
Career Development: Navigating Your Way to a Productive Army Career

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Introduction

If you are at the beginning of your career, or have been in the Army for a few years, consider the one piece of information you would love to have—a blueprint, maybe, on what steps to take along your career path. *If* you had access to a blueprint of what the Army expects from you, would you use it? The Army has endless opportunities for personal growth and professional achievement. There is just one catch—you must be willing to put in the time and effort and have the desire to achieve more than you ever thought possible.

This article will describe how you can become an expert in your discipline while planning for the next chapter in your Army career. You will learn that you can chart your very own path as you progress in rank, set your own personalized and professional goals, and achieve more by following some simple rules.

The Updated DA PAM 600-25

The Army has expectations for its Soldiers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs). As Soldiers climb the proverbial ladder of success, they must perform specific tasks at each rank for an increased potential for promotion, and these tasks are fundamental to the growth, knowledge, and experience for the next rank. Each task builds on the last and enables the transition from junior enlisted Soldier to NCO. This allows for a well-rounded individual, capable of leading the future force.

The primary publication governing this subject is DA PAM 600-25, *U.S. Army Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development Guide*, available through the Army Publishing Directorate website.¹ Additional chapters outlining each career management field's professional development opportunities are available at milSuite as a supplemental "smartbook." The military intelligence (MI) career management field is addressed in chapter 15, titled "Military Intelligence (Career Management Field 35) Career Progression Plan."² The chapter describes the major duties of each MI military occupational specialty (MOS) and the overarching goals for development, and it provides detailed guidelines pertaining to each skill level.

Educating the Force

Educating the force can be an intimidating task. This is especially true when educating the entire MI Corps on how to get the most out of a career. The Army has countless regulations, pamphlets, and publications that instruct us in all that a Soldier needs to know and do. However, the Army does not have much information on how to navigate your entire career by defining each step of the way. Soldiers and leaders must understand the importance of assignment diversity and its influence on creating a well-rounded Soldier. Leaders not using DA PAM 600-25 to counsel their Soldiers are overlooking a valuable resource to enhance career development in their Soldiers. The Department of the Army (DA) states, "Direct leaders develop others through coaching, counseling, mentoring, and setting the example."³ Many of you reading this article are the direct line leader! How are you giving sound guidance and counsel without using the proper resources designed to facilitate career enhancement? Simply stated, the answer is, you are not.

We must consider this DA pamphlet a blueprint for career development, a guide for counseling, and a resource for knowledge. This DA pamphlet covers each career management field within the Army. Furthermore, it enables non-MI leaders to understand what the MI Soldier's career looks like. As members of the MI Corps, we are responsible for educating our subordinates *and* our non-MI senior leaders on what we bring to the fight. Leaders at all levels need to understand that each Soldier has a different definition of success, and each will take a different path to achieve their goal.

Impacts to the Force and Improving the Force

When embarking on a journey, understanding the overall direction is important, but knowing when and where to turn is essential. Your career is no different. Understanding *what* the expectations are is important, but understanding *why* they are important often results in Soldier buy-in. A Soldier with buy-in is a Soldier who is committed. With a career path established, Soldiers can focus more on ways to improve. This includes seeking out educational opportunities,

being successful at demanding jobs, and attending the necessary schools to enhance MOS Soldier skills. Educating the force is important, and so too is the proper employment of MI Soldiers. Employing Soldiers within their means, which also includes outside their comfort zone, will improve the force. No Soldier can be stagnant throughout a career and hope to make it to the senior enlisted ranks. As Soldiers, we must engage our leadership, branch managers, and career managers to seek guidance. That is why we are here—to help you make the most out of your time in the Army. When our MI Soldiers understand and follow the blueprint for career development, our MI Corps is a more competent and combat-ready force.

Talent Management

Talent management is a self-driven initiative that requires a commitment to the demanding opportunities the Army offers. This is not to say talent management is solely an individual responsibility; leaders across the force must properly manage talent to employ their Soldiers most effectively. Used properly, talent management can improve readiness and combat effectiveness, empower Soldiers, positively influence unit performance, and improve organizational ability. The Army places a high demand on position within the force, and it is imperative that leaders manage their subordinates accordingly. At its core, talent management is about knowing your Soldiers and understanding your organization's mission. If MI leaders are unable to manage talent properly, we will lose that talent to the civilian sector.

Talent management is impossible without the understanding, and incorporation, of knowledge, skills, and behaviors. Knowledge represents experience, mental awareness, and education. Skills are those abilities individual Soldiers have learned from various training opportunities, including prior military, and from other situational experiences. Environmental factors drive behaviors. These factors include cultural experiences, workplace policies, and societal norms. Combining these three factors makes up a Soldier's talent, and knowing how to mold and employ a Soldier is management. Leaders must always remember that the people who make up the force are the Army's greatest asset. By investing in our people, the Army can better develop and employ the force to engage in combat operations around the globe.

Key Leadership, Key Developmental, and Broadening

DA PAM 600-25 clearly defines key leadership, key developmental, and broadening assignments as well as the duties associated with each rank. The MI chapter of the DA PAM 600-25 smartbook states the following:

Key Leadership—Duty positions that consist of traditional and staff leadership positions.

Key Developmental—Operational MOS positions that are required to develop critical technical skills and experience that provide the greatest potential for advancement.

Broadening assignments—Operational or institutional positions in a command or agency where duties can be outside of one's MOS or [career management field] CMF. These assignments offer a purposeful expansion of an NCO's leadership, resulting in agile and adaptive leaders capable of operating in complex environments. Mostly, these assignments are MOS-immaterial and challenge the NCO to increase their knowledge of Army policy and programs, increase skills beyond their CMF by performing the required duties of the assignment, and encourage growth.⁶

Linkage to Concepts and Strategies

Talent management is an implicit component of the ways and means required to support the Army's strategic priorities and an integral part of several key concepts and strategies.⁴ *The Army Strategic Planning Guidance* establishes strategic priorities for the Army Total Force. The first priority is "**Adaptive Army Leaders for a Complex World**" and identifies the required [knowledge, skills, and behaviors] KSBs as "morals, ethics, individual toughness, fighting spirit, intellectual capacity, tactical competence, technical proficiency, and strategic perspective."⁵

Key leadership includes, but is not limited to, team leader, squadron leader, platoon sergeant, and detachment sergeant. These positions are critical in pursuing self-development and aiding the development of subordinates. Key developmental includes, but is not limited to,

Security Force Assistance Brigade, division/corps analysis and control element, or special mission unit. These developmental assignments enable a more challenging workload within a specific MOS. Broadening assignments include, but are not limited to, drill sergeant, recruiter, instructor, and NCO Academy small group leader. It is important that a Soldier be able to step outside his or her specialty and give back to the Army. Volunteering for and being successful in those distinct and demanding assignments will set you apart from your peers. Those assignments are within the three training domains, which will develop the Soldier's training, experience, and education.

Training Domains

The Army has three training domains: operational, institutional, and self-development. Soldier and leader progression


is continuously built upon over the life of a career. Soldiers use the training, education, and experience that they gain through key leadership, key developmental, and broadening assignments to continuously develop themselves in each domain. Through counseling, Army leaders assist their subordinates in prioritizing and balancing their training, experience, and education components. That is why it is imperative for the leader to understand DA PAM 600-25 and how it assists in the counseling process.

Counseling

Regulatory guidance dictates leaders must counsel their Soldiers. This counseling should take place in an environment free from distraction. Whether done with a pen and paper or by digital means, counseling plays a vital role in the development and growth of Soldiers. As stated previously, DA PAM 600-25 serves as a blueprint for leaders conducting professional growth counseling of subordinates of any MOS. The DA pamphlet is a tool to help Soldiers and leaders identify relevant short- and long-term goals that will set them up for success. It outlines the major duties and goals for development for each MOS, and it informs Soldiers which key leadership, key developmental, and broadening assignments they need for each skill level. Additionally, it describes which military training Soldiers require in order to be competitive within their MOS. DA PAM 600-25 also informs Soldiers what they need in terms of self-development. In theory, if the leader follows the guide path in DA PAM 600-25 when conducting professional growth counseling, the subordinate will be successful.

In addition to DA PAM 600-25, another tool is available to assist in the counseling process—the Individual Development Plan (IDP), located on the Army Career Tracker (ACT) website. As a digital tool, the ACT website allows Soldiers and leaders to identify and set goals. This IDP allows Soldiers to view their career map and select a leader(s) and mentor(s) to help guide them in future planning. Consider the IDP a digital version of the DA pamphlet with interactive features Soldiers and leaders can modify as needed to create a focused career plan.

Conclusion

This article provided a baseline understanding of DA PAM 600-25, which offers MI Soldiers and leaders a better understanding of each MI discipline. It emphasized the importance of educating the force and the subsequent impacts on the force. The DA pamphlet, the ACT website, and IDP serve as a blueprint and a resource for career navigation to both MI Soldiers and non-MI leaders. Having knowledge of key leadership, key developmental, and broadening assignments enables Soldiers to seek more diversity, which helps create a well-rounded leader. It is critical that Soldiers understand whom to contact when questions arise concerning career development and assignment selection. Lastly, this DA pamphlet provides leaders a tool for counseling subordinates and educating leaders. An educated leader creates an educated force. 

Endnotes

1. Department of the Army, Department of the Army Pamphlet (DA PAM) 600-25, *U.S. Army Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development Guide* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 11 December 2018), <https://armypubs.army.mil/>.
2. Department of the Army, “Military Intelligence (Career Management Field 35) Career Progression Plan,” chap. 15 at Smartbook DA PAM 600-25, *The Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development Guide* (Washington, DC, 18 August 2020), <https://www.milsuite.mil/book/groups/smartbook-da-pam-600-25>.
3. Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, *Army Leadership and the Profession* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 31 July 2019), 1-23. Change 1 was issued on 25 November 2019.
4. Department of the Army, Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), *Talent Management Concept of Operations for Force 2025 and Beyond* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: TRADOC, September 2015), 33.
5. Department of the Army, *2014 Army Strategic Planning Guidance* (Washington, DC: 2014), 18.
6. Department of the Army, “Military Intelligence (Career Management Field 35) Career Progression Plan,” 8, <https://www.milsuite.mil/book/groups/smartbook-da-pam-600-25>.

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