

Is This the Army 'Standard'?

Tara Crooks | September 22, 2006

The so-called "Army standard" is a perplexing issue for me. There are so many different layers of the expectation that seem contradictory. It's very hard for me to define where I stand.

I can't seem to negotiate the difference between adjusting my expectations and not lowering my personal standards. I am involved in many organizations on post. The expectation of commitment from volunteers is there for every organization, and it's high. Or is it? Maybe it's just me. If I say I'll do something I do it. If I schedule something, it sticks. I expect that from myself. I expect it from others. I think they should expect it from me, as well.

A high level of expectation seems fine coming from the Army (or its organizations) to the volunteer. But, when a volunteer has the same expectation of the system, things aren't as simple.

I live the "Army Wife Life." AWL isn't always what it's chalked up to be. It is beginning to be, more often than not, a "job" for me. It's much more than living in your own world with your own family and surviving. If your husband is in a leadership role there is an expectation of you. It is naturally assumed that you will fulfill a certain role in the communication process. Ironically, becoming part of this process is challenging for me.

I am all about Army Wife Life. I agree we have a standard that is expected, and I understand why. I agree that we have an inherent responsibility to younger wives to pass on knowledge and information.

However, there is an individual responsibility for each of us to reach out, ask questions, and solve some of our own issues. I agree that the Army is there as the "company" that we work for and that they hold a bigger responsibility than most normal companies would because of the level of our families' (and most importantly our soldiers') commitment. However, I would argue this is not a dictatorship. The Army is not our parent, guardian or babysitter. Families are not puppets. We do not like to feel controlled. That is easier said than done.

The Army standard seems to be the main source of this confusion for me. I find the standard is that the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing. The right hand can't feed the mouth. More importantly, the brain doesn't know the heart.

We're going to have to take a stand somewhere, somehow, to help our government and it's leaders understand where they are going wrong in the process, and why families are just not getting it. I see it first hand. It has to start with communication, commitment and consistency.

Is the Army standard really a standard of miscommunication, cancellations, changes, confusion, reschedules, and blatant disregard for anyone but the system? I don't believe for half-a-second that is what leaders want us to perceive it to be. Unfortunately, perception is reality. Do we really owe a commitment to the military even when we are not paid to do so? Are wives becoming the Army's professional volunteers? What can we do to keep this from being the perception? How can we make structural, legal, economical, and socially acceptable changes in this standard to allow family members participation including the right to alter, question, or enhance the system?

In a nutshell, it is standard to expect volunteers to participate within the system, but not standard when they start to access the resources to do their job. Creating a frustrating environment where the volunteer gives up on the process because of the issues I referenced earlier; miscommunication, cancellations, and consistency. The expectation is for the volunteer to do the job, unpaid, with no little or no guidance or resources.

Who sets this standard? Why do we feel this is the way things have to be? And the biggest question: Is possible to be immersed in this military life, without losing sight of what really matters? How can you keep the responsibility of others from taking precedence over the responsibility you have for your own family, work, and self? There just has to be a better way, and I'm determined to find it.