



Improving Readiness by Developing Leaders and Using Their Talents

■ By Frank Wenzel

Sergeant 1st Class Shvoda Gregory, motor sergeant for the 557th Engineer Company, 864th Engineer Battalion, talks to a small group of specialists and new sergeants on Jan. 24, 2016, at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, as part of a five-day junior leader development course that the battalion administers quarterly to better prepare its new and future leaders. (Photo by Sgt. Christopher Gaylord)



According to the Army Leader Development Strategy, “Leader development is the deliberate, continuous, and progressive process—founded in Army values—that grows Soldiers and Army civilians into competent and committed professional leaders of character. Leader development is achieved through the career-long synthesis of training, education, and experiences acquired through opportunities in the institutional, operational, and self-development domains, supported by peer and developmental relationships.”

Leader development routinely ranks very high on the chief of staff of the Army’s priorities because it is imperative that today’s Soldiers are fully prepared to meet the current and future readiness needs of the Army. Talent management should be used in conjunction with leader development to place the right leaders in the right place at the right time.

Echelons of Leader Development

Leader development is a shared responsibility among the institutional Army (education and training), the operational force (unit), and the individual. It encompasses different elements at different echelons. At

higher echelons, the Army ensures there are systems in place for developing senior leaders; this is the purview of general officers. At the unit level, leaders are personally responsible for developing their subordinates. This hands-on work is the domain of unit commanders and noncommissioned officers (NCOs).

Although both the Army and individual units are focused on meeting current and future needs, they deal with different developmental periods. Unit leaders ensure subordinate leaders are ready to operate in their current and next duty positions. In contrast, the Army takes a long-term view; it ensures that systems are in place to develop today’s junior leaders into the senior leaders it needs for the coming decades.

Preparing for the Future

For the foreseeable future, the Army will increasingly need individuals who can operate in complex and ambiguous environments. The Army Profession and Leader Development Forum (APLDF) was established to identify leader development issues and find solutions. In this forum, leader development initiatives are planned, tracked, and approved for implementation across the Army.

FEATURES

Leader development improves readiness. It is even more effective when the Army employs talent management to put leaders in the right place at the right time.

The APLDF works to rebalance the three crucial leader development components of training, education, and experience to ensure that leaders are properly trained to meet the challenges of future operational environments.

To ensure synchronized implementation, participating organizations share existing and emerging leader development topics, issues, and best practices that are developed in key Army forums. These forums include the Senior Leader Readiness Forum, the Training General Officer Steering Committee, and the Civilian Workforce Transformation General Officer Steering Committee.

The APLDF is a decision-making body chaired by a designated senior responsible official (SRO), who uses the APLDF to shape and lead Armywide leader development efforts. The SRO leads and executes the Army Leader Development Program and makes leader development recommendations to the chief of staff of the Army. Consequently, the SRO is vested with the authority to shape and lead efforts to develop officers, warrant officers, NCOs, and civilians.

Members of the APLDF include

Army commands, Army service component commands, direct reporting units, the National Guard Bureau, the U.S. Army Reserve Command, staff principals for the Department of the Army headquarters, the Human Resources Command, and other members, as the SRO directs. These members critically examine leader development initiatives and programs, discuss issues, and draw upon their experiences and judgment to advise the SRO.

The forum's current initiatives include Regional and Strategic Broadening, the Commander 360 Assessment, NCO 2020, and America's Army—Our Profession. Successfully completed initiatives include the Army Career Tracker, the Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback Program, the Advanced Strategic Policy and Planning Program, and the Command and General Staff Officer Course Interagency Exchange Program.

The Role of Talent Management

Talent management is the combination of the processes the Army uses to ensure the right leader is as-



Maj. Jason Winkelmann shared insights on Army Corps of Engineers organizational structures with Soldiers of the 10th Brigade Engineer Battalion during a two-day leadership development program at Hunter Army Airfield, Georgia, on March 4, 2016. (Photo by Chelsea Smith)

signed to the right job at the right time. The right leader might not always be the most qualified individual for a position. Often, the best leader for a position needs to be developed within that assignment in order to satisfy immediate organizational needs. This development might be necessary for that leader's future utilization.

Talent management takes into account the individual preferences and talents of an officer, warrant officer, NCO, or Army civilian; the unique distribution of his or her skills, knowledge, and behaviors; and that individual's potential. The Army focuses on developing and using well-rounded leaders based on the talents they have derived not only from operational experience but also from broadening assignments, advanced civil schooling, professional military education, and demonstrated interests.

Leader development and talent management together are built on the fundamentals "be, know, and do." Army leaders must possess and demonstrate traits such as adaptability, agility, flexibility, responsiveness, and resilience. Mastering these fundamentals is a professional obligation and provides the basis by which Army leaders operate effectively with joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational partners.

Recommendations

To support the integration of talent management with leader development, the Army must restructure promotion timelines so that leaders have the opportunity to broaden their experiences that will improve their leadership skills. Additionally, using 360-degree assessments may someday support talent management and help individual leaders identify their own strengths to sustain and weaknesses to overcome.

Developmental programs such as the Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback Program and the Commander 360 Assessment are steps in the right direction because they in-

crease leaders' self-awareness. These initiatives are developmental programs, though, and do not provide the Army with assessments of performance or potential.

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Evaluation reports alone are not sufficient for assessing performance or potential. The Army must consider additional ways to evaluate individual potential. In order to truly engage in talent management, the Army needs to study and derive lessons from industry-standard assessment centers as models for selection and promotion.

Training, education, and experience each contribute to development in a unique way. While training teaches skills, education teaches how to think. And experience is where it all comes together. This is where and when all the training and education are put into practice.

Experience originates from service in war and peace, the personal and the professional, the private and the public, leading and following, and training and education. Career-long learners reflect on all experiences, develop lessons learned from those experiences, and apply those lessons in future experiences.

The Army uses assignments, progression, development, broadening opportunities, and outside influences to provide leaders with the experiential opportunities required to reach full potential. In today's resource-constrained environment, investments in leader development can often mitigate other budget-induced shortcomings. If the leaders at the tip of the spear are properly developed, adaptive thinkers, they can

overcome almost anything.

The valuable experience the Army gained in Iraq and Afghanistan must be complemented by the education and training necessary to develop

the leaders the Army needs for its complex future—leaders who have the ability to lead Army and joint enterprises.

Leader development is essential to the Army's success. The Army's strategic leaders of tomorrow are serving in entry-level ranks and positions today. To maintain an Army of competent and committed leaders of character who have the skills and attributes necessary to meet the challenges of the 21st century, leaders must train, educate, and provide experiences to progressively develop subordinate leaders. This will ensure the Army prevails in unified land operations.

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This article is adapted from an article published in the July–August 2015 issue of Military Review. The Military Review article is available at http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20150831_art010.pdf.