



SENIOR ADVISOR MESSAGE

Volume 1, Issue 2 | July 2021

Hello Junior Officers,

I hope your summer is going well. Mine has been a bit busy with several ongoing personal and professional activities. Professionally, I am still dealing with a lot of COVID related activities and responses. Sometimes I wonder if COVID will ever end. Having said that, it is amazing to think about how far we, as a nation, have advanced over the past year. I still receive earnest thanks for all the work that you, as officers have done. Personally, I have had to deal with the loss of my mother-in-law from cancer and helping my family move forward. My family has expressed heartfelt thanks to me in several ways. Sometimes, the thanks were shown with a gesture as simple as a hug, sometimes it was buying me lunch, sometimes it was just asking in a genuine manner how I was doing.

I use both examples to highlight what I want to spend some time talking about – *appreciation*. By now, most of you have seen the promotion rates this year and that might lead an officer to think that the lower-than-normal rates mean the PHS officers are not appreciated. That cannot be farther from the truth. As has been said many times by different department and agency leadership, PHS fulfills a vital role in improving the healthcare of our nation. Over the years, numerous leaders have recognized the efforts of the Corps. As Surgeon General C. Everett Koop said in the book *Plagues and Politics*, “[w]hat I found was [the PHS] was enormously exciting. The breadth of the PHS, the professionalism and compassion of its staff, and the responsiveness of its programs have made me proud.” YOU are the Corps. You and your colleagues before you are the reason we have the outstanding reputation we are known for.

Recognition and Appreciation

According to the Harvard Business Review (HBR), appreciation is seeing a person for who they are.¹ If you are familiar with the outward mindset, this would be the step called “Seeing Others.” For PHS officers, this means not forgetting that officers are in remote areas; working in arduous conditions; often working extra hours, deploying for 30-, 60-, or 90-days multiple times a year; have family obligations (that are harder to attend if on deployment); friends; and many other individual needs. All of this while producing incredible results in our nation’s public health effort.

So how do we appreciate someone? According to the HBR there are three simple ways:

- Listen – Really listen and give the person who is talking your undivided attention. Put down your computer, phone, and pay attention.
- Tell people what you value about them – Not just when they do something good, or when you need something from them.



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2021 JOAG Senior Advisor

¹ Accessed on July 1, 2021 at <https://hbr.org/2019/11/why-employees-need-both-recognition-and-appreciation>

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- Check-in – Ask people in a genuine manner how they are doing. HBR mentions the quote from Teddy Roosevelt: “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” I have found this to be incredibly true for both myself and the people I have had the privilege to supervise.

On this last point, the Corps leadership really does care about you and your well-being. If you need to talk to someone, please pick up the phone and reach out. Talk to a friend, co-worker, Employee Assistance Program (EAP), Corps Care, supervisor, agency liaison or me.

So, one asks, “Given this outstanding work, how should we be recognized?” The HBR defines recognition as “giving positive feedback based on results or performance.” In PHS it may be formal such as a promotion, award, or selection for a different position. For promotions, billets, or positions, these are often limited, and the limits are usually out of our control. Many times, recognition is informal – think of a genuine thank you or handwritten note. How have these made you feel when you received one? Both informal and formal recognitions are meaningful, motivating, and exciting when issued in a timely and genuine manner.

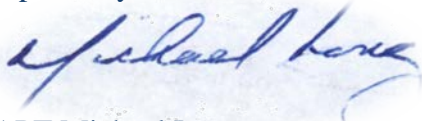
Awards

Going back to awards, I want to take a few lines to talk about them since they do provide recognition and can help lead to other recognitions (i.e., promotions). Officers often can suggest to supervisors and provide input into award nominations, particularly PHS awards. A few items to consider for an award write-up:

- Use simple, factual language to show impact. (How many and over what period)
- Do not use opinionated language, let the facts speak for themselves. (What does “outstanding” mean anyway?)
- When it comes to promotions, you do not need an award every year. You are probably better off allowing some time to accumulate so greater impact and potentially a higher-level nomination can be written. Sometimes there seems to be an urgency especially by Junior Officers to get more awards faster. Often I will make the recommendation to wait a little longer, let your accomplishments build, allow time for that project you are working on to mature and reflect greater impact prior to submitting an award nomination. Remember, the benchmarks reflect higher level awards and recognition for higher ranks. The benchmarks also do not reflect that an officer should have an award every year.
- For promotion, awards do not have to be PHS. They can be agency or other professional awards.

Once again, thank you for everything you do daily, from delivering direct patient care, overseeing healthcare insurance, ensuring the safety of our nation’s drug supply, or guiding and creating healthcare policy. You are the strength of the Corps. And as I stated before, if you need help or guidance, please talk to someone. If you have concerns or questions for our Corps leadership, please forward it to the JOAG leadership or me so we can advocate for you.

Respectfully,



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