



Reflections of an Ethical Cadet

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I picture myself ten years down the road, finished with college and established in my career. My younger cousin, Matthew, is about to start high school and he is interested in JROTC. He asks me if I think he should join and if so, why? I answer with an energetic “yes” and continue to explain all the great benefits JROTC has to offer. I mention the opportunities to make friends, develop leadership skills, compete on a team, serve your community, and participate in fun activities. I leave him with one final thought that I hope he takes to heart. “Your experience in JROTC will have a tremendous impact on you and in turn the world around you.”

I wake up from my daydream but continue to think about all the skills I have learned in JROTC and their importance in my life. Efficiency and time management, attention to detail, and excellence rise to the top of my list. These principles have a monumental importance in my life.

Efficiency and time management are valuable skills I have learned and practiced throughout JROTC. Anyone who has ever learned about SMART goals, which I did in JROTC, knows that the “T” stands for time bound. I learned about setting a deadline and scheduling steps to reach a goal. I practiced this during staff meetings and in my own duties according to my job position. I also never wanted to be late turning in permis-

sion slips or assignments because failure would mean extra physical training. The thought of the sun beating down on me while suffering through pyramid push-ups was a great motivator to finish jobs on time.

I carried the skills of efficiency and time management into other classes. In Economics, I worked with another student to create a newspaper article and design the page layout. Just as I had done so many times during JROTC, we set dates to have each part of the project completed. We knew our deadline and we finished our work according to our time schedule. We turned in an excellent project by the due date. Unfortunately, in AP History class I failed to follow my efficiency and time management skills. I did not schedule times to gather information and materials. I did not plan each step of my project, and I did not complete the assignment, resulting in a poor grade. I was completely disappointed in myself. Especially since I possessed the skills necessary to avoid this from happening. Lesson learned. I would not allow this to happen in the future.

Another standard I learned in JROTC that I greatly value is attention to detail. I remember a uniform inspection in my early years of JROTC when I forgot to button the top button under my tie. I also failed to acquire a ribbon for my uniform. The sergeant’s commanding voice echoed close to my face. My legs were shaking and I felt like

crying. She questioned me for a time and then she explained the importance of the uniform detail. I remember her saying that thousands have served their country in uniform and how disrespectful it is to wear the uniform improperly. At the time, failing inspection was horrible and humiliating but it hit home a powerful message: attention to detail matters.

When I started working as a busser at a local family restaurant, I put this skill into action. I did everything from washing off pools of sticky syrup from tables and chairs, to counting the cash draw for accuracy, to tackling the dreaded restroom duty. I was thorough, careful, and meticulous in my work. I like to think that customers enjoyed a comfortable, clean environment because of my attention to detail. When other bussers lacked this skill, customers complained, and I would often have to pick up their slack. Even in my own home life, attention to detail has had a huge impact on me. I make my bed daily, keep a neat room, organize my paperwork, and help out when I notice something needs to be done. My parents are certainly thankful for this.

Above all, “excellence in all we do” is the core value that is most important to me. In large, black, bold letters, at the top of the JROTC classroom wall, I have looked upon this phrase for 4 years. It means

doing everything to the best of my ability in every aspect of my life. Drill practice and marching competitions, cross-country running, faith and family life, and employment roles - they all deserve excellence. Not only do I gain the rewards of work done well and the feeling of pride from my efforts, but I also avoid placing a burden on others for mediocrity. Nobody wants a doctor, teacher, or pilot that doesn't take excellence seriously. No matter what role or job I currently hold or will hold in the future, I will always pursue excellence, because it is the right thing to do for myself and for others. And I no longer need the phrase “excellence in all we do” hung on a wall to remind me. It is tattooed in my mind forever.

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