



The Directorate of Training analyzes, designs, and develops intelligence training materials, unit mission essential tasks, and training programs that contribute directly to the combat readiness of military intelligence Soldiers, leaders, and their units.

by Ms. Beth Leeder

## Introduction

Welcome to the inaugural ***Training Readiness: From Our Fort to Yours!*** The purpose of this column is to open a dialogue between the institutional training domain (U.S. Army Intelligence Center of Excellence [USAICoE]) and the operational training domain (you) to enhance learning and create “seamless transitions as Soldiers move into and out of operational units and institutional opportunities.”<sup>1</sup> Said another way, this column will share resources you can use with your Soldiers to enhance their learning and ultimately their readiness. In this initial column, I will introduce myself, discuss the difference between a brief and a learning opportunity, and provide one tip you can use to enhance learning in your units.

It seems to me that being a successful military intelligence (MI) professional is a combination of what you know (the science of the profession), how you use what you know (the art), and how much experience you have using what you know. The same is true with learning. I have spent my entire career (34 years) studying, researching, and working in the business of learning, first as a public school teacher and for the past 13 years as a Department of the Army Civilian at USAICoE. I currently lead staff and faculty development, curriculum design, and educational technology development for USAICoE. Learning is literally in the name of the division I lead—Teaching, Learning, and Technology Division, which is part of the Directorate of Training. Every day we work with the officers and noncommissioned officers of the MI Corps stationed at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, to figure out the most effective way to train and educate your Soldiers while they are at the schoolhouse. This column will blend the science and art of learning we use every day into obser-

ventions, suggestions, and resources that will help you train the MI Soldiers you lead.

## Four Key Points to Help Get a Student’s Attention

So let’s get down to business. Imagine it is early on a Tuesday morning after a long weekend. You arrive at work and find out you have to give a mandatory 350-1 training brief in the unit classroom at 1300. You know the kind...lots of PowerPoint slides that everyone has seen before. The training is important to your unit and its Soldiers, but for learning to occur, Soldiers have to pay attention and this is not an easy thing to achieve in a traditional brief. In fact, “training brief” is a bit of an oxymoron because training briefs are not usually set up to facilitate training or learning. In his book *Brain Rules*, Dr. John Medina gives four key points for getting and maintaining the attention necessary for learning to occur.<sup>2</sup> You can use these four points to transform the brief into a true learning opportunity:

- ◆ Emotions Get the Brain’s Attention.
- ◆ Meaning before Details.
- ◆ The Brain Cannot Multitask.
- ◆ The Brain Needs a Break.

**1. Emotions Get the Brain’s Attention.** Finding a way to connect the topic of the brief to an emotion is a good way to start. The most common technique involves using a personal story—yours or, with permission, the story of someone in the organization. But think beyond the story. A video clip, a newspaper article, a podcast sound bite, or even a picture can arouse emotion in your audience. Surprisingly it doesn’t matter what the emotion is—empathy and fear could work equally well—as long as they tie to the content.

Announcing you have doubled the time allotted for the brief (undoubtedly making people angry) would not result in better learning, just angry people.


**2. Meaning before Details.** Deliver the meaning of the brief before the details so that Soldiers get the *gist* or crux of what you are talking about. Learning depends on connecting new information to information already present in the brain. Providing the gist first gives Soldiers a way to connect and organize the new information. The brain is really bad at remembering details, yet we tend to focus on providing lots of details when we brief. Soldiers will remember the gist far longer than the details, so if the details are essential, make sure your Soldiers know where to find them after the brief is over. For example, most 350-1 requirements are based on an Army regulation. Provide a link on the unit website, or if you can, add the link to any handouts you use.

**3. The Brain Cannot Multitask.** Regardless of what your teenager has told you, anything that draws the learner's attention away from the brief, like a cell phone, ambient noise, or even the temperature of the room, will decrease the Soldiers' attention. It is important for you to establish an environment as free of distractions as possible. This includes your slides. Ever seen a slide so full of pictures, colors, and really small font that it made your eyes cross? When you are creating slides for the purpose of learning, the less text the better. Can you replace some of the text with a picture or graphic to show the gist? Remember, Soldiers aren't likely to remember all that detail/text, but they may remember the gist of a picture. Don't make your Soldiers multitask by having them read font that is too small while they try to listen to what you have to say. If you absolutely must use the eye-crossing slide, hand out copies for each Soldier.

**4. The Brain Needs a Break.** This is a big one. The brain needs a break after 10 to 15 minutes of listening, and it is going to take one whether you stop talking or not. The break doesn't have to be long but it should be meaningful. For example,

having everyone "stand and stretch" will provide a mental break, but since it is not tied to the topic at hand, it is not an effective break. The most effective way to turn a break into a learning opportunity is to include a carefully planned interaction every 10 to 15 minutes or so. Asking a question or providing a situation related to the topic for Soldiers to discuss, write about, or respond to provides a break and helps students make more of those connections we talked about in number 2 above (Meaning before Details).

## How to Get Help with Learning Techniques

You can apply these four key insights to any interaction you want to turn into a learning opportunity. At this point, you may be wondering how you can get help creating learning opportunities. First, look in your formations! You very likely have Soldiers who have been instructors or training developers. They learn techniques like the ones we've been discussing through the instructor courses taught at USAICoE. Another way to get help is to reach out with your questions through the shout box on the Intelligence Knowledge Network website (<https://www.ikn.army.mil>) or by contacting us directly. Our Fort is standing by to help in any way we can. Finally, you can look for this column in the next edition of *Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin* (MIPB). Future topics we are kicking around include making the most of distance learning, understanding learners' reactions to failure, and helping Soldiers with professional self-development. What would YOU like to see discussed in future columns? You can contact me through MIPB at [usarmy.huachuca.icoe.mbx.mipb@mail.mil](mailto:usarmy.huachuca.icoe.mbx.mipb@mail.mil). Till then, Always Out Front! 

## Endnotes

1. Department of the Army, Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet 525-8-2, *The U.S. Army Learning Concept for Training and Education 2020–2040* (Fort Eustis, VA: TRADOC, April 2017), 16.
2. John Medina, *Brain Rules 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home, and School* (Seattle, WA: Pear Press, 2008), 71–94.

