



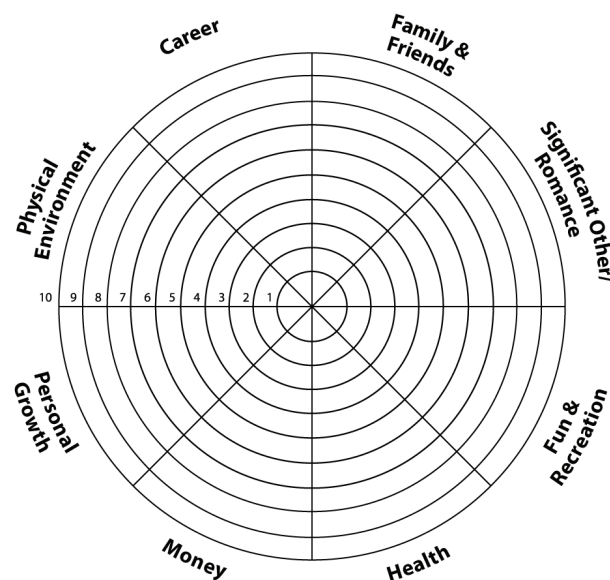
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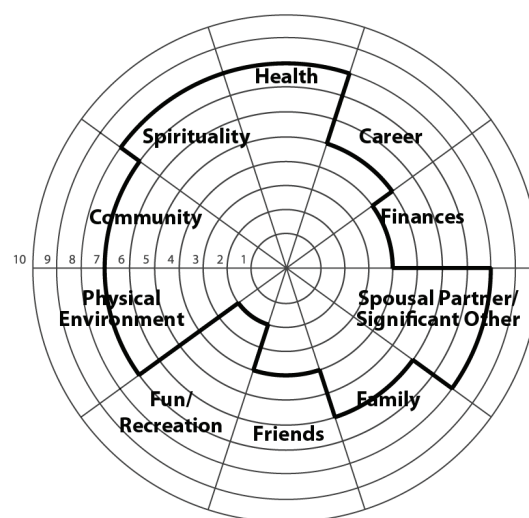
For years, Soldiers have experienced counseling sessions, desk side conversations, and heart-to-heart discussions with mentors, raters, and commanders that provided them with the opportunity to discuss their goals and development. Often, they listen to how the leader thought they could improve themselves within the confines of the counselor's vision or end state. Frequently, the subject leaves understanding the leader's desires, but are no closer to understanding how to achieve the goals of the rater, the organization. They lack specific, tangible information on how to improve. In the Army, it feels that the science of counseling is more prescriptive, but the counseling art form is nebulous.

Countless leaders have sat on the other side of the desk as counselors and presented a DA 4856, Developmental Counseling Form. This form includes a duty description and other information (as ATP 6-22.21, Providing Feedback: Counseling-Coaching-Mentoring describes) that feeds into the six attributes and competencies that the Army evaluates all Soldiers against: character, presence, intellect, achieves, develops, and leads. In those moments, many leaders are guilty of not doing proper follow-ups beyond quick sidebar conversations, if done at all. Officers also counsel senior NCOs on expectations for jobs that they have zero experience in doing, since most have not and will not hold those positions. These officers may have an idea of what right looks like but may lack the finer details of how to effectively hold those positions.

In preparation for counseling NCOs, many leaders look through DA PAM 600-25, U.S. Army Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development Guide, archived counseling forms, notes, and methods they previously used. Beyond the prescribed timelines and documentation, they may not find the perfect art form or format for every person. For one person, a DA4856 may be all that is needed, whereas for another person, it might be more effective to have a discussion.



(a)



(b)

Figure 1: (a) Wheel of Life by Paul J. Meyer; (b) Wheel of Life by Paul J. Meyer (example completed) (Obro et al., 2022)

Paul J. Meyer created a helpful tool, the Coaching Wheel or the Wheel of Life, in 1960. Unlike a common counseling that may focus more on the positive or negative work of an evaluated individual, the wheel provides a visual representation of improvement, or lack thereof, on focus areas that the person decides for themselves.

The Coaching Wheel depicts a bull's-eye divided into multiple focus areas. The subject of the ring decides their focus areas around the outside of the circle. Each inner circle represents a number or level going from one (outer ring) to ten (innermost ring) or the opposite (ten for outer ring, one for inner ring). During the initial counseling session, the subject self-evaluates and marks a level for each focus areas to show their starting point for the remainder of the period. In subsequent counseling the subject marks the progression and regression in each focus area. Then, the counselor and subject can discuss specific areas of emphasis or enhancement. The wheel provides the subject with the satisfaction of physically annotating their progress.

When counseling begins, a senior NCO may describe what they believe “right” looks like and what they should care about doing. Then specific areas of emphasis or enhancement can be discussed. After filling in the sections with these focus areas, the counselor should ask the subject to refine these down to three or four areas that they believe need the most improvement. This helps the counselor understand the subject’s career and life goals and can then determine where they nest with higher vision and intent. This enables the counselor to better understand where to add more emphasis on certain areas.

To be effective, the subject must indicate their perceived rating in each area. This helps set a baseline and identifies specific topics for follow-up counseling and discussions. The counselor should allow the subject to speak first (versus the counselor prescribing the Coaching Wheel) to mirror the benchmark of Habit 5 in The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, “Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood” (Covey, 1989).

Figure 2 shows a completed Counseling Wheel with a senior NCO over seven months. Since the same sheet is used to show growth over time, different colors are used during each session. The NCO self-assessed improvement in the eight focus areas: G-O-D (good order and discipline), advising administration, fixing problems, professional development, personal development, readiness, and training or developing.

The NCO assessed they had not improved in professional development between the second and third counseling session, therefore not marking it in the second color. At the end of the initial counseling, the NCO said that this method felt more genuine and productive in bridging the gap between what each person thinks they know and what they know.

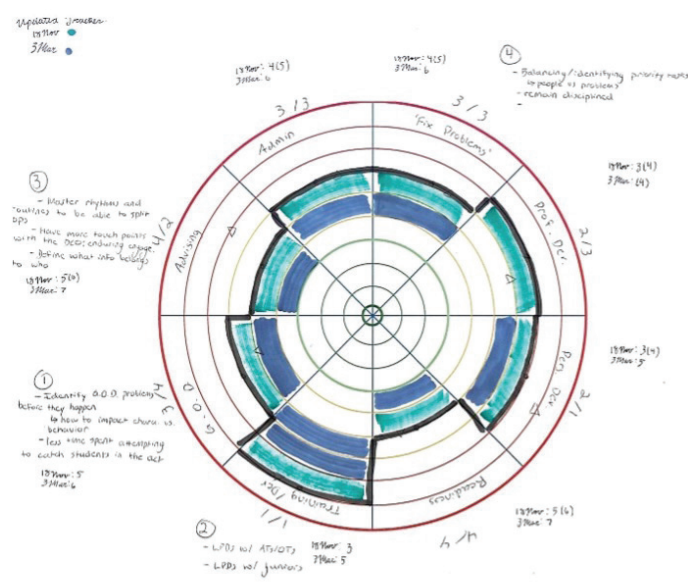


Figure 2: Example of a Senior NCO Counseling Wheel

This tool makes it easier to address lack of progress, regression, and other areas of concern. Because the subject marks progress, the engagement provides soft entries into difficult conversations about behavior and quality of work.

There is no prescription for how to counsel someone beyond that it must happen. We have all experienced good and bad counseling sessions, discussions, and mentors. A counseling wheel is another tool counselors can use during counseling sessions. It empowers the counseled individual to determine their guiding principles, leading to collaborative conversations that support their professional and personal development.

Author's Note: The author is an active-duty Civil Affairs Officer and an instructor in ARSOF CCC for 2 SWTG(A) with firsthand experience counseling Soldiers from ranks of E1 to O4. With more than 12 years in the Army, the author's experience is rooted in their military background, with significant positions and assignments that contribute to their credibility in counseling, mentoring, and coaching. Their views are personal and do not represent the official positions of the United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, the United States Army, Department of War, or the United States Government.

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