

Failure to Report-A Methodology for Dealing with Soldiers Who Are Late

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Have you ever had a Soldier who is late? Have you ever been late for a formation and been chewed out without being able to explain yourself? Failure to Report is a serious offense and the military demands strict obedience with regard to dependability. The best method I have found is to deal with a Soldier in a professional and constructive manner. Being loud and demeaning only serves to harden a Soldier's position and builds resentment, frustration, and a sense of unfair treatment. This article explores TTP's for dealing with FTR before it happens and then walks you through a thought process so that if you have to make a hard decision like recommending UCMJ...it is done in professional manner, from a factual perspective.

Setting the Tone

Minimizing FTR's begins with the reception and integration process. Soldiers arriving in a new unit or element should receive an initial counseling/orientation that emphasizes the duty and responsibility of being dependable. Requirements of dependability as it relates to FTR include: reporting for duty on time, in the proper uniform, and with the proper equipment. In my younger days an old CSM had a saying: "If you can't be on time, be early". Needless to say it stuck with me and I've used it throughout my career to drive the point home. While orientation is nice and helps set the tone; proper examples by unit leaders set the attitude and instill the standard. Leaders who are late need to have the same standard applied to them as is applied to their Soldiers.

War story: As a 1SG I was late to a formation because I had car trouble one morning. I was only 5 minutes late and under normal circumstances a Soldier with no previous history of being late would have simply received a verbal counseling. However since I was the 1SG a simple verbal would not have resonated well with the Soldiers and NCO's I had previously reprimanded for being late. Therefore, I apologized to the Soldiers for being late and communicated that there was "No excuse". I then imposed a "500 word essay on myself" as this was a standard corrective training procedure within the unit. Then I announced it would be written after normal duty hours, checked by the Commander, and posted on the unit bulletin board for review by all members of the unit by 0500 the next morning. I felt that as the Senior NCO of the unit I had a duty to reinforce the fact that standards applied to all Soldiers in the unit, including myself. Trust me, it was humbling but I wanted to avoid the perception of double standards or a 'rank has its privileges' mentality.

Identifying the Problem

What type of offender is the Soldier?

1. Minor infractions: a few minutes late, late is outside the norms for this Soldier
2. Repetitive: a few minutes late, a few times each month with an excuse, more likely than not this Soldier has shown a tendency to be late.
3. Habitual: Frequently late, more than a few minutes, this Soldier is usually late.

What is the root cause of the problem?

1. Before you begin discussions with a Soldier regarding being late ask yourself a few questions.
 - a. Is this Soldier normally late?
 - b. Is this a single incident or have there been others in the past?
 - c. Are there any issues that you are aware of that may be causing this problem for example:
 - i. Child care problems
 - ii. Family issues
 - iii. Divorce/separation
 - iv. Illness of a Family member.
2. Once you have run through these questions approach the Soldier and ask them why they were late.
 - a. Check for non-verbal indicators that may indicate a deeper issue.
 - b. Be professional, do not yell or become condescending to the Soldier

Determine a Course of Action:

1. For first time offenders a simple warning may be sufficient depending on the situation. Make an annotation in your leader book and monitor the Soldier's performance with regard to timeliness. Everyone will encounter a situation that may cause them to be late from time to time. Be empathic when dealing with these situations.
2. For individuals who show a propensity of being late formal counseling with corrective training may be in order.
3. For frequent offenders more severe action like UCMJ may be required.

Methods of Corrective Training

1. 500 word essay with a relevant subject like "Why it's important to be on time".

2. Sign in every hour on the hour from 1700 until 2300 in the proper uniform. Recommend first line leader conduct this training because it sends the message you personally care. If you let the Staff Duty NCO perform this duty you risk sending the message that you don't have time to waste on a Soldier.
3. Teach a class to the Squad on dependability and responsibility. Length 10 minutes.
4. Revocation of Privileges associated with the offense. Off post privileges, or pass privileges, visitation privileges, etc.
5. If the Soldier lives off post and the offense is severe enough, consider moving them into the barracks for a few days or a week.

Bottom-line

Corrective training must be in line with the offense committed and may be conducted until the deficiency has been corrected. This training cannot be abusive in nature.

Habitual offenders that do not respond to corrective training can be dealt with under UCMJ, bar to reenlistment, flag, letter of reprimand, administrative reduction in grade. As a Leader you have the flexibility to make an exception to policy but ensure it is an exception not a favor. Be cautious of letting a leader off light. Soldiers need to know Leaders are held to the same standards that they are.

Think through the issue, deal with it on a factual basis, and use common sense.

For more information on this subject, review the following references; AR 600-20, AR 27-10, and FM 27-1.

We hope you have found this article useful. Best Wishes Mark