



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
OFFICE OF THE PROVOST MARSHAL GENERAL
2800 ARMY PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20310-2800

DAPM-CSM

5 August 2025

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: SGT CHECKY vs. SGT TELLY: A Leadership Perspective

1. In every unit, leadership shapes everything – from morale to mission success. Over time, I've noticed two types of leaders who show up again and again: the ones who bark orders and disappear, and the ones who stay engaged, guide their people, and build trust. I call them "SGT Telly" and "SGT Checky." This isn't about good vs. bad leadership – it's about fear vs. confidence, control vs. mentorship, and short-term compliance vs. long-term growth. Most of us have a little Telly in us, especially under pressure. But if we're serious about building strong teams and future leaders, we need to understand the difference – and choose to lead like Checky.

2. SGT TELLY: "Tell and Yell"

a. Who They Are. SGT Telly isn't necessarily a bad leader – they're often a well-meaning one who's unsure how to lead effectively. Many Tellys are driven by fear: fear of being wrong, fear of appearing weak, and fear of losing control. Instead of asking questions, seeking input, or admitting they don't know something, they overcompensate. They speak with authority, avoid follow-up, and keep their distance – because staying unapproachable feels safer than being challenged. There are more Tellys out there than people care to admit.

b. SGT Telly has a place. In high-risk, time-sensitive situations – where hesitation can cost lives – direct, authoritative orders are exactly what's needed. In those moments, Soldiers don't need a conversation; they need clarity, speed, and execution. Problems arise when leaders rely on Telly-style leadership all the time, even when the situation doesn't call for it.

c. What They Do:

(1) Issue vague or incomplete orders without context or clarity, then expect Soldiers to execute flawlessly.

(2) Disappear after giving instructions, leaving Soldiers to interpret unclear guidance on their own.

(3) Return when problems arise and react with visible frustration or anger, without reflecting on whether the initial communication contributed to the mistake.

(4) Rely on rank and authority to enforce compliance, often out of insecurity rather than confidence.

(5) Avoid vulnerability – rarely ask for help or admit when they may have missed something, for fear of being questioned.

d. Example: “I told you to clean the weapons. Why isn’t it done right?” – delivered with frustration, but without the self-awareness to ask, “Did I clearly explain the expectations?”

e. Results: A tense environment where Soldiers hesitate to ask questions. High stress, repeated mistakes, fear of failure, and little growth. Tasks get done, but often need rework. The mission can succeed, but it’s fragile and often harder than it needs to be.

3. SGT CHECKY: “Guide and Verify”

a. Who They Are: SGT Checky believes leadership is a hands-on process rooted in trust, communication, and presence. They don’t just give tasks – they teach, guide, and stay involved. They recognize that mistakes are part of the learning process, and they treat every interaction as an opportunity to grow future leaders.

b. What They Do:

(1) Provide clear, specific instructions with timelines, standards, and context – including the “why” behind the task.

(2) Stay engaged during execution, offering guidance and feedback before small issues become big problems.

(3) See mistakes as teachable moments, not personal failures.

(4) Are present and available, showing that they’re invested in both the task and the Soldier.

(5) Foster a two-way dialogue where Soldiers feel comfortable asking questions and offering input.

c. Example: “Let me show you how to do this, then I’ll check your progress, and we’ll work through it together.” These leaders build confident Soldiers who want to learn and succeed.

DAPM-CSM

SUBJECT: SGT CHECKY vs. SGT TELLY: A Leadership Perspective

d. Results: Competent, confident teams that meet the standard the first time. Higher morale, greater trust, and a stronger unit culture. Soldiers under Checky don't just complete tasks – they grow into leaders who will succeed on their own.

4. The Fundamental Difference:

a. SGT Telly often leads from fear – fear of being wrong, of being questioned, of being seen as weak. But sometimes, their directness is exactly what's needed – especially in high-stakes moments when there's no time to explain or teach. In those cases, decisive action saves lives. But those moments are the exception, not the standard.

b. SGT Checky leads from investment – in the mission, in the people, and in the long-term strength of the unit. They understand that most of leadership happens *before* the crisis, not during it.

c. SGT Telly uses one-way communication, vanishes during execution, and focuses on control and blame.

d. SGT Checky builds two-way dialogue, stays present, and focuses on learning and success.

5. My Philosophy: Leadership isn't about barking orders from a distance – it's about guiding, verifying, and developing others to carry the mission forward long after you're gone. SGT Telly can get the job done – but often at the cost of trust, time, and morale. SGT Checky builds Soldiers who get the job done *and* grow stronger with every task.

6. We all have a little Telly in us. In a crisis, that's okay. But when there's time to lead, there's time to grow others. *Command* tells people *what* to do. *Leadership* teaches them *how* and *why*. That's the difference between just giving orders and actually leading Soldiers. We have a responsibility to grow into Checky – and to help others do the same. Our Soldiers deserve leaders who invest, teach, and build confidence.

Shawn Klosterman

SHAWN A. KLOSTERMAN

CSM, USA

U.S. Army Provost Marshal Sergeant Major

and Command Sergeant Major, Army

Corrections Command