



CompanyCommand

Building Combat-Ready Teams



To: Platoon- and Company-Level Leaders

From: Experienced Platoon Leaders

The Platoon Leader-Platoon Sergeant Relationship

The relationship between a platoon leader and platoon sergeant can make or break a unit. As platoon leaders, our relationships with our platoon sergeants can often feel like arranged marriages: We don't get to choose our partner, but we sure do have to make the relationship work, not only for the sake of the "kids" (our Soldiers) but also for "the community" (our company and battalion). Complicating things, the PL-PSG relationship typically involves a relatively inexperienced commissioned officer leading a

much more experienced noncommissioned officer.

To gain greater understanding of the platoon leader-platoon sergeant relationship, more than 200 first lieutenants commissioned in 2009—all of them current or past platoon leaders—shared their experiences of working with their platoon sergeants in a January 2012 survey in the Platoon Leader Forum. These lieutenants' responses, excerpted here, highlight both the diversity and significance of their PL-PSG relationships.

Assessing the Relationship

Our relationship was awesome. One has to be the enforcer, and that responsibility lies within the role of the NCO. My first PSG was a standards-enforcing machine. That made it much easier for me to perform my duties and all the additional duties that my company gave me. At times, however, my PSG even had to enforce the standards on me. Some officers get really offended when NCOs do that, but just because you're an officer that doesn't place you above the standards. —1LT, EN

Our relationship was horrible. My platoon sergeant was someone who was stuck at E-6. He basically held the posi-

tion because of a shortage of NCOs in the unit. I learned a lot from the operations sergeants during this time, mainly about how to deal with a delinquent and incompetent PSG. It was a terrible relationship and terrible introduction to the NCO Corps. To this day, I micromanage more than I should, and it is all because of my first PSG, whom everyone said to trust wholeheartedly but was crap and not worth a minute of my time. —1LT, MP

Our relationship was difficult. I had a PSG who had been a PSG for three years, and the two previous platoon leaders were weak leaders. It was difficult getting the PSG to let go of things she shouldn't have had to do in the first place. —1LT, SC

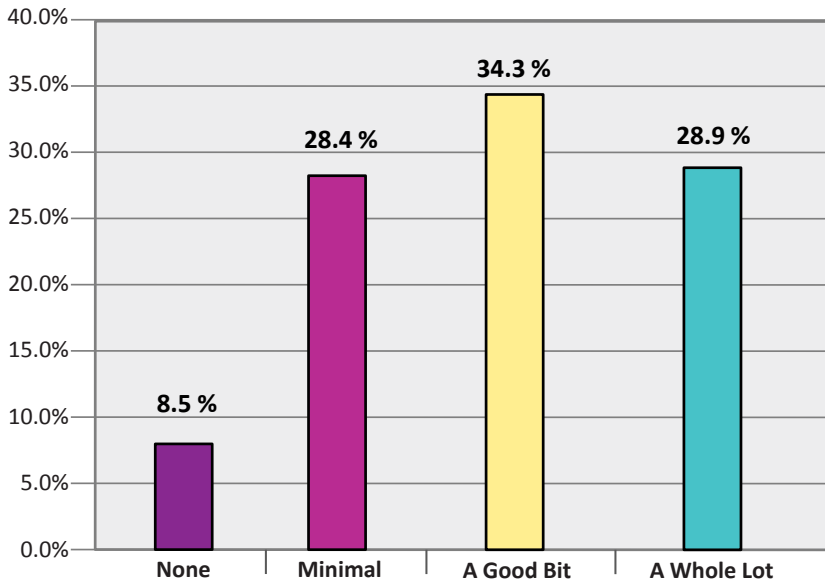
My platoon sergeant was an aggressive, stubborn man, but he truly cared for our Soldiers and worked himself to the bone for them. He didn't spare me either, and his development furthered my leadership skills and taught me about NCO-officer dynamics. We never had a real argument, but always managed to hash things out diplomatically. We brought up any issues we had with each other immediately—away from the troops—and resolved them.

1LT Alex Pruden and his platoon sergeant, SFC Thomas Kunnmann, led 3rd Platoon, Company C, 1-327 Infantry Regiment in Afghanistan.



To what extent do you feel “developed” by your PSG(s)?

201 Responses



From day one, he was always telling me to stay out of his lane, which is extremely rare among the platoon sergeants I've seen. Too many will allow a young, inexperienced platoon leader, fresh with ambition out of BOLC, to dive right in and wear himself out doing the job of his NCOs. My first PSG took care of the Soldiers, drove and developed the NCOs, and kept me out of trouble. I couldn't have asked for any better. —1LT, IN

My first platoon sergeant was amazing. I met my first platoon about halfway through their deployment. The platoon hadn't had a platoon leader since the beginning of the deployment; the PSG had been filling both roles. He was a very knowledgeable, professional NCO, yet also a very humble man. As soon as I arrived, he took me under his wing. I explained to him that I knew doctrine and what I had learned in school and in training, and that I knew he had the practical experience, so I wanted to learn whatever he could teach me. Immediately we clicked and developed a very close working relationship. We learned each other's strengths and

weaknesses and divvied up tasks accordingly. We had our disagreements but always in private, and at the end of the argument if we could not reach an agreement, he would defer to me and issue guidance as if it were his own. All in all, I was incredibly lucky. —1LT, MS

My PSG was controlling. He ran the platoon in garrison, and I, as a new LT, was expected to follow and observe. That was good for the first three months, but as a leader I had to step up and take control to let him know that I was not his student—I was his partner/leader. —1LT, CM

We had a great working relationship because we each understood our doctrinal roles. He handled all the administrative issues and I handled all of the planning. He also had the ability to step in and assume the role of platoon leader if I had to be pulled away for something. The relationship worked because he valued my contributions to

the platoon and recognized that I was ultimately the ground force commander; he never undermined me, even when he disagreed with me. If he did have an issue with something I put out, he would always address it with me offline instead of putting out contradictory information. The key to our success was always being a unified front, whereby he would ultimately support the decisions I made and I would always seek his input before making them. —1LT, IN

Our relationship was a work-only relationship. It started off well and then started going a little sour. I made several mistakes when I first became PL. The first one was allowing several people within the platoon and company to talk negatively about him. That changed my whole outlook and perception about him. I never gave him a fair shake or a clean slate as I should have. So before I ever met him, I was already looking for him to be lazy, not proactive and everything else that comes along with those preconceptions. The second mistake I made was trying to be a squad leader instead of the PL. —1LT, QM

What is the most important lesson you learned from your PSG?

- Confidence and aggressiveness.
- How to talk to NCOs as professionals.
- To be clear in orders and to require back briefs to ensure the orders are understood.
- How to talk to my company commander and make suggestions.
- How to manage time and expectations and to delegate tasks.
- Training and taking care of Soldiers.
- Accountability of property.
- To trust my subordinates.
- Patience and the division of tasks.
- An understanding of where Soldiers come from and the hardships that they encounter.
- That people are always watching—always!
- That good new lieutenants come from good platoon sergeants who are willing to mentor their PLs.
- Not to startle him in the middle of the night! I tried to spook him one night and he came out of the rack like a bear that had been shot by a .22. Man, was he grumpy!

A CompanyCommand Glossary

1SG First sergeant
ADA Air Defense Artillery
AR Armor
BOLC Basic Officer Leadership Course
CM Chemical
CO Commanding officer
EN Engineer

FA Field Artillery
FOB Forward operating base
IN Infantry
KLE Key leader engagement
LFX Live-fire exercise
LT Lieutenant
MP Military Police
MS Medical Service

NCO Noncommissioned officer
OPORD Operation order
PLT Platoon
PT Physical training
QM Quartermaster
SC Signal
SFC Sergeant first class
TC Transportation

We eventually had a great relationship, but it took a long time to build rapport because her previous PL had never been around and hadn't taken the time to work on their leader relationship. She thought I would be the same, but when she saw I was around, interested and cared about Soldiers, she started to warm up to me. —**1LT, MS**

He was exasperating at first. It took time for me to develop a relationship with my PSG. He was an old-school SFC who had been deployed seven times and had seen everything under the sun. I was just another cherry LT he had to deal with. He was outstanding at what he did and he knew it, but he trained me well and eventually, over time as I learned, he began to accept me as the PL. At first, however, he did not. —**1LT, TC**

Constructive but critical. I am not sure if my first PSG had had very good PLs before I arrived. He was very guarded and distant, as though I were about to order the entire platoon to their doom, but after a while, he and I got to know each other well enough to understand where we both were coming from. He realized that I was on the up-and-up and had the best interests of the platoon in mind. —**1LT, EN**

The relationship was professional but tense. A seasoned SFC, he had been wearing two hats as both PL and PSG for seven months before my arrival. He was eager to have a LT but somewhat set in his ways, and as we rapidly transitioned to deployment we were frequently at odds with one another, but always behind closed doors. We maintained a professional front to subordinates and higher. —**1LT, AR**

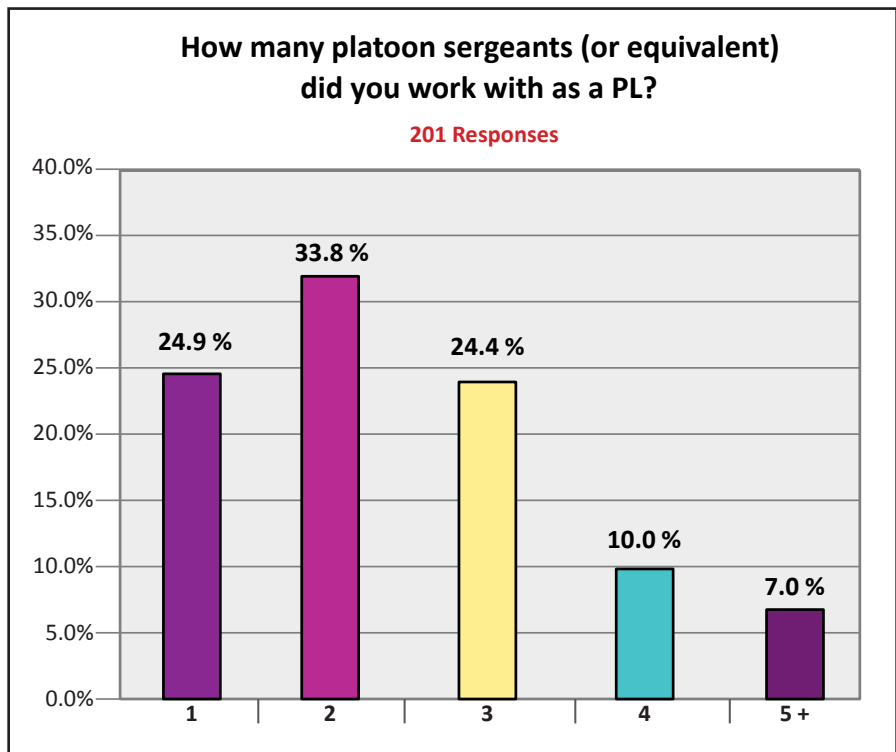
He was willing to work with me and let me feel out things before giving me all the answers, but not in a "holier than thou" kind of way, just in a "I'm here if you need me" sort of way. He was very involved with the NCO squad leaders and pretty much ran the platoon with them. —**1LT, ADA**

Fantastic! Ideal! He was an old, seasoned, experienced PSG with multiple combat tours in Iraq. I intentionally say *combat tours* vice *administrative tours*. He was the NCO you expect to get as

you leave the basic course. There were some flaws, of course, but they were easy to overlook when compared with his total body of work and effectiveness. He was supportive, gave counsel and led the Soldiers. We were a team. It was a professional relationship, but it was also personal. I wouldn't say that the latter is necessary, but cultivating a solid, personal relationship with your platoon sergeant is a huge combat multiplier. —**1LT, EN**

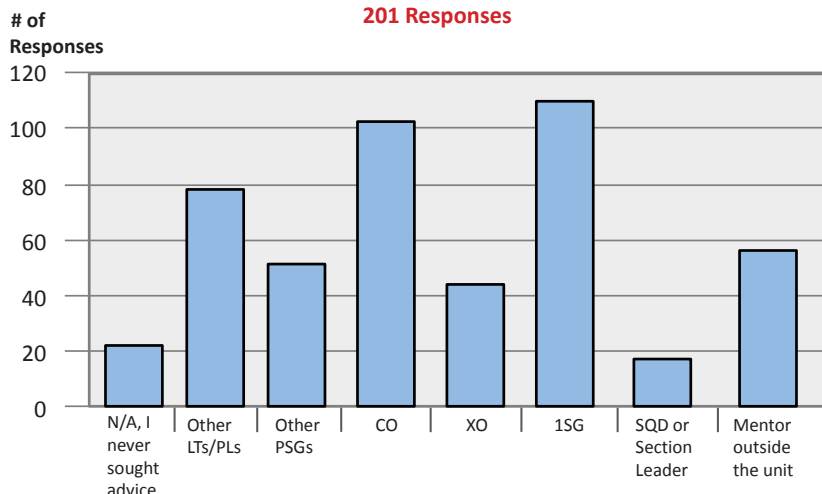
Not very good. Being a young 2LT, I took the advice of my many mentors before I commissioned and didn't want to step on my PSG's toes. My mistake was I didn't outline my expectations of him well enough. He was so weak that I ended up relying on my other NCOs to get his job done and basically ignored him, which resulted in failure. —**1LT, FA**

Our relationship became extremely good when we finally synced. Initially, it was difficult because officers are taught to come in and take charge. However, our conflicts dissolved later as I allowed my PSG and NCOs the autonomy to complete the tasks I gave. Essentially, my trust in them established my leadership of the platoon because we became mutually invested in a common project. —**1LT, AR**



If you ever sought out advice on working effectively with your PSG, whom did you ask?

201 Responses



Some other Entries:

BN CDR/CSM: 5
 ROTC Mentor: 2
 Operations NCO: 2
 Warrant Officers: 1
 Anyone that would listen: 1

NOTE: Respondents were encouraged to check all that apply

Stories about Platoon Sergeants

My first day as a PL, I sit with the PSG and before I even say hello, he looks at me and tells me, "Your lane, you plan. My lane, I execute. You plan, I execute. As long as you understand that, we will get along just fine. If I fail, you fail. I will not let you fail." And he didn't—ever. —1LT, EN

I was out on patrol with my platoon in Afghanistan. We were doing a KLE with some local villagers. I had a question about protocols and stepped away from the huddle with the village elders to consult my PSG. He looked me square in the eyes and said, "Sir, that's your deal. You run it how you want to run it." Rather stunned at the blatant lack of willingness to give any input, I returned to the village elders and carried on as best as I saw fit. Later, after we returned to the FOB, I consulted my CO about the incident. His response was, "Just deal with it, LT." Moral of the story: There may be great working relationships between PLs and PSGs out there, but there are also terrible ones. Be prepared and creative enough to run

the show entirely on your own. You may not have any support in your local chain of command. Roll with it, as I did, and do the best you can. Ultimately, the PSG owns the platoon, so if it comes down to changing the PL or changing the PSG, it is going to be the PL who is changed. —1LT, IN

My PSG had been hospitalized with pneumonia two days prior to a platoon live-fire exercise when we were preparing to deploy. Instead of following his profile, and against the guidance from the company 1SG and myself, he was there at the LFX to lead his platoon from the front. He not only endeared himself to his subordinates, but he also set the example for his younger NCOs to emulate. His dedication to his craft and his Soldiers showed me that there are true professionals still within our ranks. The moral of the story is not that he disobeyed his profile and came to work, but instead that he realized his men needed him and he executed like a warrior. In war, the enemy will not let you take a sick day, and my PSG realizes this. He was (and always will be)

the epitome of what an NCO should be. —1LT, IN

My first PSG was lazy. We would arrive at the field ready to execute a mission but would be lacking supplies. He was a nice guy but was not aggressive enough to move Soldiers into action. He was not motivating during PT because he was usually the first one out of breath. My second PSG is a "beast." Sometimes I give her a list of what needs to be done and it has already been done or she already has a plan in place. We are on the same page on



1LT John Gresham (left) presents a plaque to his first platoon sergeant, SFC Adam Farmer, upon Farmer's departure for the scout platoon. At right is SSG Marcos Colon, who subsequently served as platoon sergeant until a new sergeant first class arrived in the unit.

what we want our platoon to be. She is aggressive, loud and gets things done fast. —1LT, CM

I arrived at my PLT when we were in garrison for an extended period of time, when there isn't a whole lot to do for a PL except plan PT, keep the commander abreast on your PLT's issues and supervise maintenance. So my PSG ran the show. Before we went on our first field problem, my PSG recommended I hold a PLT meeting and explain to the Soldiers that when we left garrison and went to the field, I would be running the show. One night we were conducting an Unstabilized Table XII gunnery (PLT-level gunnery, in Humvees). Before I briefed my OPORD, I ran the plan by my PSG and he provided his advice, based on his real-world experiences. I listened to him, and the modifications we made to my original plan landed us the top performance awards for mounted maneuver, dismounted maneuver and room-clearing procedures.

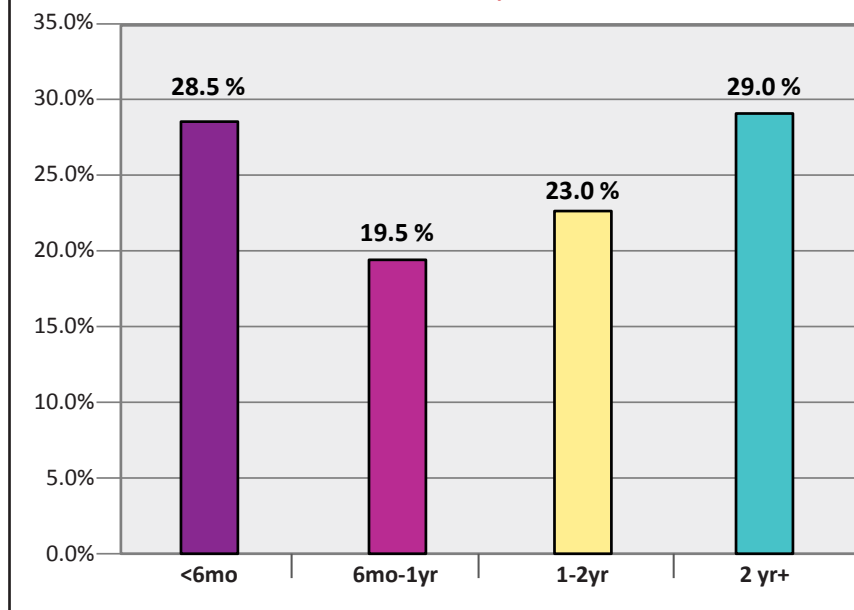
—1LT, AR

On deployment, my platoon usually worked in split sections, so my PSG and I often did not see each other for several days at a time. When we were back, we'd get some food and catch up on what had happened with the other section. It served as an outlet for frustrations developed over the patrol cycle, helped keep each other aware of potential issues within the platoon and served as a debrief. It helped us maintain a higher level of awareness and strengthened our working relationship. That time spent talking was interspersed with stories about "Joe," gripes about the commander, family, etc. —1LT, IN

One cold winter day, the platoon was getting ready to spend six hours in a convoy simulator. The simulator was fairly high-tech, effective and difficult to reserve. Since we were running a support platoon in a combined arms battalion, this was training the platoon really needed. About three-quarters of the Soldiers showed up on time, and we were all waiting for the civilians to brief us. Both my PSG and I started getting fairly upset that we had quite a few missing Soldiers. He and the squad leaders got them on the phone, and they all seemed to show up at the simulator at the same time, 15 minutes late. They were "smoking and joking," slowly making their way up to the door. My PSG shot out of the building and shouted, "Hurry the [heck] up! Run, now! Why the [heck] are you late? Get in here and sit the [heck] down!" All of the Soldiers ran inside faster than I had ever seen them move. When they passed, my PSG was fuming, red in the face, veins in his neck and face bulging. ... As soon as they got inside, he stopped and lost his scowl. He turned to me, winked and smiled, and walked into the building. —1LT, TC

How much PSG experience did your first PSG have on the day you arrived as a PL?

200 Responses



For better or worse, junior officers' experiences with their platoon sergeants affect their platoons and shape their attitudes towards NCOs and the Army. Do their thoughts ring true to your experience? The Platoon Leader (<http://PL.army.mil>) and Company Command (<http://CC.army.mil>) online professional forums bring together company-level officers—past, present and future—who are committed to becoming more effective leaders, growing combat-effective units and advancing the Army profession. If you are a commissioned officer, we invite you to join the conversation. Cadets are eligible to join the PL forum.

Connecting in conversation...
...becoming more effective.



Art by Jody Harmon

Have you joined your forum?