Building a Useful Continuity Binder

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Introduction

Any cadet who has taken over a new duty position or additional duty knows the value of a good continuity binder. It can provide a wealth of information to him/her including points of contact, duties and responsibilities, information on how to accomplish common tasks, personnel and equipment data. Without it, a cadet is often forced to re-learn the very same lessons and information that his/her predecessor discovered during his/her time in the position. In today’s downsizing Army, this waste of time is unacceptable. Every Cadet must take positive steps to increase efficiency. Yet, few departing Cadets make the effort to leave a good continuity book for their replacements. As a result, only a few fortunate individuals have been lucky enough to receive these treasured items from their predecessors. Just think of your own experiences – how often have you inherited a useful continuity binder and, perhaps more importantly, how often have you left one for your replacement?

Everyone can come up with excuses why they cannot produce a good continuity binder. Some will complain that they are too busy with other duties to devote their precious time to something that will not benefit them. Others believe that it’s a waste of time because nobody really uses a continuity binder anyway. And still others may state that they don’t know what a good continuity book looks like. The purpose of this is to provide a technique for preparing a continuity binder that will be beneficial to the Cadet preparing it and useful to the replacement Cadet and unit. If done correctly, the author will profit not only in developing an invaluable tool for himself/herself and his/her replacement, but in building greater knowledge about his/her job. This will identify some relevant information that should be included in your continuity binder. The reader can then identify and include additional sections as appropriate for his/her particular duty position.

Definition

In order to share a common understanding of the term, a continuity binder is a reference document produced by an individual to share relevant information concerning a duty or position on which he/she has knowledge. It is normally produced for an individual assigned to take over that duty or position, such as a replacement NCO designated to substitute a departing squad leader. If a cadet has more than one duty, he/she should have several continuity books.

Techniques and Procedures
The individual preparing the continuity binder should keep several things in mind during its development:

**Start Now and Keep Revising It.** The continuity binder should not be put together the week before the replacement takes over. In fact, the departing cadet should begin assembling it when he first assumes his/her position. This will allow him/her to begin recording continuity information during his/her time in that position and will ensure that the data in the book is accurate and detailed. Moreover, the developmental process involved in putting together the document will greatly increase the author's own familiarity with his/her duty position.

**Use It Daily.** The author should assemble the book with an eye to making it relevant and useful for himself/herself. He/she will know he has achieved this when he refers to it to accomplish routine activities. This technique has two advantages. First and foremost, the cadet developing the document can use it as a handy reference. A second advantage, one that is important to both the unit and the replacement cadet, is that the book is tested by the author on a daily basis for relevance and usefulness.

**Make the Continuity Binder One of the Goals and Objectives in the Author’s Checklist.** A cadet and the cadet’s rater should agree on the importance of developing the document during the rating period. This ensures that the author is both afforded the time and given the credit for producing it.

**Make the Document Revision-Friendly.** With the current ease of accessibility to computers in both the workplace and at home, cadets should assemble information for the continuity binder using computers. This allows the author to quickly update old information. Additionally, he/she can save the data on computer disks. This allows a replacement to further revise and update the information to pass on to future replacements. However, remember to save the data in a manner which allows the replacement cadet to access it. Normally, the optimal method of doing this is to save it on a computer disk using a software program (pay attention to the version) that the replacement can access using the computer at the unit.

In undertaking the task of constructing a continuity binder, the author must decide what relevant information he/she should include in the binder. Of greatest importance, the binder should include information that cannot be found anywhere else, such as standing operating procedures (SOPs). The author also wants to ensure that successful techniques in accomplishing key tasks are listed and shared with the replacement Cadet. Some useful sections of a continuity binder are listed below:

**Table of Contents** - This page should be at the very beginning of the document to give the reader a quick reference to all the information contained within the binder. Of course, the author should complete this section only after he/she has put together the rest of the continuity binder.
• **Duty Appointment Orders** - These orders often state the references that the appointed individual will use to carry out his/her duties. Normally, the unit adjutant(S-1) or company executive officer, in the case of a company-level duty appointment, publishes the appointment orders.

• **References** - This section lists the publications that the author found useful in effectively performing his/her job. For some positions, such as additional duties, the number of references may be few. The departing officer should list only the references that he/she believes are especially useful. In any event, the replacement can use the reference guide as a reading list to learn the specifics of his/her duties and responsibilities.

• **Duties and Responsibilities** - The author should provide a job description of the duty position. Use the LET 1 book which lists each duty.

• **Mission Statement** - The continuity binder should contain the unit’s mission statement, as well Staff’s individual goals. This provides the replacement a reference on how his/her new job fits into the overall success of the unit mission.

• **Mission Essential Task List (METL)** - The departing cadet should list the collective tasks of his/her section and how they support his/her higher echelon’s (BC/XO) METL.

• **Common Tasks** - This is one of the key sections of the continuity binder. It provides step-by-step instruction on how to accomplish key common tasks for that duty position. This will be done with worded instructions and examples. If paperwork must be filled out as part of common tasks, the author should enclose properly completed examples of them.

• **Alert Roster (Optional)** - The continuity document should provide an up-to-date telephonic alert roster with instructions on when and how to use it. The author should ensure that this document is kept updated in his/her book.

• **Organizational Phone Roster (Optional S-1)** - Unit S-1 normally keep a current unit telephone roster. This roster will provide the replacement with a quick guide to the phone numbers in the unit.

• **Important Phone Numbers (Optional)** - These are the telephone numbers that the author has found particularly useful during his/her time in the position. These can be numbers within the organization, but are more often numbers that are outside of it. Any business’ you have come in contact with for the success of your job or event(S-3).

• **Map of the Installation/Training Area (Optional S-3)** - This is an excellent aid in orienting the replacement cadet to the sites and areas that he/she must become familiar with to be successful in the new assignment.
• **Equipment Listing** - The departing cadet lists the key pieces of equipment that his/her replacement will be responsible for, such as weapons and clothing etc. along with a capabilities reference guide for each type of equipment.

• **Maintenance Status of Key Pieces of Equipment** - The author should provide a snapshot of the operability of each item listed in the equipment listing. The author should also maintain a current deadline report for all non-mission capable equipment in his unit and list the actions being taken to correct the problems.

• **Battle Rhythm Chart** - This chart shows the normal recurring events in the unit that the author attended, such as training meetings, leader meetings, and staff meetings. Also include the non-mandatory meetings the replacement cadet should attend.

• **Published Training Schedules (Optional S-3)** - The author should enclose a schedule of upcoming near-term training events to orient the replacement cadet to the flow of activities in the unit.

• **Long-Range Calendar of Events** - The continuity binder should contain this calendar to highlight upcoming events throughout the year to the replacement. This affords him/her the opportunity to start planning for future activities. • **Personnel Data Information (Optional S-1)** - Provide data on the personnel in the unit. The information should include name, rank, duty position, address, telephone number, gender, class period and company.

• **Recent Inspection and Evaluation Results** - Provide copies of the inspection and evaluation results/notes so that the replacement can assess the unit’s strengths and weaknesses. The author should enclose inspection and evaluation checklists that provide the tasks, conditions, and standards for his/her areas of responsibility. The incoming replacement will find this to be an invaluable resource.

• **Leader Book Information** - The author of the continuity binder should also include leader book information in his/her continuity binder. A leader book is a tool to help leaders identify and train essential cadet tasks that support the unit’s mission essential collective tasks. Leader’s use this book to record information addressing administrative data, common tasks, skill qualification assessment, and specific collective tasks that support the unit’s METL. They also record personal information that affects their Cadets’ training performance and that leaders need to know to provide training which meets their Cadets’ personal needs. The size of the leader book can vary depending on the leader and his/her duties. As a result, depending on the amount of information, the cadet preparing the continuity binder should include leader book information if it fits. Otherwise, he/she may decide to keep the leader book as a separate document.

• **Lessons Learned** - This section highlights the lessons the departing cadet learned while carrying out his/her duties. It should include tactics, techniques, and procedures
(TTPs) which the author found useful in producing optimal results in a given task. In essence, this is an after-action review (AAR) of potential pitfalls with tips on how to overcome them. Use all LET level books if needed to obtain lessons (U#, C#, L#).

- **Summary of Ongoing Actions** - The departing cadet should prepare this key section of the continuity binder just before the author is due to depart the position. The author should sum up key ongoing operations in enough detail for his/her replacement to successfully carry out all remaining actions.

**Conclusion**

To maintain our sharp cutting edge, we have to find ways to become more efficient in every facet of our operations. Without a doubt, a good continuity binder can help greatly in boosting the productivity of the Wildcat Battalion by reducing the amount of time that new personnel spend in learning their new jobs. This allows replacement cadets to more quickly learn their new jobs and thus integrate into their units. As a direct by-product of the more rapid integration of new cadets, the negative effects of personnel turnover to unit readiness can be greatly minimized. Additionally, a continuity binder assembled early in the author’s assignment assists in learning the new job more thoroughly and will become an invaluable resource. Lastly, a helpful continuity binder reflects well on its author because it shows that he/she is concerned with more than just the accomplishment of his/her mission, but that he/she is planning for the unit’s success even in the Battalion Commanders absence. So don’t make excuses-instead, start working on your continuity binder.