

Warrant Officer Professional Development

Future of the Ordnance Corps Warrant Officer

(and Warrant Officers of all Branches)

By CW4 (P) Tim Barker

As I sat down to pound out this article, it reminds me of how incredibly important our senior Ordnance Warrant Officers are to the overall health of our Corps. I'm convinced that we ought to be justifiably concerned... that if each of us does not take a very active role in mentoring our Junior Warrants, then we all... may very soon become ***irrelevant!*** Think about it for a minute... irrelevant? How could that ever happen? Can't say I could ever have speculated on this in the past. But; as I write this article we currently have only 2 accession packets for every 10 open 915A school seats for our next accessioning board. This shortfall in WOC applicants is so new and so perverse that each of us has received a letter from the Chief of Ordnance, not once, but twice over the past year asking for our help! Now that point, makes me wonder if the "Two-Stars" running the Infantry, Armor and Quartermaster Corps are faced with the same type of recruitment shortfalls? Has their Corps accession rates demanded their direct attention and possible intervention? How could this be? My gut feel is that *maybe... just maybe...* as the Senior Warrants of our branch... we ain't doing enough to pass on the same lineage, honor, traditions and tutelage that we received from our predecessors? As we focus on our upcoming annual Ordnance Conference we need to ask ourselves... what have we done for our Corps lately?

We currently have a problem attracting the right numbers of stellar NCO's to fill our ranks of the future and face the same challenge retaining them past CW3 the very first time they become free of their Active Duty Service Obligations. Folks the last thing we want is a 100% accession rate. If every candidate that applies is accessed... the competency of our Corps will quickly erode. If the Warrants of the future develop *a tactical or technical incompetence...* then I fear that ***irrelevance*** could quickly follow. Fact is... that no field Commander wants a "Chief" with a training problem. They want their "Chiefs" to walk on water and to hit the ground running! They want their Warrant to accept their challenge and to take prudent risks. They want their Chief to lead by example and to accept responsibility for their actions. They expect Chief to be ethical and to honor the Army values. Bottom Line: the want Chief to be an Army Officer! Thus said... ***if we start this process with a 100% accession rate, then more and more Junior Warrant Officers may very well fail the expectations of these same Commanders.*** If we allow this to happen the future of our Corps could snowball downward into an abyss of irrelevancy.

If you think it can't happen just look at history. Does the Air Force have Warrant Officers any longer? Are our Army Physician Assistants Warrant Officers any longer? The answer to both is a resounding NO! I recall reading an Army Times editorial in the mid-1996 in which the author, (a retired Air Force O-6), referred to the Warrant Officers that he had been associated with as ***"...a mustache with a pay problem!"*** I'm sure many of you read the same article and would agree that; this author's attitude toward Warrant Officers was... just about as bad as it possibly can get! ***Thus it becomes absolutely imperative that to protect our Corps future... we each need to take a personal approach at WO recruitment and retention.*** It also falls on us to develop those Junior Warrant Officers that we share our installations with. Hopefully I can challenge you with a few ideas to get you local development program spun up or give you some positive approaches on how to improve your local process currently in place. If you decide to take the lead locally, I can assure you that the personal reward, from your mentorship efforts will bring you a ten-fold return and you will be taking an active role in the betterment of our Corps.

One point of caution here is to let our DA level agencies attack our national level problems that are well above our local lanes. Let USAWOA handle our pay problems with compression. Let the Proponents and TRADOC sort out our training needs. Let the Warrant Officer Division have the lead in the assignment and promotion issues. The list of issues affecting our WO Corps is as large and as complex as the agencies responsible for affecting change. If you allow yourself to become the local sounding board for all that is wrong with our system chances are you aren't going to get much accomplished with your local development program. What I'd like to discuss in this article is what I feel is our responsibility locally via a "Grass Roots" approach to the accession and retention problems.

The first step in any professional development process is to have a Subject Matter Expert (SME) in the lead. Now I share with you my opinion that there probably ought to be two SME's locally. I'd suggest to you that this ought to be the senior branch officer for the Technical Service and Aviator Warrants within the MACOM. DA is structured the same way. At the Army G-1 shop we have an Aviator and an Ordnance MWO, both are working WO policy. At PERSCOM we have a CW5 Aviator as the Aviator Branch Chief and Special Forces MWO as the Technical Service Branch Chief. A CW5 Aviator, runs the entire WO Division and a Signal MWO, takes the lead in the Leader Development Branch. This split makes sense. As most of the time... one size does not fit all and the simple truth is that our technical service and aviator fields are raised differently. ***A good tool for your developmental kit bag is to not to be so generic with your WO Professional Development Days that the Junior WOs get nothing from it.*** In my case, I'm very comfortable with the majority of the technical service MOS's but don't feel comfortable trying to guide a young aviator along a specific career path. If the Senior Warrant Officer locally is not interested in taking the lead with the professional development of their branches (technical service and aviation), then tactfully remind them that there is a very viable retirement option in our Army and step up to the plate on your own. Once you have your SME's identified now where do you go? Here I'd suggest that you head straight to your MACOM G-1 office and have a "sit down" with your local G-1 WO strength manager.

During this discussion I'd suggest that you ask for a personal role in the assignment, placement and transfers of all the WO's within your Branch locally. Most strength managers will welcome your input. Some may balk at the idea since the easiest method of WO assignments is the next guy in goes to the next vacancy... professional development is not an issue of concern with this type of manager. So we end up with a brand new WO1 heading off to a tank battalion while his local SWO or CW5 is up above the clouds thinking about the 18th hole of some golf course. It is flat time to put an end to this type of local management approach. Now once you, the G-1 and the Commander are all in agreement that you will manage your Branch Warrants locally and you are the local SME for all things "Warrant"... it is time to get real current real quick?

Current you ask? Why is this important? ***The last thing you want to do in your Professional Development program is to base it upon yourself and your upbringing in our Army.*** This approach will certainly do more harm than good. Times have changed and Chief... you need to embrace that change. These Junior WOs will face challenges that we never thought of. Most of us have 25 – 30 years of active federal service... some even more. But just think of the change in our Army and our Nation over the past five years. We now have the I-Bde, have had a revolution in Logistics, information is instantaneous, we are working AMSS, the GCSS Army, new vehicle platforms, the Single Stock Fund issues, out sourcing, contracting, global reach and more lethality with less footprint... exemplified by the Javelin. ***The change of the past five years has been incredible and if you weren't part of it... then it is time for your new update.***

The days of “Iron Mountains” are gone and we’ve traded in the Cold War and “Evil Empire” for a new type of conflict, with a new world order, with new rogue states. Think about it... we currently have soldiers in Bosnia, Kosovo, Kuwait, Macedonia, Afghanistan and dozens of other less than friendly areas. In each of our offices the huge TM library and our 50-year collection of PS Magazine’s are irrelevant. We now have it all on the Internet and these publications are updated electronically. Our days of being able to make CW5 as we homesteaded for decades in Germany, Korea, or Fort Bragg will not work for these new Warrant Officers in their quest for CW5. The days of staying in heavy unit motor pools or heavy Engineer Battalions through your promotion to CW5 are also long gone. The days of needing only a GED to get by and blowing off all the military schools are also a thing of the past. So what can you offer these Junior WOs that you desire to develop? ***Your countless experiences in an applicable and updated manner.*** We need to understand where our Army is going and what our Junior WOs need to be focused on as units of measuring their growth and future potential based upon their past performance. Just like our Army has changed so has our Corps. We have taken the 915’s from five skill identifiers (A-E) down to two (A&E). Our 918’s have consolidated and in the future the 919’s may do the same. We are looking at one Ordnance CW5 MOS of 915E and we are now training something referred to as a “Muti-Capable” maintainer. How could we ever council a Junior WO of today with any relevance, based on how we were raised as WO’s in our Army? We truly need to understand what is expected of them in the future as we attempt to understand the differences between us based upon our generational gaps. Fact is... what was important to our generation may not be as important to theirs. ***Once you are aware of these communication barriers then you can attempt to overcome your generational shortfalls and get yourself up to date.*** Here is a quote from a recent job request that I was privileged to which I think exemplifies how diverse our future Warrant will need to be. “...*I believe with my diverse background, warrior and technical training, advance military and civilian training, I would be able to transform the training program for our upcoming students. I would also provide the right role model with my leadership style, managerial abilities, physical conditioning and professional bearing. This opportunity would afford me the privilege of giving back to the Corp; for all that it has given me and my family. Plus with my joint and special operations background and multiple service training in maintenance management concepts I will help our Corp to transition to a relevant proponent in this fluid and ever transforming environment!*” Now I think that this guy just about covers how diverse we have become as WO’s... in his own words describing his qualifications!

The next issue we need to focus on is Warrant Officer recruitment. Simple fact is we need to get after it. Sell our Corps and the WOC process at every opportunity. Talk with your stellar NCO’s in the field, at meetings, on the phone and in person. If they aren’t interested ask why? Then find away past their initial consternation. ***Aggressively peruse those five to eight year time in service NCO’s.*** Now for some of you this causes some grave concern about accessing so early. But, I’d speculate that this is needless worry. If we took a tally of our current CW5 population across the Ordnance Corps we would find 95+% of us had less than eight years of active service when we were accessed... and we certainly didn’t fail. Each one of us has a story such as my first encounter with a senior warrant officer after we were appointed. I remember stopping to visit the SSA Class IX warehouse OIC, a Quartermaster CW4 and obviously a very bitter man. I clearly remember him referring to me as “Spot” and assuring me that I would never achieve in our Army what he had, as I was one of those new “WOC’s” and I hadn’t been directly appointed after 15 to 20 years of active service... as his peer group had. Well history told a different story and possibly this “old bear on the mountain top” will read this article and remember and possibly regret the conversation. My point here is that as the senior mentor locally... you never get a second chance to make the right first impression. This old bear that I ran into at the SSA never earned my respect after that initial encounter.

Be careful not to fall into the same trap when a young NCO asks for your support of their packet and give those new WO1's the warmest welcome that you can. It will have a lasting impression. ***The Army Chief of Staff has asked us to aggressively peruse these junior NCO's with five to eight years of AFS and whether we agree with it or not to do something less would frankly be disloyal to the Chief.***

Retention: How as the local SME can you have a positive impact on the retention of your local WO's? By making their personal and professional development one of your critical concerns. Ways to do this are incredibly diverse but here are a few ideas. ***I think the single most important one is to underwrite their mistakes.*** Don't hang them out to dry in public for a minor shortfall. Allow them to assume risk and foster a work environment that allows growth potential. Get out from behind your desk and go visit them... not to inspect but simply to check on their pulse. Another possibility is to insure the local G-1 has you set as a voting member of each and every Medical Review Board that has a WO appear before it. Maybe this WO loses his MOS over the ailment or injury involved... but that doesn't necessarily mean that they are required to be medically eliminated or retired. Maybe they can qualify for a different WO MOS/Career? Another point that I believe strongly in is having a hand in mentoring your local field grades on how they rate their WO's. What are the right verbs, adjectives, and pronouns that mean the difference between a great report card and a mediocre one? Give your Commanders a direct tap into your expertise on how they should rate their WO's. Most will find your desire for a sanity check refreshing.

Another option that promotes accession and retention locally is your direct involvement with your local USAWOA chapter. Don't allow it to turn into a good ol' boy club or the local slam-dunk night. Keep it professional, focus it on community support and try to have a WOPD at the end of each meeting. Locally in the past two years our guest speakers have presented WOPD on *WO Promotion Prep, Civilian Education Possibilities, AC/RC Assignments, The National Guard Equipment Upkeep, The Reserve MAITS Sites, The Army Suggestion Program, The Repair and Upkeep of Army Medical Equipment, The Warrant Officer Life Cycle, The Supply and Maintenance Excellence Awards, Personal Financial Management and Investment Opportunities, Our Current Warrant Officer Candidate Course, The Staff Course and The Senior Staff Course, The Flight Simulator, The Interim Brigade* and the list goes on. One point to note is that only one of these exemplified WOPD was given by a Commissioned Officer (also a local chapter member) every other class has been given by a peer WO (WO1 through CW5). Use your subject matter experts and tap into their tremendous backgrounds.

How do you know if you have your local program about right? Pretty simple... you will start seeing more accession packets, more request for tour extensions, DA Branch or the local G-1 will be calling and asking your input on who moves where and when. More mistakes will be underwritten and fewer meetings will turn into mud slinging contest. Local Logistics will start to become anticipatory vice reactive. More services will get done on time and right. Fewer Warrant Officers will be talking less about retirement. More will be asking your advice. More will make the grade during the next promotion board to CW3/4/5. More Commanders will be asking your input when writing your OER. More commissioned officers will be taking a greater interest in what the local Warrant Officers can bring to the table in support of their given mission. Remember... ***Each point of a successful local development program will allow, support, and foster an increase in our overall Army readiness!***

Chief... it's really simple. Our Army is changing and it is time that our Senior Warrant Officers locally... step up in this Junior WO development process. In the past year we have lost over 130 dues paying members of the Ordnance Association. Each year the Army Warrant Officer Association faces the same challenge... finding and retaining dues paying members. I surely hope that your arguments (locally and at the national level via the WOLDN) for the betterment of our Corps have covered more ground than pay compression, Commissary parking and what we are called... Chief or Mister! That's the view from here... are you up to this challenge? You already have what it takes Chief... the desire to make a difference!

