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One of the characteristics of our Army that makes us a force to be reckoned with, is our ability to set and enforce a standard. We are the forerunners on many initiatives and other countries look to us as an example of the way to go. One standard we set early on is the physical standards our Soldiers must meet. As early as the recruitment stage we screen potential applicants on their mental capabilities, we also focus on their physical person. In this aspect, we look at their height and weight and make assessments on their physical capabilities to ensure they can meet and exceed the standards of the Army Physical Fitness Test and the weight control standards. The established standards are used for many reasons. One of which is to assess whether or not our Soldiers are eligible for such incentives as promotions and attendance at leadership schools. Recently, the Department of the Army instituted the changes in the standards of fitness and how they are applied. The change in the standard was well over due, but the change in application is having a negative effect on our service as a whole. It is degrading the power and authority of our NCO Corps.

Noncommissioned Officers (NCO) are the backbone of our Army. We are tasked to set and enforce the standards. In my eyes that means we have to operate under the Be, Know, Do concept and be the example for our subordinates, peers and superiors alike. The Army does an excellent job indoctrinating our newly enlisted Soldiers. We clearly define the standards and strictly hold them accountable for meeting the standards. In reference to the physical aspect, Initial Entry Trainees are only required to attain a score of 50 in each event of the physical fitness test to proceed to Advanced Individual Training. Soldiers outside of the initial training phases must attain a minimum 60 in each event.

There are various levels of recourse for Soldiers who do not meet the standards. The first action taken when a Soldier fails either the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) or Army Weight Control Program standards is to flag them from favorable personnel actions by completing a Department of the Army Form 268 on them. This action prohibits them from receiving any favorable actions such as promotions and selection for attending service schools. Once an individual fails to meet the standard they participate in remedial training programs which focus on the areas of deficiency. The Soldier is then given a certain amount of time for progression. During this time frame they are provided expert attention to aid in overcoming their deficiency. Soldiers failing the APFT receive assistance from NCOs while Soldiers needing assistance with their weight receive assistance from dieticians assigned to local medical facilities and monitoring from NCOs. If Soldiers do not meet the minimum requirements within a certain time frame, they are subject to being discharged from military service. Of course, the measures listed above are designed to retain the Soldiers needing assistance for further military service, but unfortunately sometimes there is a need to eliminate/chapter Soldiers from the Army based on their failure to meet the prescribed standards.

In recent years the Army updated its standards for passing the APFT (1998) and meeting the height/weight standards (2006). The changes were based on studies conducted by the Army Fitness School previously located at Fort Benning, GA. The change in the standard is not my issue. My main concern is the application of the changes in reference to leadership schools. Prior to 2006 it was the standard to meet the APFT and height/weight standards prior to being fully enrolled in most service schools but specifically leadership schools. Under the old standard individuals could not attend the required courses without meeting the minimum physical standards. Recent changes allow Soldiers to attend the school without being required to meet the

minimum standards upon graduation. Now Soldiers have up to 90 days after the completion of a leadership course to meet the minimum standards. The only negative part of the negative scenario is a negative comment on the Soldier' DA Form 1059. I am unsure what caused the changes in the application of standards for the APFT and height and weight, but I would submit that our involvement in the Global War on Terrorism and the need to retain as many Soldiers for service had a major impact on the overall decision to change the application of this standard.

Many would argue that the change in standard was necessary since many Soldiers returning from the combat theater and attending these courses needed additional time to get in shape to meet the minimum standards. I would argue that at some point in time Soldiers realize their physical conditioning is ultimately their own responsibility. Units design and institute a physical training program, these programs may not challenge all Soldiers; therefore, in some cases it is necessary to conduct physical training on your own. NCOs are tasked to know their Soldiers and ensure they have the tools necessary to meet at least the minimum standards. How can we as NCOs ensure our Soldiers are trained if we can not meet the minimum standards ourselves? We must lead from the front in all aspects not just a few.

The delineation from previously prescribed standards became most evident to me when we in-processed the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA). Attendance at USASMA is described by some as the capstone of the enlisted Soldier's career. Though I am not privy to specific statistics of the pass/fail rate of the members of class 58, I am sure that there are some Soldiers here who failed to meet the standards of either passing the APFT or meet the height/weight standards for their age group as prescribed in FM 21-20 and AR 600-9 respectively. The part that is disturbing at this level is that many who failed to meet the standards will be returned to the Army's inventory and empowered with the responsibility to

enforce standards they failed to meet upon enrollment in the highest leadership school for enlisted Soldiers. Many may even be in the position to eliminate or chapter Soldiers from the Army for failing to meet these same standards.

Some arguments in support of the change in reference to attendance at USASMA are the change in elevation and the recent return from deployed assignments. These arguments are not valid to me for several reasons. One reason is that we also have students attending the First Sergeant and Battle Staff Courses who must meet the same standards without the advantage of having four to six weeks on station prior to taking the record APFT. Additionally, a majority of the camps down range are outfitted with fitness areas so it is not necessary for a Soldier's physical ability to diminish merely because of deployment. Again, I am not privy to the pass/fail rate, but I would venture that most arrive here physically able to pass the test if only because they know the schools are important and they realize the need to remain competitive with their peers. The problem in my opinion is when NCOs reach the pinnacle and earn the rank of SGM/CSM many feel they are above reproach and subordinates should do as I say and not as I do.

I am sure that when the members of the promotion boards select the individuals to be advanced to the rank of sergeant major they do not envision that many would lower their standards and merely do the minimum to remain within standards. My problem is that once these individuals receive their promotion to sergeant major they are required to meet the standards and complete the sergeant's major academy yet many arrive not physically prepared to do the minimum for pass the APFT or meet the weight control standards. It used to be the standard that if you did not pass the test you were either demoted or removed from the promotion list so the individual Soldier was motivated to ensure they met the minimum physical and weight control

standards. Now a Soldier is not held to a specific standard, but allowed to meet the standard at their leisure, if they are the type of leader that strives to meet the minimum standard only.

It is my opinion that our leadership made a poor decision when they decided to change the entry requirements to leadership schools when referring to the physical requirements. At this level in our career we should be the standard setters and ensure that we are prepared to do all that we expect our Soldiers to do. At the very least we should be able to pass the APFT and meet the height and weight control standards as prescribed in FM 21-20 and AR 600-9. It is ineffective to conduct leadership schools and not require our Soldiers to meet the standards mentioned above. If we were assigned to an organization (aside from leadership schools) and we failed to meet either of the above mentioned standards our records would be flagged and we would not receive any favorable actions. Why then should a Soldier selected for promotion be allowed to fail to meet a minimum standards and continue to excel. In my opinion we should return to the old way and be required to meet the standards of FM 21-20 and AR 600-9 before being fully enrolled in any military school. Why should we be rewarded for failing? It should not be allowed, we should make Soldiers meet the prescribed standards or prevent them from progressing up the ranks. Though some change is necessary all change is not good.