



1st Place MacArthur Contest Winner

Capt. Kevin Jensen, commander, U.S. Army Garrison-Yongsan Headquarters and Headquarters Company, conducts a safety brief before releasing his soldiers for an extended weekend, Yongsan Garrison, Republic of Korea.

(Photo credit, U.S. Army Garrison, Yongsan)

Transformational Stories

How the Weekend Safety Brief Can Be a Forum for the Professional Military Ethic

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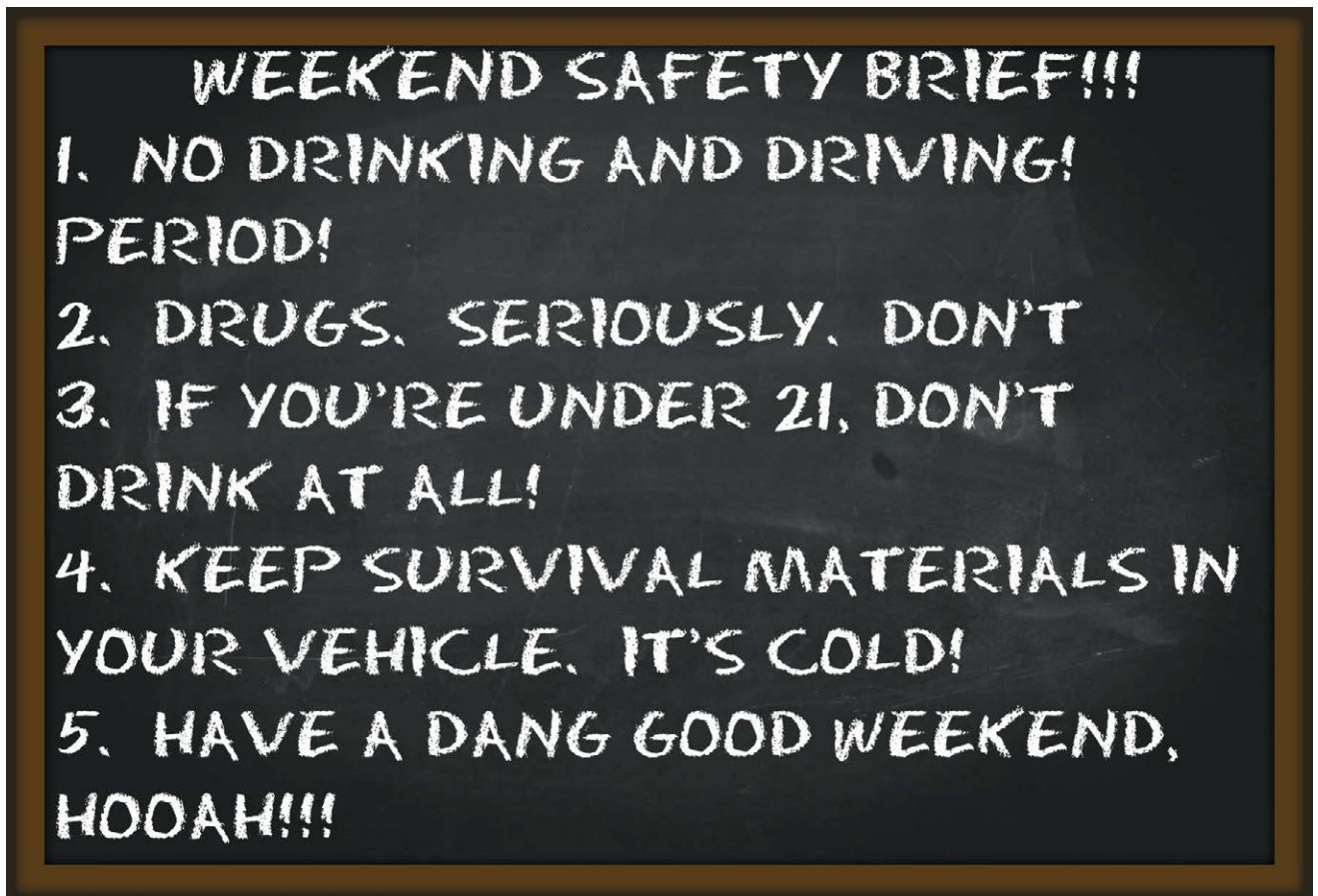
*Now all you recruities [sic] what's drafted to-day,
You shut up your rag-box an' 'ark to my lay,
An' I'll sing you a soldier as far as I may:
A soldier what's fit for a soldier.*

—Rudyard Kipling

Today's Army is well on its way to codifying a professional military ethic (PME) that will define our service and ensure that we retain our nation's trust, but a difficulty remains in translating this high ideal to the individual soldier.¹ Discussions in the past have often highlighted a need to successfully articulate and decipher the PME from our learning institutions to the frontline "strategic corporal" in order to have an impact on our organizational success.² The implied transformation from citizens into soldiers into ethical leaders will take place in a multitude of forums from institutional settings to professional mentorship, and this article cannot cover them all. Instead, let us turn our focus to one of the most readily adapted rituals we have in our service.

Friday afternoons across the Army, commanders and their senior NCOs face their formations in the perfect setting for a discussion of the PME—the weekend safety brief. Sadly, because of a long-standing practice, the large majority of these opportunities end up wasted as leaders attempt to check the block with unmemorable maxims for soldiers' immediate behavior. This usually comes in the form of a list of things soldiers should do and things soldiers should avoid. This custom could accomplish much more if we designed it to focus beyond this simple formality and began to shift soldiers closer to a commitment to the Army values using memorable engagement.

Adopting a model of transformational stories from recent business literature will provide leaders with a method that allows them to truly engage soldiers in discussions about the PME while continuing to attack the immediate concerns that the weekend safety brief should address. In lieu of the customary mode for these safety briefings, this article details a better technique for ensuring a lasting impact on our soldiers. That method is to communicate a vision through memorable stories.



Articulating a Professional Military Ethic

Before we look at how to go about retooling the weekend safety brief, it is vital to show that a change will not be adverse to good order and discipline in the short term. To accomplish this reassurance, it is first necessary to determine that there is a genuine imperative to instill in our soldiers a PME and that the Army values are an acceptable tool for the job. Second, it is relevant to demonstrate that shifting to an Army values focus will build stronger soldiers who are more able to handle the stresses of combat and day-to-day life. Finally, we will show that shifting soldiers from compliance to Army values-commitment is a realistic framework for modifying the originally targeted unsafe behavior. In the end, leaders must still effect improved off-duty judgment within their formations.

Consider for a moment an expansion on the definition of leadership from ADRP 6-22, *Army Leadership*. Under the heading of “Improve the Organization,” the publication expounds, “Improving is an act of stewardship, striving to create effective, efficient organizations.”³ Leaders have a responsibility as stewards of the military service to impart upon their soldiers the established values of our service. This challenge is not merely a matter of moving soldiers from compliance to commitment, but of ensuring that they understand the values to which they are committed.⁴ Researchers have demonstrated that leaders cannot fully accomplish an improvement of the ethics of subordinates by simply demonstrating ethical leadership. These principles must additionally be actively promoted through an ongoing dialogue in public and private settings.⁵

Likewise, in developing “soldiers with military competence and moral character,” leaders need to have at their disposal a standard set of principles-in-virtue from which to draw their lessons.⁶ The literature on the PME provides a broad set of creedal and philosophical starting points.⁷ Although legitimate recommendations for expansion of the Army values exist, the list represented by the acronym *LDRSHIP* (loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage) has significant value as a starting point for expressing a PME to our soldiers.⁸ The seven values taught to every soldier at basic training capture “important elements of the Army ethic” and provide talking points for leaders initially engaging soldiers’ moral stance.⁹

Engaging soldiers on ethics goes much further than a simple indoctrination into the profession or behavior modification on and off duty. Changes to Warrior Resiliency Training developed to aid soldiers in post-traumatic growth indicate “Army values, warrior ethos, and leadership are critical foundations of Army resiliency training that can be skillfully integrated into a model promoting internal combat stress control.”¹⁰ This kind of development indicates that the greater the foundation a soldier has in moral understanding, the more likely they are to be able to handle combat stress. Likewise, an individual with a stronger moral compass is less likely to engage in behaviors that result in psychologically damaging guilt and regret. Overall, this is an area that deserves more research but leaders cannot dismiss the demonstrated benefits that the Army values have had as an ingredient in our warrior resiliency training.

Of course, no leader should accept a recommendation to change the weekend safety brief to a new form if the originally targeted behavior is not being addressed and corrected. Weekend safety briefs, after all, are implemented to remind soldiers not to “embarrass the regiment,” as the expression goes. These concerns are not unreasonable, but a deeper examination of theories of leadership influence might demonstrate that the goal to develop soldiers who understand the PME and the goal to keep them off Monday morning’s blotter report are not mutually exclusive.

In Dr. Gene Klann’s essay, “The Application of Power and Influence in Organizational Leadership,” a central theme is the leader’s responsibility to shift subordinates from a point of mere compliance to a point of core commitment.¹¹ These ideas are usually displayed in diagrams with compliance on the left and commitment on the right so we might say for our discussion that we are “shifting soldiers to the right on the values spectrum.”¹² The implication of successfully shifting soldiers to the right is that the foundation of their behavior will move away from requiring “hard power” motivation. Instead, soldiers committed to their own standing in a profession will be motivated by an “affiliation” with the Army and the organization.

Under a framework in which soldiers become more interested in their own role as members of the profession, the logical consequence is that the originally targeted immature and negative behavior will become less

appealing or relevant. This shift meets leadership expectations of “millennials.”¹³ Research has shown, “one of the best ways to keep them [millennials] engaged is to communicate a large vision, worthy of their devotion, and then set high expectations.”¹⁴ Communicating a PME, instead of a series of rules for your weekend, would appeal to millennials.

The weekend safety brief is a valid forum for discussions about the PME. Shifting to that topic is likely to have a positive impact on the good order and discipline of the organizations that make such a change. We also need a better method of delivery to make such a safety briefing stick with the target audience.

The New Weekend Safety Brief

This conversation begins by describing what we have been doing and why that is generally an ineffective method. The next objective is to identify exactly what we want to accomplish through the weekend safety brief. To close, we will examine a new method for making soldiers more likely to do the right thing. In their 2007 book, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*, authors Chip and Dan Heath offer a helpful model with which we will be able to improve our organizations.¹⁵

To be intellectually honest, proving that the current mode of weekend safety brief is a failed method runs into a small challenge since there is no body of literature documenting the topics and formats of weekend safety briefs or any scientific data available with which to measure their effectiveness. That said, most leaders in the Army can turn to their own anecdotal evidence and experience to inform a discussion about the value of current techniques. Essentially, the reader is asked to accept this argument even though a lack of available records places it in the category of a planning assumption.

Chip and Dan Heath, in a later book, *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard*, describe a common human situation where the obstacle to change can best be described by the confession, “I know what I should be doing, but I’m not doing it.”¹⁶ The Heaths, two brothers, consider this a problem that deals with conscious awareness, but a lack of drive on the emotional side. Our subordinates often know *what* to do and may even believe that they *should* do it. The problem is that they are not motivated enough *to* do it.

The weekend safety brief that consists of a list of do’s and don’ts speaks only to the part of the human brain that already knows not to drink and drive or commit domestic violence. The problem is that it fails to address the part of the brain that is going to do something about it. In order to motivate soldiers on that level, we must transform the weekend safety brief into something else entirely.

Today’s target recruit is a fairly well-adjusted member of society between the ages of 17 and 24.¹⁷ The drinking age has been 21 in all 50 states longer than anyone in the target range has been alive.¹⁸ For the entire lives of this demographic, driving drunk has also been against the law, and it was never legal to skip wearing a seatbelt in any U.S. state.¹⁹ A Friday afternoon reminder of what is illegal in our society is not going to be a surprise to any of our soldiers. They do not need a weekly reminder of what the rules are. Instead, leaders need to broaden soldiers’ interest in the problem and involve them in the solution.²⁰

Additionally, the topics leaders address in these settings often represent a laundry list of the problems the organization has most recently suffered. Educators will confess they succumb to a similar problem. Frequent education gaps are being revealed as “pressure around state-mandated exams pushes some teachers to ‘teach to the test.’”²¹ When leaders simply chastise their soldiers to avoid a set of behaviors that those soldiers already know they should be avoiding, those leaders are in essence “teaching to the test” and failing to provide any leadership that will result in a lasting improvement in the organization. Transforming the weekend safety brief shifts the topic from a lecture aimed at behaviors soldiers already know are undesirable to a discussion that motivates them to act in a positive manner on that knowledge.

In order to motivate soldiers to live by the Army values, we must renovate our method and change our topic for the weekend safety brief. This brings us to the model of *transformational stories*. The Heath brothers’ book *Made to Stick* offers a framework for engaging and motivating people in a manner that is more likely to endure. The model they propose is built around the acronym SUCCEsS. Their mnemonic for an idea that is “made to stick” describes “a simple, unexpected, concrete, credible, emotional story” which will be more memorable and more readily applied.²²

Simple, unexpected, concrete, credible, emotional stories; Heath and Heath recommend them for everything from organizational change, to advertising, to going viral on the internet. Our purpose here is a narrow slice of organizational change aimed at transforming our soldiers by shifting them to the right on the values spectrum. In order to communicate all of these concepts more expediently, we will use the name transformational stories. These transformational stories designed to specifically engage our soldiers and shift their values will educate the formation in what it means to live the Army values as well as cover the need to make junior soldiers think about personal responsibility in their off-duty environment.

“Simple” stories work with human memory because our soldiers are more likely to pay attention to the things they understand. Focus groups organized to develop children’s programming have discovered that, despite common assumptions, children stop listening when they stop understanding. Kids tune in, even to *boring* portions of educational television, when they understand the message.²³ This is not to say that our soldiers are children but rather that keeping our messages understandable, even as we delve into the PME, is critical to ensuring that soldiers remain engaged in the discussion.

The next principle from Heath and Heath is “unexpected” because a degree of surprise captures the attention of the audience. The Heath brothers further illustrate that an identified gap in knowledge causes the human brain to retain interest long after the discussion ends.²⁴ This is why the teaser keeps some people from flipping the channel during television commercials. This does not mean that every transformational story has to contain a twist or a shocker, but when it is possible to add an element of surprise, leaders will do a better job of engaging subordinates.

“Concreteness” has long been a proven method for clarifying ideas to the audience. In this regard, we should seek out visual aids and hands-on

demonstrations of the PME. The idea of an object lesson in a sermon is incredibly popular for this same made-to-stick reason. A Google search for the phrase “object lesson” or “concrete example” will yield hundreds of results.²⁵



Brig. Gen. Bud R. Jameson, the commanding general of the 316th Expeditionary Sustainment Command, addresses soldiers of the unit during a mass formation at North Fort Hood, Texas, 23 May 2012. Jameson praised the soldiers for their hard work and perseverance over the past few months of mobilization training prior to the unit taking a four-day Memorial Day pass.

Army Sgt. Peter J. Berardi, 316th Sustainment Command

The topic of PME does not automatically make a weekend safety brief credible. Bear in mind that defining exactly what PME means is an ongoing discussion across the Army. Credibility in the realms of ethics and morality may be one of our greater challenges in the current environment of ethical diversity.²⁶ Additionally, the speaker’s credibility in both personal and professional life affects the message. The Army values, because of their pervasive acceptance, make the best platform for a credible discussion of PME, while the credibility of the speaker is a much larger topic best left for another leadership article.

Continuing with the SUCCEsS mnemonic, “emotions” are a key link to memory and lasting behavioral change.²⁷ (If emotional displays in front of a formation do not sound like your strong point, bear in mind that stoicism and the warrior ethos are also displays of emotion.)²⁸ A main point the Heath brothers convey in both of their books is that there is a strong connection between emotions and willingness to act.²⁹ Additionally, the chemical and physiological connection between emotion and memory is fairly well established.³⁰ Accessing the endorphin-memory link may be

as easy as holding your brief immediately following an esprit-de-corps unit run.

Simple, unexpected, concrete, credible, emotional, and finally, “stories”—we were born to remember a narrative, but humans must work to remember a list.³¹ Professional competitive “memory champions” actually convert anything they want to remember (even random lists of numbers or decks of playing cards) into a “memory palace,” a kind of story, in order to remember so many inane details.³² When we hear a well-told narrative, there is a part of our brain that walks through the story with the teller, and doing that aids understanding and retention.³³

It is through this last point, through the telling of stories, that we are making the major success-driving change in our weekend safety brief format. The story and the object lesson become our starting point for engaging subordinates in a common vision of the Army values.

Telling Transformational Stories

Going back to the beginning of this article, imagine a new Friday. The unit finishes a motivational morning run and while soldiers’ hearts are still pumping hard the commander calls them all into an informal “horseshoe” formation. He tells them he is not going to insult their intelligence by lecturing them to do the right thing over the weekend. They already know what the right thing is, and he expects them to do it.

Instead, he wants to talk to them about respect. It is simple because they already have a foundation for what respect is. Discussing respect is also credible because it is an Army value. He tells them about his neighbor who is a blind man with a service dog. That is unexpected, and because the soldiers realize there is a gap in their knowledge, their natural curiosity is piqued.

“The other day I saw him leave home to go for a walk, and when he got about 100 meters from his house, there was a car parked across the sidewalk in someone’s driveway.” He is drawing them in to the challenge his neighbor is about to face. “The dog stopped him short of the car but, having no idea why, my neighbor tried to keep the dog moving. The dog stopped him three times and he ended up yelling at the poor dog before running into the car himself.”³⁴

Soldiers might be wondering where this is going, but none of them have tuned out. The commander continues, “I think there’s a lesson about respect we can learn

from what happened to my neighbor.” He goes on to make a connection between the lack of trust the blind man had for his service dog when something unexpected happened and a young soldier who disregards the advice of a wise friend or an NCO.

“I want you to imagine your friend is trying to steer you clear from a bad decision this weekend. What are you going to do? Are you going to do the right thing? Or, are you going to walk smack-dab into a parked car?” He has placed them inside the narrative now, and he starts to shift them toward commitment. “If you think respect is simply giving your NCOs what’s due, you are just beginning to uncover the Army values”

This commander has successfully initiated a dialogue through a transformational story. When he finishes the discussion after a few more points about respect, he has not told them not to drink and drive because they already know not to. On a very personal level, he has reminded them that their off-duty behavior is part of who they are and that he has high expectations of that behavior.³⁵

Every soldier will not walk away from that formation instantly transformed and completely committed to the Army values, but they will walk away shifted a little bit more to the right on the spectrum from compliance to commitment. Soldiers who are engaged through a SUCCEsS-based series of transformational stories may still occasionally hit the blotter report, but, despite that, leaders will instill in their soldiers something the old-style weekend safety brief does not: the emotionally based personal drive to act. Those soldiers will be more likely to become committed to the professional military ethic sooner in their careers than others will.

The simplest thing about this concept is that leaders who have themselves shifted from compliance to commitment to the PME carry with them the stories that brought them to that point. Without seeking out a cleverly contrived anecdote or object lesson, most leaders are capable of relaying to soldiers what it means to be a practitioner of the Army values from their own experience and the experiences of those around them. Additionally, leaders who choose to adopt this method will find themselves approached by soldiers who are in the process of shifting to the right with their own stories to tell.

Changing the weekend safety brief into a weekly forum to discuss the PME will build the organization

we have been seeking through the previous format by targeting the root cause of a need to shift soldiers from compliance to commitment. Redesigning the format of what is said from the notorious list of do's and don'ts into transformational stories will improve the organization because leaders will be using researched methods to ensure that these ideas stick with our soldiers once they get past the parking lot. The following two examples illustrate the type of transformational stories discussed in this article.

Comparing Apples to Oranges: An Object Lesson in Integrity

We often hear the phrase, “you’re comparing apples to oranges,” as if it cannot be done; but have you ever tried it? On the outside, apples and oranges are both baseball-sized round fruit. Apples are smooth and shiny while oranges are bumpy. However, cut them open and they are very different. The apple is consistent, while the orange is segmented into several pieces. Looking further, we discover that the apple has a core while each orange segment is focused on one or two seeds.

Do you find that your life is segmented or is it consistent? Do you do the right thing all day while you are in uniform but put on a different personality when you are at home? Do you act right at work and then act out when you are at the club? You might be segmented like the orange. In this analogy, we would be more professional in our lives if we were consistent.

The Army value *integrity* is about more than just honesty. It is about being consistent between our professional selves and our personal selves. The word integrity comes from the same root word as the word “integer,” the word for a whole number. So if we think about it, integrity has something to do with your whole life, being a whole person. Changing your behavior depending on your setting might be an indicator of poor integrity.

The main difference between the apple and the orange is that the apple has a core to focus on so it is consistent, while the orange has several separate seeds. We have a core—we have the Army values to provide a point of focus and make us more consistent like the apple.³⁶

It Is the Soldier: Loyalty and the Emotions of a Patriot

Transformational stories do not have to be incredibly complicated, or even always stories in the strictest sense. One of the quietest weekends I ever had while commanding in Korea was after reading this poem to the formation:

It Is The Soldier

It is the Soldier, not the minister
Who has given us freedom of religion.

It is the Soldier, not the reporter
Who has given us freedom of the press.

It is the Soldier, not the poet,
Who has given us freedom of speech.

It is the Soldier, not the campus organizer,
Who has given us freedom to protest.

It is the soldier, not the lawyer,
Who has given us the right to a fair trial.

It is the Soldier, not the politician,
Who has given us the right to vote.

It is the Soldier who salutes the flag,
Who serves beneath the flag,
And whose coffin is draped by the flag,
Who allows the protester the right to burn the flag.

(Reproduced with permission of Charles M. Province, copyright 1970, 2010.)

After reading this poem I pulled my American flag from the right shoulder of my ACUs and held it aloft to the formation. I said, “This is an inspectable item this weekend. Stick it in your pocket before you go out, and every time you are about to do something questionable, look at that flag and ponder whether someone died so you could be free to do that.” My first sergeant followed up with a brief discussion about loyalty, and everyone left with something memorable. ■

Notes

Epigraph. Rudyard Kipling, *Barrack-Room Ballads, Departmental Ditties, and Other Ballads and Verses: Two Volumes in One with Glossary* (New York: Alex Grosset and Company, 1899), 133.

1. U.S. Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22: *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], August 2012), 6; Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-22: *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: GPO, August 2012), 3-1, 7-15. Also, see Martin E. Dempsey, Training and Doctrine Command, *An Army White Paper: The Profession of Arms* (Washington, DC: GPO, December 2010).

2. Brian Imiola and Danny Cazier, "On the Road to Articulating Our Professional Ethic," *Military Review, Special Edition: Center for the Army Profession and Ethic* (September 2010): 14.

3. ADRP 6-22, 1-2.

4. Gene Klann, "The Application of Power and Influence in Organizational Leadership," in *L100 Book of Readings: Developing Organizations and Leaders*, by CGSC Department of Leadership, 61-72 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2011), 61.

5. Christopher M. Barnes and Joe Doty, "What Does Contemporary Science Say About Ethical Leadership?" *Military Review, Special Edition: Center for the Army Profession and Ethic* (September 2010): 90-91.

6. Chris Case, Bob Underwood, and Sean T. Hannah, "Owning Our Army Ethic," *Military Review, Special Edition: Center for the Army Profession and Ethic* (September 2010): 9.

7. A recommended starting point for the interested leader would be this publication. *Military Review* regularly publishes quality articles addressing the realm of leadership including a 2010 *Special Edition on the Center for the Army Profession and Ethic*, which includes many of the sources for this article.

8. Peter D. Fromm, "Warriors, the Army Ethos, and the Sacred Trust of Soldiers," *Military Review, Special Edition: Center for the Army Profession and Ethic* (September 2010): 23. This article represents one of many authors considering changes to the Army values and the warrior ethos. In addition to asking some thought-provoking questions, this article contains several historical examples that could be used to design a more engaging weekend safety brief. See also Imiola and Cazier, 15.

9. Case, Underwood, and Hannah, 4.

10. Thomas Jarrett, "Warrior Resilience Training in Operation Iraqi Freedom: Combining Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, Resilience, and Positive Psychology," *The Army Medical Department Journal* (July-September 2008): 37.

11. Klann, 61-72. See also ADRP 6-22, chap. 6.

12. I must credit this phrase to my former commander and mentor in leadership, Col. (P) Bernie B. Banks. The word "right" is not intended to have any sort of political connotation.

13. "Millennials" is a name used by the popular media to identify persons born in the 1980s and 1990s, reaching young adulthood around the year 2000.

14. Sam S. Rainer III, "Next Generation Needs: Leading Millennials Requires Exercising a Different Type of Authority," *Leadership Journal* (Summer 2011): 49.

15. Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas*

Survive and Others Die (New York: Random House, 2007).

16. Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard* (New York: Broadway Books, 2010), 263.

17. U.S. Army Recruiting Command, "US Army Recruiting Command January 2012 Talking Points," *U.S. Army Recruiting Command* (31 January 2012), 1, <http://www.usarec.army.mil/support/downloads/january%202012%20talking%20points.pdf>.

18. Associated Press, "Last Call in Wyoming as State Gives in, Raises Drinking Age," *Orange County Register*, 1 Jul 1988, 11 <http://search.proquest.com/docview/272245554?accountid=28992>.

19. For a more robust list of facts that have always or never been true during millennials' lives, it is worth occasionally perusing the Beloit College Mindset List. Beloit College publishes a list annually to help their professors understand the incoming freshmen class. Beloit College, *The Mindset List* (6 September 2012), <http://www.beloit.edu/mindset/>.

20. Heath and Heath, *Switch*, 123.21. Mike Bonem, "Measuring What Matters," *Leadership Journal* Spring (2012): 72.

22. Heath and Heath, *Made to Stick*, 16-18.

23. Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2000), 102.

24. Heath and Heath, *Made to Stick*, 89-93.

25. *Made to Stick* has a similarly accessible set of examples.

26. Louis P. Pojman and James Fieser, *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong*, 7th Edition Kindle e-Reader Edition (Boston: Wadsworth, 2012), location 5379 of 6078.

27. Heath and Heath, *Switch*, 105.

28. Jarrett, 34-35. Also see the Fromm article in *Military Review* referenced in note 9 to expand the reader's understanding of the nuances found within many of the emotional and creedal charters we indicate here.

29. Heath and Heath, *Made to Stick*, 173 and 203. See also Heath and Heath, *Switch*, 101-23.

30. Henry L. Roediger III, Elizabeth Deutsch Capaldi, Scott G. Paris, Janet Polivy, and C. Peter Herman, *Psychology*, Fourth Edition (Minneapolis/St. Paul: West Publishing Company, 1996), 283.

31. "Story" could easily be replaced with "narrative" since the point is less "once upon a time," and more to draw the listener in to the message.

32. Joshua Foer, *Moonwalking With Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2001), 9-10.

33. Heath and Heath, *Made to Stick*, 209-210.

34. Modified from Ken Sande, "The blind ignoring the guide," *Leadership Journal* (Summer 2011), 59.

35. The reader may have noticed some of the principles of SUCCESs in this story about a commander and her organization. It was simple, concrete, and perhaps even unexpected. It may not be possible to hit all six points in every transformational story, but each one adds a layer of "stickiness."

36. Although I have been using this object lesson in front of formations so long I have made it my own, I recall first hearing it at Flamingo Road Church in Cooper City, FL, around 2005 and will place the credit there.

Acknowledgment: I would like to thank Charles M. Province for permitting reproduction of his poem, "It Is The Soldier."