

Breaking the Chain:

An Explanation of the Various Chains at work in the California Cadet Corps

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I am constantly asked to explain to cadets the difference between the Chain of Command, the Chain of Concern, the NCO Support Channel and the Staff Support Channel. These are complicated questions and I will attempt to make the answers as straightforward as possible.

The formal definition of the Cadet Corps Chain of Command is “the succession of commanding officers from superior to subordinate levels”. It consists of people whom the LAWS OF CALIFORNIA give authority to exercise control over Cadet Corps activities. It starts with the squad leader at the lowest level of command, proceeds to the platoon leader, company commander, and battalion commander, and then brings in the Commandant, Principal of the School, Cadet Corps Executive Officer, Adjutant General of the State, and most importantly, the Governor. The chart looks like this:

**GOVERNOR
ADJUTANT GENERAL
EXECUTIVE OFFICER
SCHOOL PRINCIPAL
COMMANDANT OF CADETS
CADET BATTALION COMMANDER
CADET COMPANY COMMANDER
CADET PLATOON LEADER
CADET SQUAD LEADER**

In addition to that formal Chain of Command, there are other individuals with command authority who, at different times, and for different reasons, become part of the chain. Examples include a Cadet Brigade Commander and adult Brigade Advisor in matters relating to the Brigade, a Superintendent of Schools in matter directly involving a school principal, and the Director of Youth Programs, a Colonel in the California National Guard who supervises the work of the Executive Officer. The following charts show what the chain looks like in different situations.

Situation 1: You are at a brigade activity such as a leadership school. Note that the positions on the chain held by the Commandant and Principal are replaced in this case by the cadet Brigade Commander and adult Brigade Advisor respectively because the activity is a regional event instead of a single school activity.

**GOVERNOR
ADJUTANT GENERAL
EXECUTIVE OFFICER
BRIGADE ADVISOR
CADET BRIGADE COMMANDER
CADET BATTALION COMMANDER
CADET COMPANY COMMANDER
CADET PLATOON LEADER
CADET SQUAD LEADER**

Situation 2: There are matters relating to student discipline, assignment of teachers (commandants) and school district policies and procedures such as field trips that require a modification to the Chain of Command that looks like this:

**GOVERNOR
ADJUTANT GENERAL
EXECUTIVE OFFICER
LOCAL BOARD OF EDUCATION
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS
SCHOOL PRINCIPAL
COMMANDANT OF CADETS
CADET BATTALION COMMANDER
CADET COMPANY COMMANDER
CADET PLATOON LEADER
CADET SQUAD LEADER**

Situation 3: Cadets are participating in a State Drill Competition. In this case, there is direct supervision of the State Military Department over the event. The Chain of Command looks like this:

**GOVERNOR
ADJUTANT GENERAL
DIRECTOR OF YOUTH PROGRAMS
EXECUTIVE OFFICER
10TH CORPS CADET COMMANDER
CADET BATTALION COMMANDER
CADET COMPANY COMMANDER
CADET PLATOON LEADER**

CADET SQUAD LEADER

The above charts hopefully make it clear that there are times when circumstances “insert” other people into the Chain of Command of the California Cadet Corps for a variety of reasons.

To complicate matters even further, there are three other “Chains” to consider. Let’s look at them one at a time. The first is commonly called the Chain of Concern. This chain is the chain of “who you see when you have a problem, need a question answered, or need help with something.” For instance, a squad member might see his/her assistant squad leader before going to the squad leader. Squad leaders would likely see the platoon sergeant before going to the platoon leader. Platoon sergeants might ask their company first sergeant for assistance instead of going through the Platoon Leader. The Chain of Concern is the path you take to get your questions answered and concerns addressed. The Chain of Concern is not written down in the same way the Chain of Command is; however, it might look like this:

- ❑ Squad members ask assistant squad leaders or squad leaders
- ❑ Squad leaders ask platoon sergeants
- ❑ Platoon sergeants ask platoon leaders or company first sergeants
- ❑ Platoon leaders ask company commanders
- ❑ Company first sergeants ask company commanders or battalion sergeants major or might ask an NCO in one of the staff sections (S-1, S-3, S4, etc)
- ❑ Company commanders ask battalion commanders or one of the Staff Officers (S-1, S3, S-4)
- ❑ And so on

Then there is the NCO support channel. There is a formal chain of non-commissioned officers who support the commanders they work for. As a general rule, these NCOs communicate with each other through this separate chain as they perform their daily duties. That chain looks like this:

BRIGADE COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR
BATTALION COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR
COMPANY FIRST SERGEANT
PLATOON SERGEANT

Finally, there is the Staff Support Channel. While the Commanders and NCOs are doing their various jobs, there are Staff NCOs and Officers who perform the functions of personnel and administration management, training and operations planning, supply and logistics support, and public and government affairs work. That “Chain” looks something like this:

- ❑ At the company level, this includes clerks, a supply sergeant, sometimes a personnel/administration sergeant, and sometimes a training sergeant

- ❑ At the battalion level, this includes an S-1, S-3, S-4, and S-5 and various assistants and NCOs who work in those staff sections.
- ❑ At the brigade level, this includes another layer of S-1s, S-3s, S-4s, and S-5s and even more assistants and NCOs who work in those departments.

To put it all together, the chart on the following page shows the Chain of Command in the center and the NCO and Staff Support Channels on each side. Even though there are only a few people who have formal command authority and are represented in the center of the chart, you can see a great many people who work with those commanders to support the many responsibilities of command.

NCO SUPPORT CHANNEL (Part of the Chain of Concern)	CHAIN OF COMMAND	STAFF SUPPORT CHANNEL (Part of the Chain of Concern)
10th Corps Command Sergeant Major	Governor Adjutant General Executive Officer 10th Corps Cadet Commander (At State Events)	10th Corps S-1, S-3, S-4, S-5
Brigade Command Sergeant Major	Brigade Advisor Cadet Brigade Commander	Brigade S-1, S-3, S-4, S-5
Battalion Command Sergeant Major	Principal Commandant of Cadets Battalion Commander	Battalion S-1, S-3, S-4, S-5
Company First Sergeant	Company Commander	Company Clerk Supply Sergeant Training Sergeant
Platoon Sergeant	Platoon Leader	Generally none
Assistant Squad Leader	Squad Leader	None