



Civil Air Patrol Cadet First Sergeant's Guide

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Introduction

Okay, you've been appointed the squadron First Sergeant. You've pinned the diamond on above your chevrons. You've been given an in-box and maybe a drawer in a desk in the Cadet Programs office. And now you stand in front of the formation and report to the Cadet Commander.

You are the 'First Shirt' or 'First Skirt'. Tradition says that this name came about because in the field all company personnel would be in utilities except for the First Sergeant, who would often have to go to battalion back in garrison to do business. Therefore he would wear an office uniform. That difference became his trademark and his nickname became the First Shirt or Skirt. Eventually this was shortened to just 'The Shirt' or 'The Skirt'.

So what are you going to do now, First Sergeant? What are your duties? What should your duties be? How should you interact with the Cadet Commander? What should be your relationship with the other NCOs? How should you be in front of the Cadets? How do you get along with the Leadership Officer and Deputy Commander for Cadets?

In the military, a First Sergeant will normally have fifteen or twenty years in the service. This is more than any company commander is likely to have. You, however, will normally have less time and experience in CAP than your commander will. In most cases, your Cadet Commander has held your position at one time or another. But don't worry! You probably know what you need to know in order to get your job done! And what you don't know you can learn.

This document is not just for the new First Sergeant. It is also written for the Cadet Commander or Deputy Commander for Cadets who's not quite sure what to do with that new First Sergeant. Hopefully, this will help them to utilize the new resource they have to call on.

The job of First Sergeant carries a heavy weight of responsibility. The Cadets in the squadron should depend on the First Sergeant more than anyone else they depend on. He is charged with their welfare and charged with the day-to-day business of their program. Not even the Cadet Commander has as much responsibility to them.

This Guide is structured in a way that made sense to me. It is written more for reading than for reference. It is supposed to make you think and consider your methods and behaviors. And, perhaps, to give you hints on how to do your job in a professional and effective manner.

Through out the Guide are italicized quotes from participants in the Cadet First Sergeant's thread that ran in CAP-Cadet in October of 1997. Most of the commentators are or were First Sergeants. Some in CAP, some in the armed services. I gratefully accepted their wisdom and used it to guide my own hand. My sincere thanks to all the contributors and participants!

So, sit down and read on. I hope this Guide will be as fun and informative for you to read as it was for me to research and create.

Capt Shawn Stanford, CAP

The Creed of the Air Force First Sergeant

I AM A FIRST SERGEANT

My job is people ---- Every ONE is my Business. I dedicate my time and energy to their needs; their health, morale, discipline and welfare. I grow in strength by strengthening my people. My job is done in faith; my people build my faith. The Air Force is my life; I share it with my people. I believe in the Air Force goal --- "We take care of our own."

My job is people ---EVERY ONE IS MY BUSINESS.

Dedication

This is respectfully dedicated to the First Sergeants I have known:

Cadet First Sergeant Provencher, CAP, 1979 CT Wing Encampment

First Sergeant Ratowski, USMC, H&S Co, H&S Bn, 3d FSSG

First Sergeant Barrett, USMC, H&S Co, Hq Bn, MCLB Albany

Your Relationship with the Cadet Programs Officers

In the military, the First Sergeant has the wisdom and experience of the Sergeant Major and his fellow First Sergeants to draw on. You probably don't have another First Sergeant that you can commiserate and swap gossip with. However, you do have an analog to the Sergeant Major.

The Leadership Officer occupies a position similar to that of the Sergeant Major or Command Chief Master Sergeant in the military. He is the right hand of the man in charge and has the maturity and experience to help you out. Feel free to rely on him.

The Deputy Commander for Cadets or Leadership Officer will see you as a valuable tool. Be careful that they don't load you up too greatly. And keep in mind that you have the discretion to send some of your work down the totem pole. If you are too busy to supervise evening cleanup, have an NCO do it and check on the results. Just be sure you can report a clean classroom.

Keep the Leadership Officer informed of what is going on in the Cadet corps the same way you keep the Cadet Commander informed. Also, feel free to tell him of your difficulties or frustrations. He may have a solution that you can use.

The Deputy Commander for Cadets will generally want you around when things are discussed. If he doesn't include you, ask him to. He may have a reason he doesn't want you there or he may have forgotten about you. However, anything that affects any of your Cadets or NCOs should be given to you first hand, if possible. If he doesn't want you included, say 'Yes sir!' and continue the march.

Your Relationship with Your Cadet Commander

This is, obviously, the single most important person you will work with as First Sergeant. The Cadet Commander is your one and only boss. You report directly to him and to no one else. The two of you must be on the best of terms in order to run the squadron together.

Almost every personnel or staffing decision that doesn't involve officers should include the First Sergeant. You are the one who knows the Cadets the best. If one of them is ready or suitable for a staff position, such as Admin or Supply, you should recommend them. It is also your responsibility to recommend flight sergeant positions. In fact, your Cadet Commander may leave such decisions up to you entirely.

What a Commander Wants in a First Sergeant

(Concepts from 'Company Command: The Bottom Line' by John G. Meyer, Jr., published by National Defense University Press)

The First Sergeant should be the best NCO in the squadron. This is what your Cadet Commander will be looking for from you and what you should be capable of being for him or her:

- A strong leader. Your Cadet Commander needs to know that you have the strength of purpose and personality to keep your NCOs and their Cadets in line. And the NCO corps can certainly be a rowdy, quarrelsome bunch! It is largely up to you to make sure that they are getting along with each other, progressing in their training and taking care of the Cadets.
- A leader by example. If you can't pass the PFT, don't look good in uniform, spend all your time goofing around, don't carry your share of the workload and aren't actively working toward your next achievement, you aren't setting a positive example. At this point you aren't carrying your weight in this respect and you're making the Cadet Commander look bad. More than likely another NCO or the Cadet Commander will have to try to pick up your slack. That simply is not their job, it's yours.
- A competent leader. The First Sergeant should be technically and tactically proficient. That is, you should know your Leadership subjects and your ES and aerospace subjects. The Cadet Commander should feel confident that you have the depth of knowledge to be helpful to the NCOs and Cadets under you.
- A trainer and developer. NCOs are the primary instructors in any unit. Because you are the senior NCO it is your responsibility to be the senior instructor. Make sure that you are

aware of any training being given in the squadron. If you have already received this training, brush up and make sure you're current. If this training is new to you, learn what you can before the class and learn all you can in class. The NCOs and Cadets will expect you to have enough understanding to help them, if necessary.

- A good communicator. The First Sergeant's job demands a lot more than yelling. Sometimes yelling is appropriate. However, more often a quiet word spoken at the right time will accomplish far more. The Cadet Commander has to know that his First Sergeant can speak appropriately. The First Sergeant should also be able to find out what the Cadets are thinking and successfully relay that to the Cadet Commander.
- A dedicated leader. You have to love this organization and the people in it. That is the only way you can give them each the measure of yourself that they deserve. If you are lacking in either way, it will adversely effect the decisions you make. Decisions will be made in favor of the Cadets at the expense of the unit or vice-versa.
- A loyal supporter. The Cadet Commander has to know that no matter what he has to pass down to the Cadets and no matter what types of mistakes he may make, that you will be behind him one hundred percent. A First Sergeant who undermines his Cadet Commander or places the blame for unpopular decisions at his feet is damaging to the unit and not worth the diamond he's wearing.

What a Commander Doesn't Want in a First Sergeant

Concepts from 'Company Command: The Bottom Line' by John G. Meyer, Jr., published by National Defense University Press)

- A First Sergeant who doesn't listen. Keep in mind two things, First Sergeant. First, the Cadet Commander has probably been where you are before. He's familiar with the duties and he can probably give you valuable pointers on how to do your job. Second: He's the Cadet Commander; his word is law. This doesn't mean you shouldn't offer your own suggestions, but make sure you understand what he's saying first.
- A First Sergeant who doesn't keep his Cadet Commander informed. No one likes to be surprised, especially by bad news. If something has happened, or there is a problem, the Cadet Commander should be the first one you talk to. By the same token, if something good happens he should also know so the appropriate awards can be given. A First Sergeant who doesn't support his Cadet Commander. The First Sergeant owes his Commander his total loyalty. A First Sergeant who's argumentative or contrary not only causes him grief - he undermines the Cadet Commander's authority.
- A First Sergeant who doesn't lead by example. A First Sergeant can not demand that his Cadets have their boots shined or pass the PFT if he can't do these things himself. Make sure you meet or exceed every requirement of the Cadet Program and your Commander.
- A First Sergeant who doesn't train and hold his NCOs accountable. As the most senior NCO your job is to train the junior NCOs to someday take your job. All your interactions with the NCOs should have this ultimate goal in mind.
- A First Sergeant who's a desk rider. Get out with the NCOs and Cadets. Watch the training. Sit in on the classes if you need them or not. Be a constant presence to your Cadets. It will make them feel more confident in you and, by extension, the Cadet Commander.

Developing a working relationship with your Cadet Commander

(Concepts from 'Company Command: The Bottom Line' by John G. Meyer, Jr., published by National Defense University Press)

A proper working relationship with your Cadet Commander is vitally important. Between the two of you, you should have the reigns of the squadron. The Cadet Commander should be in charge of planning things and you should be in charge of running things.

Schedule a meeting with your Cadet Commander shortly after receiving your diamond. It may also be helpful for the Deputy Commander for Cadets or Leadership Officer to attend. In this meeting you should try to accomplish the following:

- Establish a common command philosophy. The two of you need to work out your basic concepts of how things are done and what will be done. Is the Cadet Commander a little more “hands on” than his predecessor was? Are you planning on pushing more responsibility down to the NCOs? Does the Cadet Commander want his junior officers a little more ‘up front’ than you’d like? You need to come to an understanding about these kinds of things.
- Develop and agree on squadron goals, standards and objectives. This is very important if you want to get anywhere. If a you want to concentrate on the squadron's Ground Team and the Cadet Commander wants to go to the National Drill Team Competition, then you will have very different ideas of how to expend your training efforts. Get on the same page. This discussion should obviously include the goals of the Cadet Programs Office.
- Discuss your expectations of each other (in your roles as Cadet Commander and Cadet First Sergeant). You each have to know what you will depend on from the other if you’re going to work well together. This Guide will give you general information on how to do your job, but the specifics are between you and your Cadet Commander.
- Make sure you have easy two-way communications between you. You should feel free to discuss anything about the squadron with your Cadet Commander. One of the most difficult will be pointing out a discrepancy in your Cadet Commander. However, if you feel he needs to improve you should talk to him. His reputation among the Cadets is as much your responsibility as his. If his hair is getting long or he needs to run PT more often with the squadron, tell him so. A Cadet Commander worth his salt will want to know these things.
- Determine a general division of labor. This Guide and CAPM 20-1 describe your duties and how to get them done. You and your Cadet Commander may want to add (or subtract) from these duties based on the local situation. For instance, in a big squadron you might be relieved of some of the administrative duties. Of if it is small enough, some of the flight sergeant duties may be given to you. Either way, this is something you and your Cadet Commander will have to work out.
- Discuss the good-guy/bad-guy roles. This can be somewhat confusing. Neither of you may want to be the ‘bad guy’, or the ‘good guy’ for that matter. And it’s not important that you be either. What is important is that you be yourself. If you are naturally relaxed, be relaxed. If you are very by the book and no-nonsense, then be that way. If you don’t ‘be yourself’ you will find yourself unsure of how to behave in confusing situations.

Your first few weeks with your Cadet Commander will be very important. It may very well set the tone for your entire relationship. You and your Cadet Commander should use these lists as a guideline for your first meetings.

As time goes by, you should get more comfortable with each other and more used to your individual ways of doing business. You should continue the discussion of the above topics when it is necessary. If you are unhappy with the way your Cadet Commander is doing something, feel free to discuss it with him. By the same token, he should feel the same way toward you. You should both be prepared at all times to carry on a constructive, friendly talk about the way you work together.

Other Voices

“The First Sergeant works hand in hand with the [Cadet] Commander in all issues and matters of the unit. They are a team.” – Maj Connie Carlson, CAP

“It is just not feasible for me to micromanage my squadron. I teach leadership classes, I plan squadron activities, and I am very active in wing activities, and I am on Region CAC. Those things and school means I am very busy. If my First Sergeant can handle a task that I ask of him, then he is making my life easier. Most of all he is helping the squadron. The Cadet Commander who does it all hurts his squadron!” – Cadet Capt Jamie Jackson, CAP

Your Relationship with the Cadet Officer Corps

Officers are nearly a constant fact of life. Yes, it would be nice if they would just go into their offices and close the door, but they don't always do that. Sometimes they even have jobs to do. Sometimes they try to do your job! What to do, what to do?

The most important thing to keep in mind is this: they are officers and you are an NCO. It is vitally important that you show every possible courtesy and respect. Your Cadets are watching your every move. If you fail to perform these things perfectly and consistently, you are encouraging your Cadets to do the same. This is a complete violation your job and a betrayal of your Cadet Commander's trust.

With that said and done, the second most important thing about the Cadet officers is to keep them away from the troops and away from your NCOs! Officers are supposed to plan, not execute. Allowing officers to handle the day-to-day chores of the Cadet Program is damaging to the unit in several ways:

- It shows the officers lack faith in the abilities of the NCOs, undermining their authority. If they had faith, they wouldn't be out there, would they? You don't want the Cadets to learn to depend on the officers for their hands-on leadership.

- It deprives the NCOs of valuable and necessary experience. How will your NCOs ever learn to lead drill, instruct and run the show if the junior officers are constantly around taking these duties away?
- It keeps the officers from learning and performing their own duties and responsibilities. Officers have their own work to do. If they don't do it, someone else will have to and they'll never learn it.
- It makes the Cadets nervous or overly familiar. Officers should be semi-mythical figures to Cadets. If these semi-mythical figures are hanging around, it will make the Cadets jumpy and nervous. Or, worse, the officers will lose that 'air' they should have about them.

If this becomes a problem it should be brought directly to the Cadet Commander. If your Cadet Commander is unwilling or unable to cooperate (or the Cadet Commander is the officer in question) feel free to speak with the Leadership Officer or Deputy Commander for Cadets. This division of labor is vitally important.

It is also important that you make it so the officers have no reason to stick their noses into your area. Make sure you are doing every aspect of your job. Leave nothing undone and do everything well. Then when some Cadet lieutenant snoops around looking for something to do, you can tell him that the situation is well in hand and politely suggest he go bug the Cadet Commander.

Which brings up another point: you don't work for any officer except the Cadet Commander. You report directly to him, you are his right hand. While you should give officers the respect due their grade, you don't work for them. Your duties come through the Cadet Commander or the Cadet Programs officers.

If you find you are having problems with an officer giving you tasks, listen to him and then politely tell him you'll have to run it by the Cadet Commander before you get to it. You never know when the Cadet Commander may want you to handle that task. However, only he can assign it to you.

Other Voices

"CAP's Cadet program would do well to remind its Cadet officers that demanding accountability from their NCOs and providing them with suggestions is a much better way of handling leadership than doing it themselves. Some services have dealt with this [by] keeping their officers away from active command responsibilities until they have settled down a little." – Capt Richard Griffith, CAP

"My First Sergeant has a very good relationship with the Cadet officers. He treats them with the respect that they are entitled too. He is direct reflection of me as Cadet Commander, so the Cadet officers are to treat him as they would me." – Cadet Capt Jamie Jackson, CAP

Your Relationship with the Cadet NCO Corps

As the most senior NCO, you are in charge of the professional development of your NCOs. This means that you are charged with teaching them the fine art of being an NCO. Pass down everything that earned you the First Sergeant's job. How to talk, how to walk, how to wear the uniforms, how to get along, how to behave around officers, how to behave around other NCOs, how to talk and listen to their Cadets, how to counsel and discipline, how to be counseled and disciplined...

In short, everything.

Make sure your NCOs do as much teaching as they possibly can. If there is a class that you are asked to teach or one you're considering teaching, pass it to one of your NCOs. NCOs should be perfectly capable of teaching lower-ranked Cadets, encourage them to do so.

When practicing drill, make sure that every NCO has a reasonable chance to lead the unit. If you have enough Cadets, divide the unit up into two units to allow twice the experience. However, never divide a unit into less than nine Cadets. A unit any smaller doesn't provide a valuable enough drill experience.

If an NCO is not in command of the unit while drilling, it certainly won't hurt them to spend time in the unit practicing their drill. This can be somewhat touchy, because NCOs will often chafe under the command of another NCO. Especially if that NCO is of a lesser rank than they are. So, as First Sergeant it is important that you let your NCOs know that you will tolerate nothing but professional behavior towards each other. If one is drilling, the others are being drilled. They should apply themselves to learning and practicing at all times, regardless of who is driving the unit.

If you aren't busy and you aren't spending time with the Cadet Commander, spend time with your NCOs. They will want to socialize with you as much as possible, because they know that you have the ear of the Cadet Commander and know what is going on. This is perfectly acceptable and should be encouraged.

If talk turns to disparaging remarks about the various commanders over you, it is important that you support your superiors, even if you agree with the remarks. If you absolutely have nothing positive to say, you should remind the Cadets who are being insulting that they owe their superiors respect and loyalty, that such talk is unbecoming of an NCO or a Cadet and that they can always leave the program. It is your duty to remain loyal to the command. What is to stop Cadets who bad-mouth your superiors when they aren't around from bad-mouthing you when you aren't around? Do everything in your power to discourage such talk.

Of course, a certain amount of complaining is the right and privilege of every 'soldier'. However, there is a fine distinction between complaining about a task or decision and being insulting and insubordinate.

Don't allow your NCOs to swagger about too much. They should be humble, as leading people is

an honor and a privilege. Your NCOs should be aware of that fact and treat their people well. It is up to you to make sure this is true.

Occasionally meet and train with your NCOs separately. There should be a camaraderie between all the members of the NCO corps. This will help their professionalism and cooperation. The NCOs deserve this attention from you and you owe it to them in exchange for their hard work and loyalty.

Be sure you include your NCOs instead of excluding them. The First Sergeant sets the tone for the unit and for his NCOs. Don't allow your NCO corps to break down into a set of cliques. It is up to you to show that you value and appreciate all your NCOs. If this isn't true, work to improve your people rather giving up on them.

Other Voices

“He is in charge of the flight sergeants.” – Cadet Master Sergeant Anil Kalicharan, CAP “Sixty days after you have the job, start (quietly) training two people to take over your job.” – Captain David G. Jadwin, CAP

Your Relationship with the Cadet Corps

Your relationship with the Cadet corps is vitally important. You are all things to them. You are the prime leadership example for them to follow. You set the tone for their daily existence. You ride herd on the NCO corps and ensure they treat their Cadets well.

Your Cadets are the ultimate expression of a volunteer. They are giving CAP their time because they want to, not because they have to. You have no hold on them other than their desire to participate in the program. If they lose that desire they're gone.

Because you are First Sergeant, your Cadets should respect and fear you. Any relationship of this type has a measure of fear in it. Your Cadets should fear crossing you, but they should not be afraid to approach you when they need to.

Discourage familiarity. Your Cadets aren't your best friends; they're your Cadets. If you are overly familiar, it will undermine your authority and your ability to command. Cadets, like anyone else, are less likely to take their friends seriously when being given orders. This will either quickly spread to the other Cadets or cause jealousy and resentment among them.

Encourage your Cadets to work together as a team. To you, they should all be one unit, one family, and one team. You may have one flight or a four flights, but they are one squadron and you are their one First Sergeant. Treat them all the same.

Find out what your Cadets want and need. If it is within your power and authority to grant, do so. If not, go to the Cadet Commander. You are the number one advocate for your Cadets. No one else could, or should, look out for them and do as much for them as you.

If a situation arises where you have to ‘choose’ between your Cadets and an NCO, side with the Cadets. For instance, if the Cadets would like to take their break early and their NCO would like them to continue practicing drill, if you feel that a break is warranted, give the Cadets a break. However, it is vitally important that you compromise. Instead of a fifteen-minute break, give them a five-minute break. And make sure that you instruct your NCO why you think they could use the break. “Staff Sergeant Jones, I know they aren’t due for a break for another half hour, but it’s pretty hot and they could use some water. Besides, they weren’t paying attention so well and weren’t getting much from the training.” The Cadets should understand that you’re not undermining the NCO, but merely disagreeing and finding an opportunity to teach. However, don’t side with the Cadets against the NCO just to spite the NCO or if the Cadets are being unreasonable in their desires. If they get a fifteen-minute break, don’t let them stretch it into half an hour on a whim. There are things to get done. And if you decide your NCO is in the right, back him up immediately and publicly. Your Cadets need to have no doubt that they can’t get by on you or on your NCOs. Especially not with your help.

Make a point to learn something about each of your Cadets. Obviously you should know their names. But you should learn something that they do on their own time. Are they in the band? Do they play a sport? Asking about things like this occasionally will let your Cadets know that you know them as individuals and that you care about them.

Other Voices

“The First Sergeant is all things to his/her soldiers. You have to be mother, father, confidante, disciplinarian...you name it. My soldiers know without doubt that I care for them. They also know that I will go to bat for them if need be. On the other hand, they also know my wrath if they don’t perform to standards in all areas of soldiering. You are not the soldiers’ enemy, but you are also not their best friend. Another thing about being First Sergeant...learning to keep your mouth shut and not betray your soldiers (expect when you have to take matters to the commander or chaplain...if necessary).” – Maj Connie Carlson, CAP

When you are new into the program - a solid First Sergeant is the goal many new enlisted cadets want to emulate. – Capt David G. Jadwin, CAP

“The First Sergeant...is a liaison between the enlisted ranks and the commander. He is there to help us with problems and counsel us when the need be.” – Maj George Evans, CAP

“In the German army, the First Sergeant is referred to as the father of the company - and that he or she is! The provider, the disciplinarian, the wise counselor, the tough and unbending foe, the confidant, the sounding board, everything that we need in a leader during our personal success or failure. The father of the company...” – from the Indiana Wing Cadet NCO Handbook

Your Duties as Cadet First Sergeant

CAPM 20-1: Duties of a Cadet First Sergeant

The CAPM 20-1 'Organization of Civil Air Patrol' from 1993 has been superceded and the section listing Cadet First Sergeant has been removed. However, here are the listed job functions for a Cadet First Sergeant from the 1993 edition and a brief discussion of what each entails.

- Supervisory, administrative and managerial functions. In the military, the First Sergeant is traditionally the manager of the company office. He has a good working knowledge of all the administrative processes that his people go through and he's in charge of the personnel in the squadron office who do that work. Additionally, he's in charge of the squadron area and the health and welfare of the Cadets.
- Personnel guidance for cadets. The First Sergeant is charged with helping Cadets with the many CAP forms. Now, an Admin NCO or the Personnel Officer may normally handle his. But it is still the First Sergeant's job to know what's what.
- Inspection and correction of deficiencies. This is an extremely broad category, but it can be construed to mean those areas that are the First Sergeant's concern. Supply is the duty of the Supply Officer, not the First Sergeant. However, things like appearance, PFT's, behavior and some parts of personnel and admin are definitely within the Shirt's responsibilities.
- Preparation of rosters. This is another of those admin-type tasks that the First Sergeant is charged with. Not only should the Shirt prepare rosters, he should make sure he knows the whereabouts of every Cadet on those rosters when they are supposed to be at meetings.
- Counseling cadets concerning the CAP cadet program. The First Sergeant should be the first line of counseling a cadet goes through on his way up to the Cadet Commander and a 2b. It is your responsibility to forward situations or people to the Cadet Commander only after you've done everything you can.
- Related duties as required. This sentence allows the Cadet Commander and the Cadet Programs Officers to load you up with anything and everything. If your workload gets too great, ask for help in the form of other staff assistants or use of the flight sergeants.

Additionally, the 20-1 states that the Cadet First Sergeant should be familiar with CAPP 14.

The Nuts And Bolts

The First Sergeant, along with the flight sergeants, is charged with maintaining standards of discipline and appearance. He should never, ever, relax in this capacity or allow his NCOs to relax. If a Cadet's uniform or grooming do not meet standards, tell him so the instant you notice. If you are in the middle of a conversation, excuse yourself briefly, call the Cadet over, explain his discrepancy, and send him on his way. Then return to your conversation. In most cases, even

Seniors won't resent you interrupting the conversation. Instead they will be encouraged by the fact that you are doing your job.

Discrepancies should always be pointed out for the simple fact that it lets that Cadets know that you know. Most of the time a Cadet is fully aware that his uniform isn't ironed and that his hair is too long. But by pointing this out to him, however briefly ("Did you iron that uniform?" "Yes, First Sergeant." "Well, do a better job next week. And get a haircut."), you are letting him know that you are aware of his shortcomings and expect him to measure up. Some Cadets will slide as long as they can if they think they are getting away with something. Don't let them think so! Also, the more people who point out their problems, the more likely they'll get tired of hearing it and figure that everyone means business. So make sure that your NCOs do the same.

Correct lapses in customs and courtesies just a quickly. If a Cadet misses a salute, correct them immediately and have them do it again. Constant repetition and instruction in the right way to do things will pay off handsomely in the long run, although it may be time consuming. Besides, it's your job.

It is your responsibility to have a good working knowledge of CAP paperwork. You should, at the very least, know which forms your Cadets need most often, where to get them and how to fill them out. You should also know where they go when they're done. You may have an Cadet Admin NCO to assist you in this. In that case, the Admin NCO works for you in your capacity as manager of the 'Cadet Squadron Office'. If your unit has a Cadet Admin Officer or just an Admin Officer, you still have the responsibility of taking care of your Cadets and making sure they're taken care of, you just don't have any supervisory authority.

Your Cadet Commander should, and probably will, lead PT most of the time. However, you are always right there as well. The Cadet Commander may hand off responsibility for leading PT to you and your NCOs on occasion. If he does, lead PT in the same manner he does. And be sure that you don't in any way disparage his decision. He may have work to do.

It is your responsibility to make sure that the squadron area is in a good state of police. If you are in a situation where you control all of your surroundings, make sure that the grounds are picked up and well kept. Keep the building itself clean. If you don't control your situation, do your best and insist the Cadets do theirs. Have the Cadets police the drill deck you are using. Your hosts will appreciate having someone pick up soda cans, especially if they didn't put them there. Keep the office spaces picked up and the trashcans emptied. Sweep and swab the floor after the meeting.

Don't take on too much responsibility. If the responsibilities you have are too much, delegate some of them. You have a staff in the form of the flight sergeants. They work for you. If you need to send some chores down to them, do so. It will benefit both of you. You will have a little more breathing space and can give more attention to the things that really deserve your time. Your flight sergeants will get to work with you, will have some responsibility and can get a taste of what life is like as the First Sergeant. Also, it gives you an opportunity to evaluate them with an eye toward finding someone to replace you when the time comes.

Don't waste time. Don't let time go unused. If you have no specific duties you are carrying out at any given time, find something to do. Inspect the squadron area to make sure it is squared away. Review the activity and training schedule for the next month. Make a list of things that you need to bring up with the Cadets or with the Cadet Commander or Cadet Programs officers. Work out a list of classes that you think would benefit the Cadets. Pick a Cadet's file at random and review it to ensure that all the paperwork is correct. Straighten up your own filing. Take another look at this handbook and see if you are performing up to what is expected and your own potential.

A First Sergeant's work is never done, so don't ever do nothing.

Disciplinary Actions

Discipline of the squadron is primarily your responsibility. You should handle it swiftly and impartially. Just as in correcting uniform or drill discrepancies, most discipline problems can be handled by simply 'making a nuisance' of yourself. If you immediately and ceaselessly verbally correct discipline problems when they pop up the Cadet should eventually get tired of hearing it and correct his problem. Obviously, you should demand that your NCOs do the same.

Besides the obvious advantage of letting the individual in question know that he is behaving incorrectly, consistently and regularly correcting him in public will have other desirable effects. It will let all the Cadets know what is not acceptable and it will let the Cadets know which of their number isn't performing to expectations. When the Cadets realize this they may begin to apply peer pressure to influence him to correct himself. They also may stop associating with that Cadet, which could have the same effect.

If you have been verbally correcting the Cadet for a reasonable period and that fails you have two other options available:

1. Extra Military Instruction – This is not punishment, so don't let it be called that. It is additional training aimed at correcting a behavioral deficiency. Obviously, if the individual in question was well enough trained, there would be no deficiency. The EMI should be appropriate to the problem. If a Cadet can't seem to be quiet or stand still, practice at standing at attention or parade rest while closely supervised would seem to be in order. If a Cadet is having difficulty in following orders then extra time on the drill deck accepting commands from an NCO might work. If disrupting class is a problem then perhaps extra study time alone during the squadron's break would be beneficial. Be creative, be consistent and be careful. The Cadet Protection Policy is there for your benefit. If you have any doubt at all about your standing with it, check with your Cadet Commander and Cadet Programs Officers.
2. Administrative Action – If a Cadet just doesn't get the message in spite of all your efforts, there are several administrative actions available to the Cadet Commander and the Cadet Programs Officers. However, once you go to your Cadet Commander with a

discipline problem, it is out of your hands. You must make every effort to prevent a Cadet from ever having to stand in front of an officer's desk at attention. If this happens you have failed that Cadet just as badly as that Cadet failed you, and you have failed your Cadet Commander as well.

Whenever you administer EMI, make sure that you advise your Cadet Commander. He should be aware of any problems and potential problems that may be coming his way. You certainly don't want a Cadet who was doing fine to show up in front of his desk. The first thing the Cadet Commander should want to know is why he wasn't aware of this problem Cadet sooner. Keep your Cadet Commander informed!

Being First Sergeant at an Activity

Obviously, being the Cadet First Sergeant at an activity is different from performing the job at the squadron. You have almost no time to settle in and get used to the Cadet Commander or your NCOs.

And yet, the even more than at the squadron, the Cadet Commander, NCOs and Cadets need the leadership and attention of a good First Sergeant. We've discussed at length why a First Sergeant is important. In the high-pressure environment of a Cadet activity this is especially true.

Your Cadet Commander has a million things to think about and has to deal with other officers and his commander. It is up to you to take the pressure of dealing with Cadet issues and the day-to-day things such as schedules and formations.

The NCOs will be very keyed-up. They want to prove themselves and their squadron to others in the organization. The danger of your NCOs harassing the Cadets to the point of Cadet Protection Program violations is very real. You must keep a very tight reign on them, especially for the first few days. Also, you must inspire them to take a special interest in their Cadets, as problems have a way of being missed when things are moving quickly.

Your Cadets depend on you to ensure that they are taken care of. Even if they don't want to be looked after (see "Personal Hygiene and Your Cadets").

Since there is so little time to get things the way you and the Cadet Commander would like them, it is very important that you set a very definite tone. As First Sergeant, the Cadets will see more of you than anyone else on the activity staff they see. It is up to you to project the professionalism and attitudes of the staff. Also, you may find that one of a Cadet's strongest memories is of the First Sergeant at his first big activity.

Other Voices

“You are responsible for ensuring and overseeing the training of your soldiers and ensuring that they are physically fit and combat ready (of course the combat ready won’t apply to CAP, but emergency services ready sure does).” – Maj Connie Carlson, CAP

“[In the Air Force,] the First Sergeant... assists the Commander in giving punishment, Article 15’s, Letters of Reprimand, etc.” – Maj George Evans, CAP

“Cadet First Shirts are responsible for discipline, drill, emergency services, administration, etc. – a really wide range of responsibilities. If you think the First Sergeants’ job is one of paperwork then you have missed the point. It, like so many other leadership positions, is about setting tone, enforcing standards, and carrying on the traditions of past Cadets. There is no better feeling in my CAP experience than being a Cadet Commander and wandering out onto the opening formation of 40 Cadets, and receiving the report from a First Sergeant that ensures that your standards have been implemented.” – Capt Richard Griffith, CAP

How Does A First Sergeant Behave?

The number one rule of First Sergeant behavior is be you. If you have always been on friendly terms with your Cadets, you should continue to do so. If you’re a cut and dried, business first kind of person then be that way. Do what you are comfortable doing. Be consistent.

To achieve the respect of your Cadets, your demeanor, attitude and abilities should be above reproach. They should never forget that YOU are First Sergeant. There are many little ways you can remind them of your status and abilities. These things should be done whenever possible.

You should always proceed at the rear of a formation. This prevents you from excessively fraternizing with your Cadets. It allows the Cadet Commander to lead at the front, gathering respect for him. Also, from the rear you can see if there is a problem or if someone drops out for any reason.

If the flight sergeants are not members of the formation, or are not leading it, they should be at the rear with you. You are their boss, and your relationship with them should be strong and cordial.

If there is equipment to be carried or a task to be completed, you should participate only if your participation would help in a large way. For instance, if there are two Cadets who need to unload twenty sleeping bags from a van, assistance from you would cut the workload by half; you should help. However, if there were ten Cadets, you should direct as necessary, but not assist.

Surprisingly, this behavior will not raise resentment in your Cadets. True, there will always be a few who will complain about anything. But, by and large, your Cadets will understand and accept that this is one of the privileges of being First Sergeant.

Since your Cadets should look up to you, you should do everything in your power to always do them 'one better.' If you are on a break and the majority of your Cadets are sitting, you should stand. If your Cadets are straining or complaining while trying to complete some portion of a PT program or some physically demanding task, you should quietly tough it out.

Your uniforms should always be in regulation and inspection-ready.

Always keep your bearing when around your Cadets. Laughing and joking quietly with your NCOs is fine, but horseplay and similar activities will detract from your bearing and should be avoided.

Don't fraternize with junior Cadets during activities. Don't 'hang around' with anyone who isn't an NCO. Fraternization, especially with a junior Cadet, will give your Cadets wrong impressions. They will feel you are showing favoritism, and that you aren't serious and can be taken lightly. This is an attitude that will make your job impossible and your position and title worthless.

Insist that everyone call you 'First Sergeant'. That is your title, you have earned it and for others not to use it is vaguely insulting. You are not a 'Top'; you are a First Sergeant.

Other Voices

"How does a First Sergeant behave? He should behave PROFESSIONALLY at ALL times. It's not an ego trip either. A First Sergeant... leads by example and sets the example at ALL times (not some of the times). A First Sergeant does not leave room for those to say he/she does not lead by example [or] set the example. ...It is also very important that a First Sergeant demonstrates caring leadership." – Maj Connie Carson, CAP

"Being the Cadet First Sergeant of my squadron, I set the foremost example since I am the top NCO. [I] must wear the diamond with pride, set the standard ... the Cadets look up to [me]. [I] must achieve coherence between the flights, even though competition is present." – Cadet Master Sergeant Anil Kalicharan, CAP

"A bad First Sergeant can really unravel a unit. The idea of power can get to their head quickly!"- Capt David G. Jadwin, CAP

The Mitchell Award

There is no doubt that First Sergeant is one of the most rewarding jobs in the Cadet Program. You are at the peak of your abilities and at the top of the NCO totem pole. Your Cadet Commander relies on you on a daily basis for your input and assistance. You have the helm when the Cadets aren't in class. Your NCO corps looks up to you as a role model and aspires to someday have your job. You are the First Sergeant.

But it's going to happen. Just when you've finally gotten a handle on your job. Just when you know every box on every form and just how Wing likes them filled in. Just when you've learned the all your Cadet's names, their schools, their parents names, if they have any pets, etc. Just when you finally get your two most contentious NCOs to act professionally and stop making faces at each other during drill...it happens.

You test for the Mitchell...and you pass ... now you're a Cadet officer ... yuck!

All good things must end and your tenure as First Sergeant and time in Phase II of the program are two of those good things. Eventually, you'll have to pass your Mitchell and promote.

All is not lost. After all, you are only half done with the program. You have many years and many achievements ahead of you. Phases III and IV offer many new challenges. True, there is even more work, but there are more opportunities as well.

Perhaps most importantly, you now have your Mitchell Award. As you know, this entitles you to accelerated promotions on enlistment in the armed forces. There are also several National Special Activities that only allow Mitchell recipients or higher, most significantly IACE.

Take with you the initiative, drive and perseverance that are the marks of a good NCO. You will require these in spades to conquer the challenges of the officer grades. Leave behind the nitpickiness and any tendencies to 'ride' your Cadets or NCOs. They aren't yours any more. The NCOs belong to the new First Sergeant and the Cadets belong to the Cadet Commander.

You'll have to change your approach, as well. You should no longer be as imposing a figure. Relax a little. Take it easy. You've earned it. As an officer you should appear comfortable, as if everything is in control. And it is.

Now, go back and re-read the section on keeping the junior officers away from your Cadets. And now, practice what you preached. Stay away! You have no business sticking your nose into the day-to-day running of the squadron. Let the NCOs do their jobs and learn, just as you did. This is the hardest part of the NCO to officer transition. Stepping back and letting go.

Also, don't supervise or 'help' the new First Sergeant. You had your chance. If you did your job correctly, the new First Sergeant was picked by the Cadet Commander on your recommendation

and stepped right into your shoes. And that's because you were training and observing him for months prior to his actually taking the job. You know he's the right guy, and he is.

Other Voices

“Just because [the First Sergeant] is taking his time to get his Mitchell doesn't mean he wants to be an NCO forever.” – Cadet Captain Jamie Jackson, CAP

“...the ultimate goal for every cadet is Spaatz, the goal is not reaching CadetMSergeant and stopping. Our program is designed to keep everyone moving upward and Cadet master sergeant is only half the way through.” – Capt Greg Hader, CAP

“Sure, you may have before you one of the best First Sergeants CAP has ever seen, but I think that it's important to encourage that individual to continue in the program...experiment...who knows, he/she may also be one of your finest officers. My biggest fear for those commanders who do allow a First Sergeant to stay his entire Cadet career serving in that role has to do with the others around him/her. I think that we have some responsibility to allow others to grow as well. Encouraging constant progression in the CAP Cadet Program not only means growth for those moving along, but for those who come behind as well since they will fill the vacancies created.” – Maj Kevin J. Reinstein, CAP

And Finally...

No doubt about it, First Sergeant is one of the most enjoyable and most rewarding jobs in the program. And it's one of the hardest, if you're doing it properly. Luckily, the skills required to be a good First Sergeant are ones you probably already possess. And what you don't know you can learn.

This job, like anything else in CAP, should be fun and rewarding. You should enjoy the challenges and accomplishments of the First Sergeant's job. You should enjoy interacting with your fellow Cadets and your Cadet Commander as you will often have to. You should enjoy nurturing and teaching the junior NCOs so that they can someday take your place.

If it isn't any fun to be the First Sergeant, first check to see if there is anything you should change about yourself. If you are doing everything by the book, to the best of your abilities and within the guidelines established in this handbook, then look to the command. Do you have enough responsibility? Do you have too much? Is your interaction with the Cadet Commander and Cadet Programs Officers appropriate for the job and your needs? And lastly, the Cadets. Do they have a problem with you as First Sergeant? Are you too harsh or strict? Too lax? Do you play favorites (or even give the appearance of playing favorites)?

There are people around who want you to succeed and are happy to help you do so. The Deputy Commander for Cadets, Leadership Officer and Cadet Commander are all committed to having an effective Cadet First Sergeant. You can ask them to help you unravel the knottier problems. They'll probably be giving you pointers and tips as you go along anyway. Don't ignore them, try to understand what they're saying, what they want and why. Think about it and try to accommodate their wishes into your routine and style.

If you have done everything correctly and everything is in its proper place and you still don't enjoy the position, it could just be that you weren't meant to be the First Sergeant. At least not right now. That's okay. Not everyone has the temperament or personality to put on the diamond. If that is the case, start looking for a replacement and talk to the Cadet Commander. There is no shame in admitting that you aren't happy in a position or that you are in over your head. That is, as long as you gave it your best shot. And whoever is selected as the new First Sergeant should receive one hundred percent of your support and loyalty.

But there is no reason to assume it will ever come to that. Far more First Sergeants are promoted to Cadet Flight Officer kicking and screaming than ever are relieved for any reason. But it is up to you to carry on the proud tradition and add your own chapter to the history of Cadet First Sergeants in the Civil Air Patrol.

Good luck, have fun!

Other Voices

“My best CAP experiences were as a First Sergeant (with the exception of being Vice Commander of Cadets at COS), and I would have gladly stayed one for a while.” – Cadet Colonel Jamie Foote, CAP

“[A course] still doesn't totally teach you how to be a First Sergeant...it gives you the tools from which to work...but experience is the key. Plus you have to have the right personality. Not everybody is designed to be a First Sergeant.” – Maj Connie Carson, CAP

“If you only have seven cadets, is there a need for a First Sergeant? Probably more of a need for a recruiting drive!” – Maj George Evans, CAP

“I guess it just goes with the job, but most people I have talked to said that being First Sergeant was one of the best experiences of their careers. I know that it was mine.” – Cadet Captain Jamie Jackson, CAP

“If I had to summarize all of the above and train a new First Sergeant...I would say that the First Sergeant is there for the people.” – Capt David G. Jadwin, CAP

“By placing cadets in leadership positions such as First Sergeant, they learn to lead cadets, and are motivated to excel as officers.” – Cadet Colonel Jamie L. Foote, CAP

“The Cadet NCO is a ‘Participant-Leader’ while the Cadet Officer is the ‘Advisor-Counselor’ or the ‘Leader-Executive.’ In other words, our Cadet [First] Sergeant is going to be the highest level of Direct Leader in the Cadet Program.” – Cadet Colonel Matthew Heusser, CAP

“First and foremost, a First Sergeant is the enlisted commander for all the enlisted and NCO soldiers in his/her unit.” – Maj Connie Carlson, CAP

“I feel that the First Sergeant position is a position meant for the most qualified cadet, not the highest ranking NCO. That is why I passed two Cadet Master Sergeants to select a Cadet Technical Sergeant to be my Cadet First Sergeant.” – Cadet Captain Jamie Jackson, CAP

“The First Sergeant position is a great chance for your ‘high-speed’ Cadet to get an early look at what is coming their way as an officer (paperwork shuffle, planning, coordinating, etc.) while still being able to take direction and fulfill the learning side of ‘growing-up’ within our Cadet Program.” – Capt David G. Jadwin, CAP

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Summary Of Changes

19 May, 1999: This document has been reformatted for standard letter paper to ease publication in the field. No changes to content have been made.

18 February, 2000: Title page changed. Document font changed from 11 pt. to 12 pt. Formatting and title page changed to accommodate new font size. Abbreviations eliminated. Minor phrasing changes.

18 December, 2002: Reformatted for online presentation on CadetStuff.org. Section regarding hygiene eliminated.

1 December, 2012: Reformatted from online presentation on CadetStuff.org to an electronic booklet format for current and future Cadet First Sergeants.

Capt. Shawn Stanford is a long-time Civil Air Patrol member and is (as of this writing) a squadron commander in PAWG. He was a Cadet in Stratford Eagles Squadron during the Lessard-era and an office pogue in the Marine Corps. He has a wife, a son and two daughters and, as one of the founders of CadetStuff.org, he is allowed to write his own bio.