

Counseling

B-1. Counseling is the process used by leaders to review with a subordinate the subordinate's demonstrated performance and potential (Part Three, Chapter 8).

B-2. Counseling is one of the most important leadership development responsibilities for Army leaders. The Army's future and the legacy of today's Army leaders rests on the shoulders of those they help prepare for greater responsibility.

TYPES OF DEVELOPMENTAL COUNSELING

B-3. Developmental counseling is categorized by the purpose of the session. The three major categories of developmental counseling are—

- Event counseling.
- Performance counseling.
- Professional growth counseling.

EVENT COUNSELING

B-4. Event-oriented counseling involves a specific event or situation. It may precede events such as appearing before a promotion board or attending training. It can also follow events such as noteworthy duty performance, a problem with performance or mission accomplishment, or a personal issue. Examples of event-oriented counseling include—

- Instances of superior or substandard performance.
- Reception and integration counseling.
- Crisis counseling.
- Referral counseling.
- Promotion counseling.
- Separation counseling.

Counseling for Specific Instances

B-5. Sometimes counseling is tied to specific instances of superior or substandard duty performance. The leader uses the counseling session to convey to the subordinate whether or not the performance met the standard and what the subordinate did right or wrong. Successful counseling for specific performance occurs as close to the event as possible. Leaders should counsel subordinates for exceptional as well as substandard duty performance. The key is to strike a balance between the two. To maintain an appropriate balance, leaders keep track of counseling for exceptional versus substandard performance.

B-6. Although good leaders attempt to balance their counseling emphasis, leaders should always counsel subordinates who do not meet the standard. If the Soldier or civilian's performance is unsatisfactory because of a lack of knowledge or ability, leader and subordinate can develop a plan for improvement. Corrective training helps ensure that the subordinate knows and consistently achieves the standard.

B-7. When counseling a subordinate for a specific performance, take the following actions:

- Explain the purpose of the counseling—what was expected, and how the subordinate failed to meet the standard.
- Address the specific unacceptable behavior or action—do not attack the person's character.
- Explain the effect of the behavior, action, or performance on the rest of the organization.
- Actively listen to the subordinate's response.
- Remain neutral.
- Teach the subordinate how to meet the standard.
- Be prepared to do some personal counseling, since a failure to meet the standard may be related to or be the result of an unresolved personal problem.

Explain to the subordinate how an individual development plan will improve performance and identify specific responsibilities in implementing the plan. Continue to assess and follow up on the subordinate's progress. Adjust the plan as necessary.

Reception and Integration Counseling

B-8. Caring and empathic Army leaders should counsel all new team members when they join the organization. Reception and integration counseling serves two important purposes:

- It identifies and helps alleviate any problems or concerns that new members may have, including any issues resulting from the new duty assignment.
- It familiarizes new team members with the organizational standards and how they fit into the team. It clarifies roles and assignments and sends the message that the chain of command cares.

B-9. Reception and integration counseling should among others include the following discussion points:

- Chain of command familiarization.
- Organizational standards.
- Security and safety issues.
- Noncommissioned officer (NCO) support channel (who is in it and how it is used).
- On- and off-duty conduct.
- Personnel/personal affairs/initial and special clothing issue.
- Organizational history, structure, and mission.
- Soldier programs within the organization, such as Soldier of the Month/Quarter/Year, and educational and training opportunities.
- Off limits and danger areas.
- Functions and locations of support activities.
- On- and off-post recreational, educational, cultural, and historical opportunities.
- Foreign nation or host nation orientation.
- Other areas the individual should be aware of as determined by the leader.

Crisis Counseling

B-10. Crisis counseling includes getting a Soldier or employee through a period of shock after receiving negative news, such as the notification of the death of a loved one. It focuses on the subordinate's immediate short-term needs. Leaders may assist the subordinate by listening and providing appropriate assistance. Assisting can also mean referring the subordinate to a support activity or coordinating for external agency support, such as obtaining emergency funding for a flight ticket or putting them in contact with a chaplain.

Referral Counseling

B-11. Referral counseling helps subordinates work through a personal situation. It may or may not follow crisis counseling. Referral counseling aims at preventing a problem from becoming unmanageable if the empathic Army leader succeeds in identifying the problem in time and involves appropriate resources, such as Army Community Services, a chaplain, or an alcohol and drug counselor. (Figure B-4 lists support activities.)

Promotion Counseling

B-12. Army leaders must conduct promotion counseling for all specialists and sergeants who are eligible for advancement without waivers but not recommended for promotion to the next higher grade. Army regulations require that Soldiers within this category receive initial (event-oriented) counseling when they attain full promotion eligibility and then periodic (performance/personal growth) counseling thereafter.

Adverse Separation Counseling

B-13. Adverse separation counseling may involve informing the Soldier of the administrative actions available to the commander in the event substandard performance continues and of the consequences associated with those administrative actions (see AR 635-200).

B-14. Developmental counseling may not apply when an individual has engaged in serious acts of misconduct. In those situations, leaders should refer the matter to the commander and the servicing staff judge advocate. When rehabilitative efforts fail, counseling with a view towards separation is required. It is an administrative prerequisite to many administrative discharges, while sending a final warning to the Soldier: improve performance or face discharge. In many situations, it is advisable to involve the chain of command as soon as it is determined that adverse separation counseling might be required. A unit first sergeant or the commander should inform the Soldier of the notification requirements outlined in AR 635- 200.

PERFORMANCE COUNSELING

B-15. During performance counseling, leaders conduct a review of a subordinate's duty performance over a certain period. Simultaneously, leader and subordinate jointly establish performance objectives and standards for the next period. Rather than dwelling on the past, focus on the future: the subordinate's strengths, areas of improvement, and potential.

B-16. Performance counseling is required under the officer, NCO, and Army civilian evaluation reporting systems. The officer evaluation report (OER) (DA Form 67-9) process requires periodic performance counseling as part of the OER Support Form requirements. Mandatory, face-to-face performance counseling between the rater and the rated NCO is required under the noncommissioned officer evaluation reporting system. (See AR 623-3). Performance evaluation for civilian employees also includes both of these requirements.

B-17. Counseling at the beginning of and during the evaluation period ensures the subordinate's personal involvement in the evaluation process. Performance counseling communicates standards and is an opportunity for leaders to establish and clarify the expected values, attributes, and competencies. The OER support form's coverage of leader attributes and competencies is an excellent tool for leader performance counseling. For lieutenants and junior warrant officers, the major performance objectives on the OER Support Form (DA Form 67-9-1) are used as the basis for determining the developmental tasks on the Developmental Support Form (DA Form 67-9-1A). Quarterly face-to-face performance and developmental counseling is required for these junior officers as outlined in AR 623-3. Army leaders ensure that performance objectives and standards are focused and tied to the organization's objectives and the individual's professional development. They should also echo the objectives on the leader's support form as a team member's performance contributes to mission accomplishment.

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH COUNSELING

B-18. Professional growth counseling includes planning for the accomplishment of individual and professional goals. During the counseling, leader and subordinate conduct a review to identify and discuss the subordinate's strengths and weaknesses and to create an individual development plan that builds upon those strengths and compensates for (or eliminates) weaknesses.

B-19. As part of professional growth counseling, leader and subordinate may choose to develop a "pathway to success" with short- and long-term goals and objectives. The discussion of the pathway includes opportunities for civilian or military schooling, future duty assignments, special programs, and reenlistment options. An individual development plan is a requirement for all Soldiers and Army civilians as every person's needs and interests are different.

B-20. Career field counseling is required for lieutenants and captains before they are considered for promotion to major. Raters and senior raters in conjunction with the rated officer need to determine where the officer's skills and talents best fit the needs of the Army. The rated officer's preference and abilities (both performance and intellectual) must be considered. The rater and senior rater should discuss career field designation with the officer prior to making a recommendation on the rated officer's OER.

B-21. While these categories can help organize and focus counseling sessions, they should not be viewed as separate or exhaustive. For example, a counseling session that focuses on resolving a problem may also address improving duty performance. A session focused on performance often includes a discussion on opportunities for professional growth. Regardless of the topic of the counseling session, leaders should follow a basic format to prepare for and conduct it. The Developmental Counseling Form, DA Form 4856, discussed at the end of this appendix provides a useful framework to prepare for almost any type of counseling. Use it to help mentally organize the relevant issues to cover during counseling sessions.

THE LEADER AS A COUNSELOR

B-22. To be effective, developmental counseling must be a shared effort. Leaders assist their subordinates in identifying strengths and weaknesses and creating plans of action. Once an individual development plan is agreed upon, they support their Soldiers and civilians throughout the plan implementation and continued assessment. To achieve success, subordinates must be forthright in their commitment to improve and candid in their own assessments and goal setting.

B-23. Army leaders evaluate Army civilians using procedures prescribed under civilian personnel policies. DA Form 4856 is appropriate to counsel Army civilians on professional growth and career goals. DA Form 4856 is not adequate to address civilian counseling concerning Army civilian misconduct or poor performance. The servicing Civilian Personnel Office can provide guidance for such situations.

B-24. Caring and empathic Army leaders conduct counseling to help subordinates become better team members, maintain or improve performance, and prepare for the future. While it is not easy to address every possible counseling situation, leader self-awareness and an adaptable counseling style focusing on key characteristics will enhance personal effectiveness as a counselor. These key characteristics include—

- Purpose:** Clearly define the purpose of the counseling.
- Flexibility:** Fit the counseling style to the character of each subordinate and to the relationship desired.
- Respect:** View subordinates as unique, complex individuals, each with a distinct set of values, beliefs, and attitudes.
- Communication:** Establish open, two-way communication with subordinates using spoken language, nonverbal actions, gestures, and body language. Effective counselors listen more than they speak.
- Support:** Encourage subordinates through actions while guiding them through their problems.

THE QUALITIES OF THE COUNSELOR

B-25. Army leaders must demonstrate certain qualities to be effective counselors. These qualities include respect for subordinates, self-awareness and cultural awareness, empathy, and credibility.

B-26. One challenging aspect of counseling is selecting the proper approach to a specific situation. To counsel effectively, the technique used must fit the situation, leader capabilities, and subordinate expectations. Sometimes, leaders may only need to give information or listen, while in other situations a subordinate's improvement may call for just a brief word of praise. Difficult circumstances may require structured counseling followed by definite actions, such as referrals to outside experts and agencies.

B-27. Self-aware Army leaders consistently develop and improve their own counseling abilities. They do so by studying human behavior, learning the kinds of problems that affect their followers, and developing person and session to session. However, general skills that leaders will need in almost every situation include active listening, responding, and questioning.

ACTIVE LISTENING

B-28. Active listening helps communicate reception of the subordinate's message verbally and nonverbally. To capture the message fully, leaders listen to what is said and observe the subordinate's manners. Key elements of active listening include—

- **Eye contact.** Maintaining eye contact without staring helps show sincere interest. Occasional breaks of eye contact are normal and acceptable, while excessive breaks, paper shuffling, and clock-watching may be perceived as a lack of interest or concern.
- **Body posture.** Being relaxed and comfortable will help put the subordinate at ease. However, a too-relaxed position or slouching may be interpreted as a lack of interest.
- **Head nods.** Occasionally head nodding indicates paying attention and encourages the subordinate to continue.
- **Facial expressions.** Keep facial expressions natural and relaxed to signal a sincere interest.
- **Verbal expressions.** Refrain from talking too much and avoid interrupting. Let the subordinate do the talking, while keeping the discussion on the counseling subject.

B-29. Active listening implies listening thoughtfully and deliberately to capture the nuances of the subordinate's language. Stay alert for common themes. A subordinate's opening and closing statements as well as recurring references may indicate his priorities. Inconsistencies and gaps may indicate an avoidance of the real issue. Certain inconsistencies may suggest additional questions by the counselor.

B-30. Pay attention to the subordinate's gestures to understand the complete message. By watching the subordinate's actions, leaders identify the emotions behind the words. Not all actions are proof of a subordinate's feelings but they should be considered. Nonverbal indicators of a subordinate's attitude include—

- **Boredom.** Drumming on the table, doodling, clicking a ballpoint pen, or resting the head in the palm of the hand.
- **Self-confidence.** Standing tall, leaning back with hands behind the head, and maintaining steady eye contact.
- **Defensiveness.** Pushing deeply into a chair, glaring at the leader, and making sarcastic comments as well as crossing or folding arms in front of the chest.
- **Frustration.** Rubbing eyes, pulling on an ear, taking short breaths, wringing the hands, or frequently changing total body position.
- **Interest, friendliness, and openness.** Moving toward the leader while sitting.
- **Anxiety.** Sitting on the edge of the chair with arms uncrossed and hands open.

B-31. Leaders consider each indicator carefully. Although each may reveal something about the subordinate, do not judge too quickly. When unsure look for reinforcing indicators or check with the subordinate to understand the behavior, determine what is underlying it, and allow the subordinate to take responsibility.

RESPONDING

B-32. A leader responds verbally and nonverbally to show understanding of the subordinate. Verbal responses consist of summarizing, interpreting, and clarifying the subordinate's message. Nonverbal responses include eye contact and occasional gestures such as a head nod.

QUESTIONING

B-33. Although focused questioning is an important skill, counselors should use it with caution. Too many questions can aggravate the power differential between a leader and a subordinate and place the subordinate in a passive mode. The subordinate may also react to excessive questioning as an intrusion of privacy and become defensive. During a leadership development review, ask questions to obtain information or to get the subordinate to think deeper about a particular situation. Questions should evoke more than a yes or no answer. Well-posed questions deepen understanding, encourage further explanation, and help the subordinate perceive the counseling session as a constructive experience.

COUNSELING ERRORS

B-34. Dominating the counseling by talking too much, giving unnecessary or inappropriate advice, not truly listening, and projecting personal likes, dislikes, biases, and prejudices all interfere with effective counseling.

Competent leaders avoid rash judgments, stereotyping, losing emotional control, inflexible counseling methods, or improper follow-up.

B-35. To improve leader counseling skills, follow these general guidelines:

- To help resolve the problem or improve performance, determine the subordinate's role in the situation and what the subordinate has done.
- Draw conclusions based on more factors than the subordinate's statement.
- Try to understand what the subordinate says and feels; listen to what is said and how it is said
- Display empathy when discussing the problem.
- When asking questions, be sure the information is needed.
- Keep the conversation open-ended and avoid interrupting.
- Give the subordinate your full attention.
- Be receptive to the subordinate's emotions, without feeling responsible to save the subordinate from hurting.
- Encourage the subordinate to take the initiative and to speak aloud.
- Avoid interrogating.
- Keep personal experiences out of the counseling session, unless you believe your experiences will really help.
- Listen more and talk less.
- Remain objective.
- Avoid confirming a subordinate's prejudices.
- Help the subordinates help themselves.
- Know what information to keep confidential and what to present to the chain of command, if necessary.

ACCEPTING LIMITATIONS

B-36. Army leaders cannot help everyone in every situation. Recognize personal limitations and seek outside assistance, when required. When necessary, refer a subordinate to the agency more qualified to help.

B-37. The agency list in figure B-1 assists in solving problems. Although it is generally in an individual's best interest to begin by seeking help from their first-line leaders, caring leaders should respect an individual's preference to contact any of these agencies on their own.

ADAPTIVE APPROACHES TO COUNSELING

B-38. An effective leader approaches each subordinate as an individual. Different people and different situations require different counseling approaches. Three approaches to counseling include nondirective, directive, and combined (see Part Three, Chapter 8 for more). These approaches differ in specific techniques, but all fit the definition of counseling and contribute to its overall purpose. The major difference between the approaches is the degree to which the subordinate participates and interacts during a counseling session. Figure B-2 identifies the advantages and disadvantages of each approach.

COUNSELING TECHNIQUES

B-39. The Army leader can select from several techniques when counseling subordinates. These techniques may cause subordinates to change behavior and improve upon their performance. Counseling techniques leaders may explore during the nondirective or combined approaches include—

- Suggesting alternatives.** Discuss alternative actions that the subordinate may take. Leader and subordinate together decide which course of action is most appropriate.
- Recommending.** Recommend one course of action, but leave the decision to accept it to the subordinate.
- Persuading.** Persuade the subordinate that a given course of action is best, but leave the final decision to the subordinate. Successful persuasion depends on the leader's credibility, the subordinate's willingness to listen, and mutual trust.
- Advising.** Advise the subordinate that a given course of action is best. This is the strongest form of influence not involving a command.

B-40. Techniques to use during the directive approach to counseling include—

- Corrective training.** Teach and assist the subordinate in attaining and maintaining the required standard. A subordinate completes corrective training when the standard is consistently attained.
- Commanding.** Order the subordinate to take a given course of action in clear, precise words. The subordinate understands the order and will face consequences for failing to carry it out.

THE FOUR-STAGE COUNSELING PROCESS

B-41. Effective Army leaders make use of a four-stage counseling process:

- Identify the need for counseling.
- Prepare for counseling.
- Conduct counseling.
- Follow-up.

STAGE 1: IDENTIFY THE NEED FOR COUNSELING

B-42. Usually organizational policies—such as counseling associated with an evaluation or command directed counseling—focus a counseling session. However, leaders may also conduct developmental counseling whenever the need arises for focused, two-way communication aimed at subordinate's development. Developing subordinates consists of observing the subordinate's performance, comparing it to the standard, and then providing feedback to the subordinate in the form of counseling.

STAGE 2: PREPARE FOR COUNSELING

B-43. Successful counseling requires preparation in the following seven areas:

- Select a suitable place.
- Schedule the time.
- Notify the subordinate well in advance.
- Organize information.
- Outline the counseling session components.
- Plan the counseling strategy.
- Establish the right atmosphere.

Select a Suitable Place

B-44. Conduct the counseling in an environment that minimizes interruptions and is free from distracting sights and sounds.

Schedule the Time

B-45. When possible, counsel a subordinate during the duty day. Counseling after duty hours may be rushed or perceived as unfavorable. Select a time free from competition with other activities. Consider that important events occurring after the session could distract a subordinate from concentrating on the counseling. The scheduled time for counseling should also be appropriate for the complexity of the issue at hand. Generally, counseling sessions should last less than an hour.

Notify the Subordinate Well in Advance

B-46. Counseling is a subordinate-centered, two-person effort for which the subordinate must have adequate time to prepare. The person to be counseled should know why, where, and when the counseling takes place. Counseling tied to a specific event should happen as closely to the event as possible. For performance or professional development counseling, subordinates may need at least a week or more to prepare or review specific documents and resources, including evaluation support forms or counseling records.

Organize Information

B-47. The counselor should review all pertinent information, including the purpose of the counseling, facts, and observations about the person to be counseled, identification of possible problems, and main points of discussion. The counselor can outline a possible plan of action with clear obtainable goals as a basis for the final plan development between counselor and the Soldier or civilian.

Outline the Components of the Counseling Session

B-48. Using the available information, determine the focus and specific topics of the counseling session. Note what prompted the counseling requirement, aims, and counselor role. Identify possible key comments and questions to keep the counseling session subordinate-centered and which can help guide the subordinate through the session's stages. As subordinates may be unpredictable during counseling, a written outline can help keep the session on track and enhances the chance for focused success.

Figure B-3. Example of a counseling outline

Plan the Counseling Strategy

B-49. There are many different approaches to counseling. The directive, nondirective, and combined approaches offer a variety of options that can suit any subordinates and situation (see figure B-3 and Part Three, Chapter 8).

Establish the Right Atmosphere

B-50. The right atmosphere promotes open, two-way communication between a leader and subordinate. To establish a more relaxed atmosphere, offer the subordinate a seat or a cup of coffee. If appropriate, choose to sit in a chair facing the subordinate since a desk can act as a barrier.

B-51. Some situations require more formal settings. During counseling to correct substandard performance, leaders seated behind a desk may direct the subordinate to remain standing. This reinforces the leader's role and authority and underscores the severity of the situation.

STAGE 3: CONDUCT THE COUNSELING SESSION

B-52. Caring Army leaders use a balanced mix of formal and informal counseling and learn to take advantage of everyday events to provide subordinates with feedback. Counseling opportunities often appear when leaders encounter subordinates in their daily activities in the field, motor pool, barracks, and wherever else Soldiers and civilians perform their duties. Even during ad-hoc counseling, leaders should address the four basic components of a counseling session:

- Opening the session.
- Discussing the issues.
- Developing a plan of action.
- Recording and closing the session.

Open the Session

B-53. In the session opening, the leader counselor states the purpose and establishes a subordinate-centered setting. The counselor establishes an atmosphere of shared purpose by inviting the subordinate to speak. An appropriate purpose statement might be "SFC Taylor, the purpose of this counseling is to discuss your duty performance over the past month and to create a plan to enhance performance and attain performance goals." If applicable, start the counseling session by reviewing the status of the current plan of action.

Discuss the Issues

B-54. Leader and counseled individual should attempt to develop a mutual and clear understanding of the counseling issues. Use active listening and invite the subordinate to do most of the talking. Respond and ask questions without dominating the conversation but help the subordinate better understand the subject of the counseling session: duty performance, a problem situation and its impact, or potential areas for growth.

B-55. To reduce the perception of bias or early judgment, both leader and subordinate should provide examples or cite specific observations. When the issue is substandard performance, the leader must be clear why the performance did not meet the standard. During the discussion, the leader must clearly establish what the subordinate must do to meet the standard in the future. It is very important that the leader frames the issue at hand as substandard performance and prevents the subordinate from labeling the issue as an unreasonable standard. An exception would be when the leader considers the current standard as negotiable or is willing to alter the conditions under which the subordinate can meet the standard.

Develop a Plan of Action

B-56. A plan of action identifies a method and pathway for achieving a desired result. It specifies what the subordinate must do to reach agreed-upon goals set during the counseling session. The plan of action must be specific, showing the subordinate how to modify or maintain his or her behavior. Example: “PFC Miller, next week you’ll attend the map reading class with 1st Platoon. After the class, SGT Dixon will personally coach you through the land navigation course. He will help you develop your skills with the compass. After observing you going through the course with SGT Dixon, I will meet with you again to determine if you still need additional training.”

Record and Close the Session

B-57. Although requirements to record counseling sessions vary, a leader always benefits from documenting the main points of a counseling session, even the informal ones. Documentation serves as a ready reference for the agreed-upon plan of action and helps the leader track the subordinate’s accomplishments, improvements, personal preferences, or problems. A good record of counseling enables the leader to make proper recommendations for professional development, schools, promotions, and evaluation reports.

B-58. Army regulations require specific written records of counseling for certain personnel actions, such as barring a Soldier from reenlisting, processing an administrative separation, or placing a Soldier in the overweight program. When a Soldier faces involuntary separation, the leader must maintain accurate counseling records. Documentation of substandard actions often conveys a strong message to subordinates that a further slip in performance or discipline could require more severe action or punishment.

B-59. When closing the counseling session, summarize the key points and ask if the subordinate understands and agrees with the proposed plan of action. With the subordinate present, establish any follow-up measures necessary to support the successful implementation of the plan of action. Follow-up measures may include providing the subordinate with specific resources and time, periodic assessments of the plan, and additional referrals. If possible, schedule future meetings before dismissing the subordinate.

STAGE 4: FOLLOW-UP

Leader Responsibilities

B-60. The counseling process does not end with the initial counseling session. It continues throughout the implementation of the plan of action, consistent with the observed results. Sometimes, the initial plan of action will require modification to meet its goals. Leaders must consistently support their subordinates in implementing the plan of action by teaching, coaching, mentoring, or providing additional time, referrals, and other appropriate resources. Additional measures may include more focused follow-up counseling, informing the chain of command, and taking more severe corrective measures.

Assess the Plan of Action

B-61. During assessment, the leader and the subordinate jointly determine if the desired results were achieved. They should determine the date for their initial assessment during the initial counseling session. The plan of action assessment provides useful information for future follow-up counseling sessions.

SUMMARY—THE COUNSELING PROCESS AT A GLANCE

B-62. Use figure B-5 as a quick reference whenever counseling Soldiers or civilian team members.

Figure B-5. A summary of counseling

THE DEVELOPMENTAL COUNSELING FORM

B-63. The Developmental Counseling Form (DA Form 4856) is designed to help Army leaders conduct and record counseling sessions. Figures B-6 and B-7 show a completed DA Form 4856 documenting the counseling of a young Soldier with financial problems. Although derogatory, it is still developmental counseling. Leaders must decide when counseling, additional training, rehabilitation, reassignment, or other developmental options have been exhausted. Figures B-8 and B-9 show a routine performance/professional growth counseling for a unit first