

Military customs and courtesy essay



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Today's Army is an extremely nostalgic organization with a copious amount of traditions and has about a million different methods of conducting its business. Some are old and some are new, but possibly the oldest one that has been around since before the Army was officially established and still lives today is the Army's rules, regulations and policies on customs and courtesies. In this form of a remedial block of instruction given to me, due to what I believe to be false targeting, I am to explain the Army's customs and courtesies and their importance.

Customs and Courtesies are among the main fundamentals of military life, the other being the Seven Army Values, upon which Soldiers are expected to live and rely upon both on and off duty. Customs and Courtesies date back to the inception of the military service, and are one of the defining features of a professional within that service. The idea that at any point in time that they can be lapsed, forgotten about, or dispensed with is ludicrous, and undermines esprit de corps.

These customs govern Soldiers not only in their professional life but in their social life as well, they add to the interest, pleasure and graciousness of army life, and this is reiterated throughout a soldier's career. A custom is a way of acting – a way that has continued consistently over such a long time that it has become similar to a law. A courtesy is a form of polite behavior and excellence of manners. You will find that Army life creates many special situations, not found in civilian life, that require special behavior on your part.

Customs and courtesies help make life orderly and are a way of showing respect. The Army is an organization that imprints pride and discipline in its Soldiers, both enlisted and commissioned officers, because of its history, mission, capabilities, and the respect it has earned in the service of the nation. A reflection of that pride and discipline is visible in the customs, courtesies, and traditions the Army holds. Inversely the pride and discipline is visible because the customs, courtesies and traditions of the Army are regularly practiced.

There are many ways in the Army to instill discipline, such as drill and ceremony for example. Like drill and ceremony, practicing of the customs, courtesies, and traditions is yet another effective means of instilling discipline, a sense of pride in ones self and ultimately the Army, and professionalism that we are well known for. Courtesy among members of all the branches of the military is important to maintain discipline. Military courtesy essentially means having good manners and respect in dealing with other people.

Courteous behavior provides a foundation for developing good people skills. Its inevitably one of the small pieces that make up the bigger picture of serving in uniform. Failing to conduct ones-self in these mannerisms just labels that person as careless or raised poorly. Integrity, service, and excellence. Three simple words that epitomize the core of the military profession: the bedrock of integrity, fortified by service to country, which in turn fuels the drive for excellence.

These values must be introduced to our new members as they enter the service and must be reinforced throughout their careers. Integrity is essential. It's the inner voice, the source of self-control, the basis for the trust that is imperative in today's military. It's doing the right thing when nobody's looking. In this world of "me first" and relative ethics, honesty is still the hallmark of the military professional. Service members must know the right thing to do and have the moral fortitude to do it. Military service is not just another job.

It's an uncommon profession that calls for people of uncommon dedication. Every military member realizes, from day one, that his or her individual needs will be subordinated to the needs of the nation. The Army requires a high level of professional skill, a 24-hour-a-day commitment, and a willingness to make personal sacrifices. When people forget that basic tenet, careerism and self-interest can emerge, doing the most damage when displayed by the leader. A leader unwilling to sacrifice individual goals for the good of the unit cannot convince other unit members to do so.

The mission suffers with potentially devastating effects. While personal goals often coincide with Army goals, there is no room for personal agendas at the expense of the institution or the American people. It is a standard in the hierarchy of military customs and courtesies that the leader must display to his subordinates that he is willing to put in extra effort, sacrifice personal time, and show initiative and motivation in order to achieve the same from his Soldiers. Tardiness is not tolerated in the military. It reflects inattention to duty.

In addition to being extremely impolite, on active duty, it is punishable under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Never keep a senior officer waiting because of your forgetfulness or lack of planning. If an unexpected event delays you, call ahead and give an explanation. The same rule applies to appointments and meetings you have arranged with subordinates. Don't keep them waiting. If your subordinates think of you as a "latecomer," you have not set a good example for them. In today's society, some people resign themselves to just getting by.

Because we've been entrusted with our nation's security and a good portion of the national treasury — because our mission often involves the risk of human life and sometimes national survival — because we are authorized to act on behalf of our entire society — then the obligation to excel is a moral obligation for members of a professional military force. The line between incompetence and immorality is a thinner line in the military profession than in any other calling. Poor or questionable conduct is not an attribute of an Army Soldier and will not be tolerated in the military.

The behavior of every Soldier is a reflection on the United States Army and is expected to be above reproach at all times. There are several policies with regard to conduct which an Army Soldier needs to pay particularly close attention to. Becoming intoxicated while in uniform will not be tolerated. When out of uniform, cadets are expected to control their behavior with regard to alcohol. Public display of affection while in uniform, except in the context of a military social event like the Military Ball, is not allowed.

This includes kissing, holding hands, and all other forms of physical affection. The use of inappropriate language in or out of uniform is not professional and should be kept to a minimum. Derogatory language is a reflection on the professional qualities and control and individual is likely to exhibit in a given pressure situation. Taking part in public demonstrations in uniform even for a “ good” cause is inappropriate and must be avoided. Discipline is used in the civilian world as of course the military world. As a basic everyone is expected to address everyone by their proper titles.

In the Army, saluting is to show respect toward an officer, flag, or our country. When talking to a senior Officer, stand at the position of attention unless given the order “ at ease”. When speaking to a senior Noncommissioned Officer, stand at the position of parade rest unless told to stand “ at ease”. Discipline is a specific form of instruction which develops self control, character, and efficiency. The level of discipline directly affects a soldier’s conduct and it affects every aspect of the military life. A person’s rank does not give them license to be rude, over-bearing, or boastful.

Likewise, when a junior renders military courtesies to a senior, it is done as a sign of respect for the senior’s position. Military customs and courtesies are never marks of inferiority because they do not aim nor are they intended to humiliate. When Officers and NCOs step outside the realm of their rank’s authority, which some do, it breeds a feeling of discontent and disrupts the professional quality of the environment. Officers, NCOs and Soldiers alike need to realize that everyone has individual ideas and disrespect is subjective.

It is a custom that junior ranking personnel show their respect to the rank of superiors by assuming the position of parade rest or attention, but it is through courtesy that true military professionals earn respect from their subordinates. Courtesy is a driving force of most human relations. The Army is no different and if leaders expect to be shown respect and courtesy, they must extend the same respects and courtesies to their subordinates. When leaders show arrogance, rudeness, vulgarity, tardiness, lying, and general misconduct or laziness, it shows their Soldiers that they are not respectable.

It's an instance of "the pot calling the kettle black". Leadership means demonstrating through actions what you want your Soldiers to emulate and copy. Too often NCOs and Officers alike feel that once they get to a certain career level, or rank, they are immune to the punishments of UCMJ and some fail to adhere to the same standards that they expect from their Soldiers. I have seen this in my own military career, and in specific, this unit. There are too many double standards, too little focus on the team, and too much focus on yourself.

It is respect which creates devotion to the team, and the important part is that that respect flows both up and down the chain of command. A leader respects the skills, strengths, and sacrifices of the people who work for him, and by giving that respect, in time and with effort, his troops come to respect him as well. That respect grows into devotion: the devotion of the leader to his troops, to do his best to see them through tough times and bring them home to their families, and the devotion of the troops to accomplishing the tasks of their unit under the vision of their leadership. Disrespect, however, has exactly the opposite effect.

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If a leader disrespects his troops, he fails to earn their respect and therefore fails to create devotion to the team. His attitude will be noticed and will become detrimental to morale, which in turn will hurt the combat effectiveness of each troop as well as the whole. Because he cannot respect his troops, he will also fail to recognize their true strengths and employ his forces to the best of their respective abilities. Military courtesy is simply an application of common, everyday courtesy and common sense. The form of salutation and greeting for the civilian consists of raising the hat.

The form of salutation and greeting for the military man consists of rendering the military salute. In all armies of the world, all officers and Soldiers are required to salute each other whenever they meet or pass, the subordinate saluting first. The salute on the part of the subordinate is not intended in any way as an act of degradation or a mark of inferiority, but is simply a military courtesy that is as binding on the officer as it is on the private, and just as the enlisted man is required to salute the officer first, so is the officer required to salute his superiors first.

When military members approach one another, the subordinate salutes first as respect to the person of a higher rank. The superior then returns the salute, acknowledging the subordinate's salute. The subordinate should also initiate a salute at the end of a conversation with someone who outranks them, and this salute should be returned by the superior before the two part ways. A sloppy salute shows a lack of respect. To perform a salute as a member of the military, raise your right hand so that the tip of the forefinger touches the forehead above the right eye.

Your fingers and thumb should be straight, with your upper arm parallel to the ground and your forearm raised at an angle. The salute is finished by quickly dropping your arm to your side in a single motion. While saluting, you should face and make eye contact with the person you're saluting. When saluting, it is customary for the junior member to wish his superior Officer a good morning, afternoon or evening, referring to the higher ranking member as sir or ma'am. If the person is your unit's commanding officer, you may address this officer by rank if it is acceptable.

Many officers come in to the Army for various reasons, but all are placed in positions of higher authority than NCOs and below, because they tend to be higher educated and more capable of making decisions that can affect the overall quality of life, if not life itself. In our unit in basic training, although some may not see it, the Officers help to dictate the safety measures that keep our trainees safe in the training environment. Noncommissioned officers begin their military careers at the lower enlisted levels and work their way up into advanced positions of authority.

I personally feel that the modern Army's way of promoting individuals is biased and unfair. Instead of promotions for job proficiency, today the Army uses a " trivia board" approach. Too often, Soldiers become promotable/promoted simply because others think he/she is a good person, or has paid their dues. This is garbage because these junior NCOs move to other units and don't fully know how to do their own job, but are expected to lead subordinate ranked Soldiers who may be far more job proficient, intelligent and well rounded.

This will continue to pose a problem in the future of the modern Army, and this is one of the main reasons I will be glad to cut all ties to the Army when my contract expires. Bad leadership forces good Soldiers out of the Army. Some of this influx of poor quality Soldiers stems from the multiple wars and overseas engagements that the US Military is currently involved with. If the Army would raise its standards for intelligence, character and personality, we might be able to mitigate many issues ahead.

Nonetheless we are taught to respect the rank of senior leaders, regardless of how worthless we think they are as people. It is important to respect a non-commissioned officer in order to keep the balance in the work place. Even if it's not deserved or given back to you, it's still the rule of the military to show them the proper respects. Not showing these leaders respect may result in getting yourself in unnecessary trouble which will make yourself look bad in front of your other superiors. Other people say that respect should be earned. I think that respect is a two way street. To get respect you have to give respect.