider inviting the grandfather to visit the squadron and be a guest speaker. *Again, reference to the grandfather helps you build rapport and engender trust.*
- ❑ Tell the dad that John's disobedience here is disappointing, but considering he's had no prior problems of that nature, it should be considered an expression of his love for his grandfather, not an intentional attempt to disobey his commander. *This approach demonstrates that you're handling the matter in a way that's appropriate to the cadet's age and view of him as a whole person not defined by one or two small incidents.*
- ❑ To show that you understand the real motivation here and are a reasonable person, mention that although you probably should document this as a written warning, you'll consider this matter closed because you and the dad understand John's intentions. *The lesson has been learned, and the dad will ensure the cadet doesn't bring the knife back. By withholding punishment, you show you're fair and generous to the cadet.*
- ❑ Shake hands.

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## Scenario # Disappointment

Alex is a very smart thirteen year old C/TSgt who is now eligible for promotion to C/MSgt. He has a great attitude, is proud to be a cadet, and obviously has enormous potential.

The cadet commander and deputy commander for cadets have advised you, the squadron commander, that we should sustain Alex in grade as a C/TSgt for 60 days. They believe that before Alex transitions to a senior NCO grade, he needs to become more proficient in leading a flight in drill, and his command voice especially needs help. Further, they're concerned that Alex hasn't learned the difference between a boss and a leader, for when conducting uniform inspections, he's said how much he enjoys "getting" cadets or "gigging" them for minor uniform infractions. Never does Alex explain to the cadets how to fix what they got wrong, and he's never been heard voicing words of encouragement to the flight.

At 13, Alex is an outstanding cadet and has ample time to progress through the Cadet Program. As commander, you agree, Alex will remain a C/TSgt for 60 days, receive greater mentoring from a cadet officer, and get coaching on his drill ability and on using positive leadership.

Alex and his dad are not going to be very happy. Both are very competitive. They know Alex outshines most cadets in the squadron in many regards. His uniform is always perfect. He's smart and always wins quiz bowl games. When there's a drill-down, if Alex is in-ranks, he wins. He has never missed a squadron meeting or special activity. Because there are obviously no objective deficiencies or instances of misconduct, Alex's dad will be angry when he learns his son is being denied a promotion.

The cadet commander, assisted by the DCC, will counsel Alex during a leadership feedback meeting. Do you meet with the dad, and if so, what do you do?

## Hallmarks of a Good Response

- ❑ Ask to meet with the dad. *Doing so allows you to acknowledge to the dad that you know the issue of his son's promotion is important to him. From a tactical perspective, it's better for you to call the meeting and be prepared for it than for the dad to demand a meeting the next time he sees you and catch you off-guard.*
- ❑ Meet one-on-one with the dad. Shake hands. Explain the promotion process to him, particularly the "Leadership Expectations" portion of the *Cadet Super Chart*. Show and tell with the *Parents' Guide* or *New Cadet Guide*, which includes some sections about being sustained in grade. *Use of national-level resources shows that you're faithfully implementing the CAP program, not targeting the cadet for special, negative treatment.*
- ❑ Apologize to the dad for not having made the performance aspects of cadet promotions clear before. *The apology shows humility and your willingness to own part of this problem. It also may disarm any angry feelings the dad has toward you.*
- ❑ Assign a cadet officer to mentor Alex; double-up that mentor with a senior to ensure the job is done well. Convey this information to the dad as reassurance. *Such an approach focuses the dad (and by extension, the cadet) on the future, which is what we want.*
- ❑ Catch Alex doing things right and commend him on-the-spot as an ongoing coaching strategy. *Making this strategy known to the dad reassures him that you're concerned with developing his son's potential, not knocking down an outstanding cadet.*
- ❑ After helping the dad understand the situation and the way forward, ask him to reinforce your message at home. Shake hands. *This is what it means to treat parents as partners.*

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### Scenario #3 Service Recovery

Becky is a 12 year old cadet airman who joined CAP because of her love of airplanes. She's not very interested in the leadership aspects of CAP, grudgingly tolerates the physical fitness activities, but absolutely loves doing AEX activities and talking with the squadron AEO, a retired airline pilot.

Your squadron meets Monday nights, and that's tonight. Six days ago, on the Tuesday following your most recent meeting, you were reading the local newspaper and noticed that a WWII bomber, a B-29 *Superfortress*, would be making a stop at your local airport on Saturday. You sent an email to all cadets and seniors, telling everyone of this short-notice opportunity, where and when the squadron would meet-up, what to wear, etc.

On Saturday, the day of the event, about half the regular cadets attended and they spent an hour getting a personal tour of the aircraft by the pilot, a WWII veteran.

It was very exciting, so at school Monday morning (today) the cadets were still talking about it, and it was through the grapevine at school that Becky heard of the event. When she learned what she missed, Becky was brought to tears. Your son, a cadet, goes to school with Becky, and told you how disappointed she is.

On hearing this unfortunate news, you remembered that you emailed all cadets but not parents, and you remember Becky's mom had told you that Becky wasn't on email or social media and that all communication should go to the mom's email, which was registered in eServices. You goofed. That's why Becky missed out. The squadron meeting starts in one hour.

### Hallmarks of a Good Response

- ❑ Watch for the parent to arrive at the meeting and/or ask a cadet to help you be on the lookout so you can speak with the parents before they drive off. Shake hands and immediately apologize to both the cadet and the parent. *When a decent, responsible person realizes error, he or she wants to put things right. Further, by taking the initiative, you gain some control over the situation, versus waiting and having your perceived inaction cause the family to become doubly angry.*
- ❑ Acknowledge that your oversight caused Becky to feel disappointed. Bonus points if the apology to Becky is made publicly, at opening formation. Bonus points if the apology makes mention of the fact that everyone makes mistakes and that a mature, responsible leader always "owns" his or her mistakes. *The apology and acknowledgement will build a reservoir of trust that will help you maintain positive relations in the future in case a misunderstanding about a different issue develops. ("Mmmh. That doesn't sound like your squadron commander. He's forthright and would apologize if he did something wrong.")*
- ❑ Confer with AEO. Can he think of anything fun to substitute as a "free dessert" make-up? (If possible, do this before issuing the apology, so you can relay the "free dessert" news at that time.) *It may be difficult to find a "free dessert" to help make things more right, but at least confer with the AEO and try to think creatively.*
- ❑ Explain to mom, and staff, that from now on all email traffic to cadets will also go to parents as a new standard procedure. Hopefully, this will prevent the problem from reoccurring. *It's not enough to apologize; we want to prevent recurrences if we can. By showing your attentiveness to this, the mom will see you truly do care about serving cadets and not just keeping yourself out of trouble.*

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