

Appointing and Utilizing Staff

Lesson Objective: Understand selection, development, and best use of squadron staff officers.

Desired Learning Outcomes (DLO):

1. Examine the importance of selecting staff officers
2. Identify roles and responsibilities of staff officers
3. Build personal plan for keeping and developing staff officers

Scheduled Lesson Time: 60 minutes

Introduction

Commanders rely on staff officers to provide the expertise in their specialty that is vital to solving current problems and successfully meeting organizational challenges.

1. Examine the importance of selecting staff officers

Squadrons, large and small, find volunteers willing to devote time to a staff position are often not enough to fill all duties. Does your staffing process operate this way? You find a member who shows up regularly then before the meeting you say, "Steve, Joe just resigned and we need you as Finance Officer, thanks." How do you know this person is interested in learning about finance, will be a productive staff member you can trust, or will end up leaving the squadron forcing you to find a replacement?

We recognize you are rarely dealing with an ideal world, yet it is worth a bit of your time to think about options for recruiting staff. Put together notes you can use to explain what you expect, spread the word by talking about importance of duties to squadron, and assure all you will find specialty track training to demonstrate they will not be left on their own. Your primary staff officers have assistants that have talked to members they can invite for a conversation about duty positions. You want to keep talented staff, yet it may be time to ask if they are getting burned out, an option is offer the opportunity to try something new. In our volunteer organization, you may achieve more success if you explain how these tasks help broaden their knowledge of CAP as a path to achieving their personal goals.

Once you decide to look at all, you may be able to see more possibilities in your squadron. There are a variety of traits so decide which are more important. Enthusiasm and a willingness to learn is vital and often in new members. There could be "hidden gems" of members with diverse life experiences that are not busy with many other squadron activities. While an ability to work as a team is important, encouraging others with diverse backgrounds can spark creative ideas. Additionally, recruiting more staff can be a bit easier when all see their contributions are valued in squadron decision making.

2. Identify roles and responsibilities of staff officers

Staff work is not what most members will tell you they joined CAP to accomplish. The challenge is understanding how you can help keep squadron moving towards mutual goals. A couple of quotes from Colin Powell's *My American Journey* best describes this mindset:

"If you are going to achieve excellence in big things, you develop the habit in little matters. Never neglect small details, even to the point of being a pest. Moments of stress, confusion, and fatigue are exactly when mistakes happen. Always check 'small things.'"

Effective staff officers are trusted by their commander and seldom have to do things twice. This is because they have spent time researching regulations as well as asking knowledgeable contacts for information about their specialty area. This is crucial to their staff focus of assisting commander to make and carry out timely decisions essential to squadron accomplishing small and large activities. Staff support extends into managing flow of reports and coordinating with other staff officers to make recommendations about future policy and use of squadron resources.

Know your specialty track regulations (requirements), pamphlets (highly recommended practices). Situational awareness of people and events is a step toward building skills to accurately answer questions. Reach out to other squadron and wing officers, so you are not isolated as you expand knowledge vital to pass inspections and develop new squadron activities in all mission areas.

Staff officers are accountable to the commander, who should provide support yet not micromanage. As a staff officer you have delegated authority, with commander responsible for actions. Differing opinions are needed during staff discussion to review all options. Once a decision is made by the commander, the expectation is the staff speaks with one voice to other members.

Each position is briefly defined in CAPR 20-1(I). Keep in touch with expectations from the squadron commander and offer your observations to strengthen the organization.

3. Build personal plan for coaching and mentoring staff officers

Coaching's focus is building a set of specific skills for current position. Many squadrons do not have all these skills so the challenge is to reach out for those who can help coach. Technology makes this a bit easier with teleconferences and sending screen shots with instructions by email. Encouraging members to attend wing conference offers a greater range of networking and instructing possibilities.

A mentor is a more informal relationship that helps you look at longer term issues, such as how to chart a path for future CAP opportunities. Good mentors are willing to share their skills and knowledge since they have faced similar challenges. Mentors possess a can-do attitude which makes it easier to discuss professional goals and concerns with them.

You may have observed or heard of strong volunteer staffs committed to jointly reaching commander's goals. As you are aware, it takes personal communication time with each member to determine if they are aware of your expectations and can provide support. An initial discussion helps you identify skills and knowledge your member wants or needs assistance. Leadership styles vary so critical element is not to allow urgency of current issues to overwhelm time for coaching and checking on progress. Your trust level is key to ability to rely on staff to for complete answers when needed as well as information in advance they know you will want.

Lesson Summary and Closure

In our volunteer organization, a commander and staff are essential to avoid members "burning out." Devoting time to selecting staff, understanding their responsibilities, and finding everyone skills training is the path to surpassing squadron activity and mission goals.

"Individual commitment to a group effort--that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work." --*Vince Lombardi*