

Open the Door

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Open the Door

The purpose of this paper is to offer a lesson learned on the true meaning of the open-door policy and the overlooked benefits. The open-door policy is standard across all military organizations and required by the Department of Defense (DOD) to maintain healthy organizations that are receptive to bottom up feedback. The understanding of the open-door policy for many command teams ends there. Overlooked are the benefits of having an actual open office door leading into a public area frequented by Soldiers of all ranks. Command teams often allow themselves to become distracted and overwhelmed by the chatter that happens in communal areas. Leaders close their doors to the conversations while displaying a policy letter that encourages use of the open-door policy by subordinates. Doors serve multiple purposes, the primary one being to close out others. A closed door is an obstacle to effective leadership and separates leaders from those they serve.

Missed Opportunity

Soldiers often are hesitant to approach their senior leaders due to fear of reprisal from their immediate leadership or ridicule from their peers. Many organizations post signs to inform Soldiers that the common area outside of command team offices is off-limits without prior approval. Soldiers who have valuable feedback and assessments on the health of the organization go unheard outside of closed doors. Policies consciously dedicated to creating separation between Soldiers and their leaders speak volumes about the command climate and health of an organization. Leaders who are not willing to listen are not able to lead in any effective capacity.

Value of Chatter

The chatter that Soldiers engage in daily in offices and workspaces throughout the Army can be overwhelming and likened to the low rumble of distant thunder. Much of the conversation surrounds hobbies, entertainment, significant family events, and the occasional unprofessional comment about their leadership or peers. Other conversations are cries for help or an informal attempt to notify leaders of what is occurring in the organization that they view as a problem. Closed doors block these conversations and unfiltered feedback from the ears of senior leaders and leave them uninformed on the true health of the command climate within their organization.

Conclusion

The military's open-door policy gives leaders the tool necessary to allow command teams to receive real-time assessments on the health of their organizations and to identify issues prior to them getting out of hand. A closed door is an obstacle to effective leadership and separates leaders from those they serve. The simple fix to allow for real-time feedback and assessment on the command climate of an organization is to simply open the door and tear down the restrictive signs that serve as roadblocks to effective communication. It may require an exercise in resilience for leaders to block out the chatter that makes up the majority of the low rumble, but the few tidbits of useful feedback that slip through are worth their weight in gold to command teams.