



CHAIN OF COMMAND & AUTHORITY

Structure and rules enhance the functioning of an organization, especially one as large as the military. Within each branch of the military, this structure includes clear hierarchies, or systems of individuals arranged in a ranked order (See Military Ranks handout for detail of ranking system in each branch of the military). For example, a commissioned officer is of higher rank than an enlisted member. Within those specific arenas, there is also a rank order. For example, within the Army enlisted ranks, a non-commissioned officer (such as a sergeant) will be of higher rank than a private first class. In the military, this hierarchy is called the chain of command.

The chain of command is the line of authority and responsibility along which orders are passed within a military unit and between different units. Orders are passed down the chain of command, from higher ranked military personnel to lower ranked military personnel until those orders are received by those who implement the orders. Similarly, requests move up the chain of command until they reach the individual who has the authority to make decisions regarding a particular type of request.

An individual's placement in the hierarchy determines his or her level of authority. One of the values of the military is respect for authority and this hierarchical structure. Those higher up in the chain of command have earned that rank and deserve respect. In the military, it is considered bad form to challenge or question authority.

Within this hierarchy, military personnel expect those with authority to take charge and make decisions with confidence, and during times of war those decisions can be matters of life or death. Many military personnel value the directness and simplicity that is often associated with the way orders are given. In addition, personnel tend to tolerate changes in plans or standards if the leader is direct and takes responsibility for the change. Given the straightforward, direct style of most military leaders, military personnel and Veterans may have difficulty with or be frustrated with patronizing talk, uncertain leadership style, and approaching problems with hesitation or fear.

