

MD2

ETHICS

**AUTOMATIC SELECTIONS OF  
SERGEANTS**

**MSG JEFFREY M. HALL**

**WO1 CRAIG EGAN**

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In an effort to overcome our Army's chronic shortage of young NCOs, the Army recently changed its' promotion methodology for Sergeants. This change, though on the surface a good idea, undermines the strength of the noncommissioned officer corps and causes me grave concern for the future of our Army.

In March 2005, the Army Times published an article regarding an upcoming policy change in the Army promotion system. Specifically, the Army approved automatic selections for Sergeant. The specifics of this policy are as follows:

1. Soldiers in the grade of E4, with four years service and one year in grade, will automatically get 350 promotion points.
2. Whenever there is a shortage of Sergeants in a specific Military Occupational Specialty, there will be more Soldiers available to promote.
3. Commanders can remove a soldier from the promotion list they determine unqualified.

The Army instituted this policy to bolster the number of Sergeants, a grade that has had a chronic shortage for years. The positive side of this plan is the immediate increase in the number of Soldiers eligible to fill the ranks of Sergeant. If this is the only intent of the policy then the Army is on the mark. Unfortunately, that is only the first step. Leaders are not made by virtue of giving people Sergeant stripes, leaders are groomed from their first days in the Army. The mentoring they get during their formative years as a young Soldier sets the course for their future service. These Soldiers then are promoted based on demonstrated potential for more responsibility. Automatic selection for promotion removes the need to demonstrate potential for greater responsibility.

Noncommissioned officers have two basic responsibilities: to accomplish the mission and to take care of their soldiers. Promoting soldiers to Sergeant by virtue of time in grade and

time in service does nothing to develop the junior Leader. What this policy will do is reward longevity and eliminates the need for Soldiers to manage their own careers. These new Sergeants, who have not had to take care of themselves, are now responsible for others. How can a Sergeant that has not cared for himself, take care of others? If this can not be done, then how can this new Sergeant live up to the NCO creed?

Proponents of this policy change argue that automatic list integration will motivate Soldiers to work on their promotion points and appear before a board (Tice 2). This opinion is not rational. Soldiers automatically recommended for promotion have lost all reason to work harder at furthering their career. This policy removes individual responsibility, one of the basic principles of Army leadership. When I went to the Primary Leadership Development Course, I learned that NCOs “seek responsibility and take responsibility for their actions”. Now the Army wishes to make promotion to Sergeant a right rather than a reward for exceptional service. Where is the individual responsibility? It is gone!

Advocates of this policy also feel that commanders and senior NCOs are too conservative in boarding and recommending Soldiers for promotion to Sergeant (Tice 2). Commanders and senior NCOs conservative nature of recommending promotions ensures that the right Soldiers get promoted, keeping our NCO corps strong. Additionally, we have to remember that not everyone is a leader. Our Army leadership seems to have forgotten the hollow Army of the 1970's. I fear that if the Army begins promoting Soldiers just to fill vacancies, we may well revisit that sorry period in our Army's history. Quality and not quantity is what keeps our corps the best in the world.

An additional concern is the lack of training available to new Sergeants during this current period of frequent deployments. Sergeants may wear their stripes for a year or more

before going to any leadership training. Young Sergeants can do a lot of damage in a year. These young Leaders can adversely affect retention in many ways. One prime example comes to mind. Sergeants lead Soldiers. If Soldiers do not get the type of leadership they expect or deserve, they tend to vote with their boots as they leave the Army. Poor leadership affects the strength of the Army and our available pool of future leaders. If we want to retain Soldiers, we need to give them trained and qualified leaders.

For all of these reasons, I am greatly concerned about automatic promotions. I am aware of the shortage of Sergeants in the Army and I offer a solution. Place a young Specialist in the NCO position and laterally appoint them a Corporal. Promote the Corporal that serves successfully for six months. This method will ensure that the right Soldier gets the recognition and positive reinforcement he or she deserves. Additionally, this will guarantee that the unit scrutinizes the actions of its' future Sergeants before promoting them.

REFERENCE:

Tice, Jim. "Automatic Selections Shortage of Sergeants Spurs Major Policy Change." Army Times.com 7 March 2005. 8 October 2005 <<http://www.armytimes.com/sgmlparse.php?f=archive2/unknown/atpc19258076.sgml>>