

Squadron Staff and Responsibilities

Lesson Objective: Understand the role of the squadron staff officers, their selection, training, and responsibilities.

Desired Learning Outcomes (DLO):

1. Describe the importance of selecting staff officers.
2. Explain the roles and responsibilities of staff officers.
3. Explain the importance of training and mentoring staff officers.

Scheduled Lesson Time: 50 minutes

Introduction

“No man is an island” – John Donne

No one person can do it all, no one person can know it all. As the commander, it is your job to provide vision and guidance. You will need a staff if you wish to have your vision fulfilled. You can't be everywhere at once and you will need a diverse skill set to help your squadron flourish and provide the best experience for your unit's members.

1. Selecting Staff Officers

Consider... SM Smith has been a member for a month. When he comes to the meeting his squadron pulls him aside and says “Steve, Joe just resigned and we need you to be the Finance Officer, thanks.” Have you ever seen this happen, has it happened to you?

As the commander, you set the tone for your squadron. You need to select your staff in order to fulfill the goals and objectives of your squadron. Our objective for this lesson is to discuss how best to select your squadron staff while balancing the needs of the squadron as well as the desires of the members.

Ideally, you have a squadron large enough to fulfill every role. However, we rarely deal with the ideal world and most likely you will have members fulfilling multiple roles. Remember that any job that is unassigned is yours. Furthermore, the commander cannot be the Finance Officer or Chaplain and is highly discouraged from being the safety officer.

When seeking members for staff positions, below are some things to keep in mind:

- Just because someone does something professionally, does not mean that they want to do it as a volunteer.
 - Many people want to volunteer to expand their horizons, not do the same thing they do at work.
 - This is supposed to be an activity that people enjoy. Help them by not sticking them in roles that they don't want in order to fill a spot.
- Interest is important

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- I would have the 2nd or 3rd best writer/photographer be my PAO if they were excited about it than have the best grudgingly accept the role.
- Assigning multiple roles
 - As mentioned above the reality is we often assign multiple roles to people. When doing this it is best to make the responsibilities complementary (Admin/Personnel) (Ops/ES) (Cadet Programs/Testing).
- Assign the specialty track
 - Don't forget that specialty tracks are required for your members' professional development and that enrolment in the specialty track for their duty assignment is an inspectable item.
- Taking command can be a good time to make organizational changes. Take the time to ask if people are still comfortable in their roles.
- Check in from time to time
 - Make sure your people are not getting burned out and ask if they would like to try something new, etc.

Now that we have selected the staff officer, let's talk about roles and responsibilities.

2. Roles and Responsibilities of Staff Officers

There is a difference between command and staff. Commanders can order and are in the chain of command. Their authority is granted by regulation and only have such authority as they are given by commanders. Define the role:

- Roles
 - Though every position is defined in CAPR 20-1(l), you will likely have certain additional expectations and those should be clear before putting someone in the position.
 - Ask if they have expectations or desires for their role to change. For instance, your activities officer may one day wish to be the Deputy Commander of Cadets.
 - Let them make the position theirs, as long as the job is getting done with a good attitude and following regulations. Don't micromanage.
- Responsibilities
 - You are the conductor, the coach, the leader. They are the orchestra, the players. You set the tone and the vision, they carry it out. Much as the squadron is where the rubber meets the road as an organization. The staff is where the rubber meets the road in the squadron.
 - Hold your people accountable. Ultimately, if reports aren't filed on time or if the inventory is not done, that's your responsibility. You should know when things are due and make sure people are doing them.
 - The time for debate is before the decision is made. Stress to your team that you are open to differing opinions while things are being discussed, but once the decision is made, the expectation is that the staff speaks with one voice.

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- Once they have been in the role for a while, they are the experts, listen to them. This can be especially difficult if you have helped a similar position. Regulations change. Just because you were a finance officer 10 years ago, doesn't mean that the processes, responsibilities and tools have remained the same.
- As a staff, their responsibility is to support the vision (your Commander's Intent) of the unit. As the commander, your responsibility is to support them. These are your experts and the decisions you make will largely be based on the information they give and actions they take. If you believe in them, and show it they will support you.

You may be fortunate and take command of a squadron full of experienced personnel. However, that is often not the case. New people join. Let's next discuss the training and mentoring of staff officers.

3. Training and Mentoring of Staff Officers

At some point, you were the new person and you couldn't spell CAP and you had no idea what you had gotten yourself into. Hopefully, someone helped you, mentored you along the way, and gave you jobs which you have obviously done well because you have been chosen for command. Now it's your turn. You selected members to serve on staff and explained the roles and responsibilities. Now let's train them.

- Training
 - Where to find information:
 - As previously mentioned, CAPR 20-1(I) lists all roles in the unit, and you should have had that discussion.
 - The specialty track pamphlet is a wonderful source as it tells people what knowledge they should have and which regulations are applicable to your role.
 - Wing and region conferences often have breakout sessions specific to various squadron roles.
 - Some wing Professional Development officers run workshops for various roles in the squadron, if yours doesn't, ask about it.
 - "Oh no, my _____ officer quit, and no one has any experience in the role".
 - First, breathe, this happens often.
 - If you are close enough to another squadron, ask for help
 - If your wing has a group structure, contact the group staff member, let them know what's happened and ask them to mentor your new officer. If you don't have groups contact the wing officer in that position.
 - Work with the newly assigned member, don't give them the impression you are not willing to learn and work alongside them, or that you plan to leave them floundering.
- Mentoring
 - When warranted, praise them publically in front of their peers. As much as everyone likes to be thanked privately, recognition can be a great inspiration.

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- “To teach is to learn twice” – Joseph Joubert
 - Whenever possible ask your staff to take on assistants. Teaching someone else will not only reinforce their knowledge, but you will then have a potential replacement for them when they want to move on to other things.
- When someone achieves a level in a specialty track, once again acknowledge their accomplishment. Cadets are not the only ones who like certificates.
- If you’ve got someone who is looking to stretch his skills, recommend him to group and/or wing. The job changes as the size of the organization expands.
- If you think one of your guys is doing something that should be a best practice, send it up the chain. Let the wing know that you’ve got something great going on and share it.
- Let them know that you care about them and their progress.
 - Put them in touch with the wing experts in the field.
 - Make sure that you are not overloading them to the point they are not enjoying their CAP experience.

Lesson Summary and Closure

In closing, you are just one person, and as such need a team. At the same time, a team needs a leader. We have gone over selecting officers, their roles and responsibilities and training and mentoring them. This will enable you to build a strong, successful team. I leave you with the following quotes and wish you success in your future endeavors.

"Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success." -- Henry Ford

"The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team." --Phil Jackson