

AUTHORITY

As a noncommissioned officer, you must know what authority you have and where it comes from. You are also expected to use good judgment when exercising your authority.

Authority is defined as the right to direct soldiers to do certain things. Authority is the legitimate power of leaders to direct soldiers or to take action within the scope of their position. Military authority begins with the Constitution, which divides it between Congress and the President. The President, as commander in chief, commands the armed forces, including the Army. The authority from the Commander-in-Chief extends through the chain of command, with the assistance of the NCO support channel, to the squad, section or team leader who then directs and supervises the actions of individual soldiers. When you say, "PFC Lee, you and PFC Johnson start filling sandbags; SPC Garcia and SPC Smith will provide security from that hill," you are turning into action the orders of the entire chain of command.

In the Army there are two basic types of authority: **command** authority and **general** military authority.

Command authority is the authority leaders have over soldiers by virtue of rank or assignment. Command authority originates with the President and may be supplemented by law or regulation. Even though it is called "command" authority, it is not limited to officers – you have command authority inherent in your leadership position as a tank commander or team leader, for example. Noncommissioned officers' command authority is inherent with the job by virtue of position to direct or control soldiers.

"It takes guts for an NCO to use inherent authority and responsibility in training, maintaining, leading, and caring for soldiers."

SMA Glen E. Morrell

Leading soldiers includes the authority to organize, direct and control your assigned soldiers so that they accomplish assigned missions. It also includes authority to use assigned equipment and resources to accomplish your missions. Remember that this only applies to soldiers and facilities in your unit. For example, if the platoon sergeant of first platoon goes on leave and a squad leader is put in charge, that squad leader has command authority over only first platoon, until he is relieved from the responsibility. The soldiers in first platoon will obey the squad leader's orders due to his position. However, the squad leader does not have command authority over another platoon.

"As a leader... you are not given authority, status and position as a personal reward to enjoy in comfort. You are given them so that you may be of greater service to your subordinates, your unit and your country."

FM 22-100, *Army Leadership* (1983)

General military authority is authority extended to all soldiers to take action and act in the absence of a unit leader or other designated authority. It originates in oaths of office, law, rank structure, traditions and regulations. This broad-based authority also allows leaders to take appropriate corrective actions whenever a member of any armed service, anywhere, commits an act involving a breach of good order or discipline. For example, if you see soldiers in a brawl, you have the general military authority (and the obligation) to stop the fight. This authority applies even if none of the soldiers are in your unit. General military authority exists whether you are on duty or not, in uniform or in civilian attire and regardless of location. For example, you are off duty, in civilian clothes and in the PX and you see a soldier in uniform with his headgear raised up and trousers unbloused. You stop the soldier immediately, identify yourself and ensure the soldier understands and makes the necessary corrections. If he refuses, saying you don't have the authority to tell him what to do because he's not in your NCO support channel, *the soldier is wrong*.

You as an NCO have both general military authority and the duty to enforce standards as outlined in AR 670-1. Your authority to enforce those regulations is specified in AR 600-20 and if you neglect your duty, you can be held accountable. If the soldier refuses to obey you, what can you do? For starters, you can explain that you have authority regardless of your location, your unit, or whether you are in uniform or civilian attire. You may decide to settle for the soldier's name and unit. If so, a phone call to his first sergeant should be more than enough to ensure that such an incident does not recur.

"Speak with your own voice."

CSM Clifford R. West

Delegation of authority. Just as Congress and the President cannot participate in every aspect of the armed forces operations, most leaders cannot handle every action directly. To meet the organization's goals, officers delegate authority to NCOs in the NCO Support Channel who, in turn, may further delegate that authority. Unless restricted by law, regulation, or a superior, leaders may delegate any or all of their authority to their subordinate leaders. However, such delegation must fall within the leader's scope of authority. Leaders cannot delegate authority they do not have and subordinate leaders may not assume authority that superiors do not have, cannot delegate, or have retained. The task or duty to be performed limits the authority of the leader to whom it is assigned.

Both command and general military authority originate in the Constitution and Congress has further defined them in law. More explicit sources are Army Regulations, the Manual for Courts Martial (MCM) and the chain of command/NCO support channel.

You don't need to read or remember all Army Regulations (ARs) but study those that pertain to your job. If necessary, ask other NCOs to help you find out what regulations pertain to you, where they can be found and how to interpret them. Start with AR 600-20. It covers enlisted soldiers' and noncommissioned officers' authority and responsibilities.

The Manual for Courts Martial (MCM, 2002) describes legal aspects of the authority of the noncommissioned officer. It states in part that, "All commissioned officers, warrant officers and noncommissioned officers are authorized to stop quarrels, frays and disorders among persons subject to the code...." Severe penalties are imposed for violations such as disrespect, insubordination, or assault. No one expects you to be an expert on military law, but as a noncommissioned officer you should know the definition of these words and be able to explain them to your soldiers. Your legal clerk can be a good source of information.

Authority of the NCO is part of the equation in military discipline.

Your authority also stems from the combination of the chain of command and the NCO support channel. Orders and policies that pass through the chain of command or the NCO support channel automatically provide the authority necessary to get the job done. With such broad authority given to all commissioned officers and noncommissioned officers, the responsibility to use mature, sound judgment is critical. The chain of command backs up the NCO support channel by legally punishing those who challenge the NCO's authority. But it does so only if the noncommissioned officer's actions and orders are sound, intelligent and based on proper authority. To be a good leader, you should learn what types of authority you have and where it comes from. Whenever in doubt, ask. Once you're confident that you know the extent of your authority, use sound judgment in applying it. Then you will be a leader respected by both your soldiers and superiors.