CSM Forum

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Several years ago, while working in my office, I heard someone yelling down the hall. When I went to see what was going on, I found a major addressing a captain about his failure to accomplish some tasks. After telling the major he had a phone call in the command group, I sat with the captain and we discussed what had taken place. The captain was serving as the battalion executive officer, a key developmental position for a major. We discussed expectation management. We also talked about whether we had appropriately invested in his ability to successfully execute the duties and responsibilities of the position. This included talking about the captain's understanding of his role and ability to assist in leading the battalion into several new missions.

This brings me to the two key priorities of our Commanding General, MG Anthony Hale: *Build Leaders* and *Drive Change*. This means we must *build leaders* so that they are equipped to *drive change*. Most would agree this should be easy because we have been doing some semblance of this for years. The reality is that the events of 9/11 forced our Army to transition, almost overnight, from training for large-scale combat against a peer adversary to training for counterinsurgency. In our haste to meet this requirement, the Army lost its emphasis on a number of tasks that tied leadership and technical expertise together to meet current and future missions. MG Hale's priorities provide the focus for leaders to go back and recapture these skills.

We have to accept that leader development is no longer implied. It is common to hear senior commanders talking about the tasks they expect junior and mid-grade leaders to accomplish in order to meet their vision and end state, when in fact roles and responsibilities are not always known or understood. This problem affects all three cohorts: officer, warrant officer, and noncommissioned officer (NCO). For example, many officers do not understand their role in training management, warrant officers believe it is their responsibility to train Soldiers, and NCOs are often unsure of their role and wait for others to lead their Soldiers. Furthermore, one entity passes responsibility to another entity without fixing the problem.

When considering how to build leaders, we must discuss the Army's three learning domains: *institutional* (institutional training and education system), *operational* (such as day-to-day operations or training conducted at home station and during joint exercises), and *self-development* (self-initiated, goal-oriented learning). The institutional domain is the initial domain in which Soldiers spend time, and it provides a baseline for the operational force, although this is mostly doctrine-centric and focuses on critical tasks that may or may not be mission-essential. Soldiers spend only about 5 percent of their career in the institutional domain, and this portion of their career only serves as a guide for overarching concepts. Soldiers spend the other 95 percent of their career in the operational force where they should develop and hone a large range of skills. Far too often, we are so involved in the daily mission that we lose sight of a multitude of developmental opportunities, whether technical or leadership-focused. Every Soldier is in the self-development domain 100 percent of the time. Self-development opportunities are not always readily available, and although reading doctrine and regulations empowers Soldiers with knowledge, the information can be dry and difficult to retain. Many times, we would rather simply listen to what our leaders tell us than actually read for ourselves to understand Army standards and operations. The primary concern is the information our leaders provide is not always correct, and the problem is exacerbated if they perpetuate inaccurate information that they heard from their leaders.

The good news is our Soldiers today are smarter than ever and can adapt quickly if only we take the time to develop them. The first place to start is with senior leaders, ensuring they know Army standards, understand doctrine, and provide clear guidance and end state. Next is defining the needed duties and responsibilities and then setting a plan on how to build other leaders. We must assess talent, determine the current capability of each individual, and define what we need that person to do in the future. From there, leaders need to deliberately plan and manage time, tasks, and priorities to facilitate each Soldier's success. We have talked about talent management, planning, and the overall management of individuals as if they are implied, but they are not. Senior leaders need to assess each of these areas with their mid-grade leaders to ensure everyone is synchronized on standards and expectations. Again, this is another opportunity for leader development. It is imperative to inspect, rather than expect, along the way to ensure everyone maintains focus on the right outcomes.

People are our most important asset. The more we invest in them, the more return on investment we will get. If we consider our primary responsibilities of mission, Soldiers, and families, building leaders will bring success to all three. We just have to build them deliberately to prepare them to drive change. ✸

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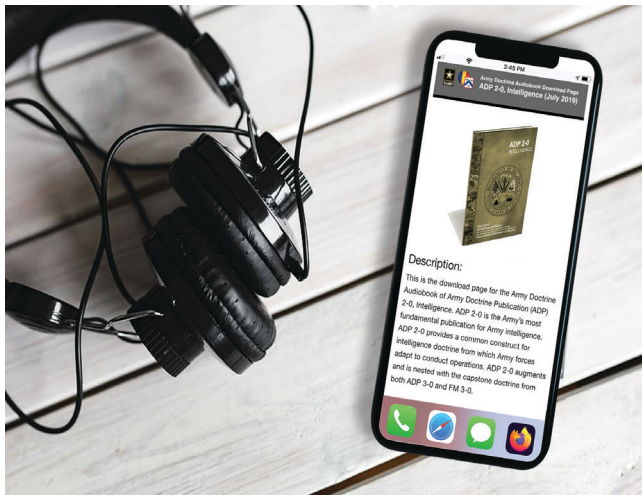
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