



Capt. Marquis R. Morris, commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, salutes Lt. Col. Latoya M. Manzey, commander of the 588th Brigade Engineer Battalion, during a company change of command ceremony 31 August 2022 in Zagan, Poland. (Photo by Capt. Tobias Cukale, U.S. Army)

We Hear You!

Lt. Gen. Milford H. Beagle Jr., U.S. Army

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In recent months, there have been several articles published regarding junior officer dissatisfaction that should have caused many to pause.¹ To the young captains who are not sure about their desire

to command again, or who are disappointed with Captains Career Course (CCC) professional military education (PME), or those responding to surveys to explain the reasons they and many of their peers are

leaving the Army: *We see you and we hear you!* We thank those who are speaking up about their experiences. Providing feedback is critical to improving our profession, and the issues brought to light will take heavy lifting by all the leaders in the force to address. While in this article we discuss reframing perceptions of military experiences, we acknowledge that our Army is not perfect, and we have all seen processes or procedures in our Army that could do better or done differently. There is room for improvement both in the PME experience and in freeing company commanders from onerous requirements to allow them to focus on training their soldiers for the next fight.

What we hope to provide herein is a collective opinion from a post-command captain, a major, a post-command lieutenant colonel, and a lieutenant general on how to reframe experiences, ways that the Army is working to make experiences better, and items that we can work on together to change the underlying emotions that may lead young officers to leave the Army. This is a crucial conversation because it has varying points of view, the stakes are high, and it is emotional.² The fact that it is emotional to the young captains who had the courage to write about their experiences demonstrates that they care about our Army and our Nation.

Serving in the Army is hard, commanding is harder, and company command can be the most demanding of all as one has little to no staff to assist. It also has the potential to be the *most rewarding*, though it may not seem so in the moment. The day-to-day fight with administrative requirements and competing demands can be draining. Moreover, a commander's impact may not become apparent until years later when young officers take up the commander's role and more. After command, some of the most rewarding engagements with leaders occur. During command, it is difficult to know whether a person is acting kind or asking an opinion because of a commander's position or their respect for him or her. Post command, the interactions

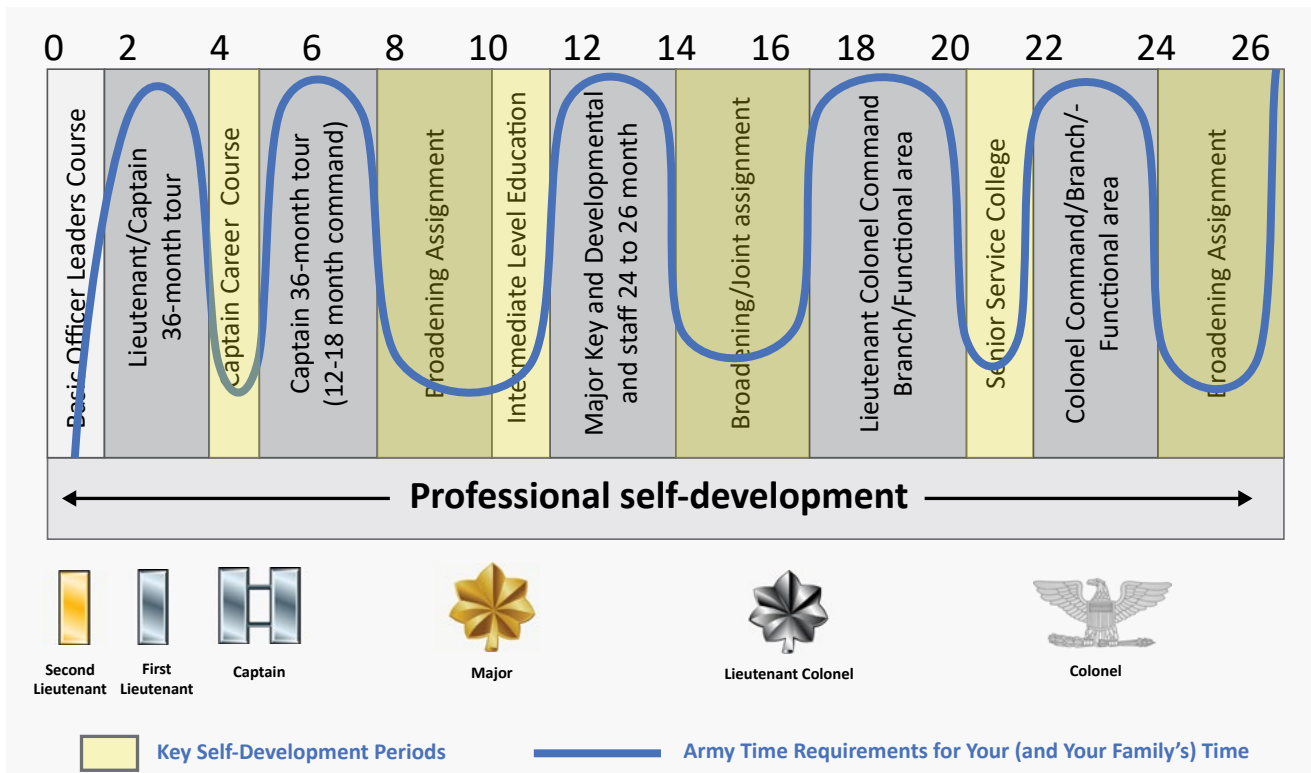


Students enrolled in the Captains Career Course participate in a seventy-two-hour simulated natural disaster field training exercise at Camp Bullis, Texas, 7 May 2019. (Photo by Jose Rodriguez, U.S. Army Medical Center of Excellence)

take on a much different feel, and in many cases, people find themselves approached for mentorship by those to whom they were once a coach or a teacher. For us collectively, that is where the burning desire to have the opportunity to continue to lead in the Army comes from—building the next generation of leaders.

Zoom Out to See the Sine Wave of Army Requirements

One of the most common questions from leaders who come to Fort Leavenworth for the Pre-Command Course (PCC) is about family/life balance. Leaders who are about to take command at the battalion or brigade level have felt the pull of Army requirements in their earlier commands, and they work to understand how to create their own personal balance. However, the balance in the Army comes with time. The Army's requirements for family can be depicted on a sine wave, waxing during times of key developmental time and waning during the gaps in between (see figure 1, page 3). Lt. Gen. Bruce Clarke, in an article titled "So You Want a Command," asks eighteen questions to determine whether a leader should be given command.³ While Clarke served in the First and Second World Wars, and times have definitely changed, some things have not. Clarke's article has been provided to recent PCC classes, not as required reading but as a thought



(Figure by authors)

Figure 1. Army Requirements Sine Wave

piece to aid in personal reflection. Of the eighteen questions, the ones that created the most concern and questions among leaders as they come through PCC were the following:

- Are you willing to devote all hours of the day and night, seven days a week, to your command?
- Is your [spouse] willing to do likewise when needed to make a happy “Army Community” in your unit area?
- Is your family willing to be secondary, if necessary, to the “Company,” “Battalion,” “Group,” “Regiment,” “Combat Command,” “Brigade,” or “Division”?⁴

Those are hard questions for each one of us to answer, but they reflect the unwritten rules of command. These rules apply in varying ways throughout command— they are fully in effect during a deployment or a combat training center rotation but less so during normal daily operations. Understanding that the Army expects that dedication of time and energy can be difficult both for the leader and the spouse, but the good news is that the Army’s demands on people’s time wax and wane over the scope of their careers.

During times of command and during key developmental time, an officer will devote a significant amount of his or her time and physical and emotional energy to their career, and they will have less time to spend with their family and personal relationships outside of work. That is the time frame during which many of the captains who wrote such insightful articles chose to leave the Army. We acknowledge their sacrifices, and we too have felt the pain. The good news is that the high level of Army requirements on soldiers’ time and that of their families has peaks and valleys that allow them to work toward balance over time.

The low points of the sine wave allow officers and their families to breathe, and they allow for reflection on what they have experienced. Those times in a career are vital; they give leaders the time and space to pursue self-development and to process the experiences they just went through. They also generally offer leaders more predictable hours and the opportunity to be more present in the lives of their families and friends. There are career decisions that may cause officers to deviate from this path, like special assignments or multiple

commands. Those jobs can be career enhancing; however, each individual leader must evaluate for themselves the impact on their mental well-being and the well-being of their family.

Reframe PME Experience

Field Manual 6-22, *Developing Leaders*, states, “Leaders develop through career-long synthesis of the training, education, and experiences acquired through opportunities in the institutional, operational, and self-development domains.”⁵ A large amount of the self-development happens during institutional time based on a leader’s reflection. Reflection is critical for personal growth, and institutional time provides a period to process individual experiences and to integrate them into personal development.

During PME, we encourage soldiers to use the opportunity for intrinsically motivated learning—learning about the parts of the profession and especially about leadership because of a desire for improvement. Soldiers will have some extrinsically motivated learning (learning to be able to pass the tests or get a reward), but a large amount of learning in PME is not just based on the curriculum. Both CCC and Intermediate Level Education are places to gather with fellow professionals and compare notes, understand how others approach challenges, and grow from the collective experiences of fellow professionals. “Experience is a powerful learning tool; however, learning from experience is not guaranteed. As the tenets for developing leaders convey, learning requires commitment and purpose. Learning occurs after reflecting on experiences.”⁶ The goal is a transfer of learning, that what a person learns in the institutional realm carries over into the operational realm, and also that the experiences in the operational realm are captured through reflection. People grow from them, and help spread them to others during their time in PME.

Instructors will remain a key part of development through their teaching, but they also represent potential mentors, and the conversations that can be fostered with those who have already walked the next steps in the path of a desired career are invaluable. That is why the Army continues to ensure that the right instructors are in the classrooms in these vital periods. Programs like Project Warrior that take high-performing leaders and send them to combat training centers to gain more experience prior to becoming CCC instructors are a

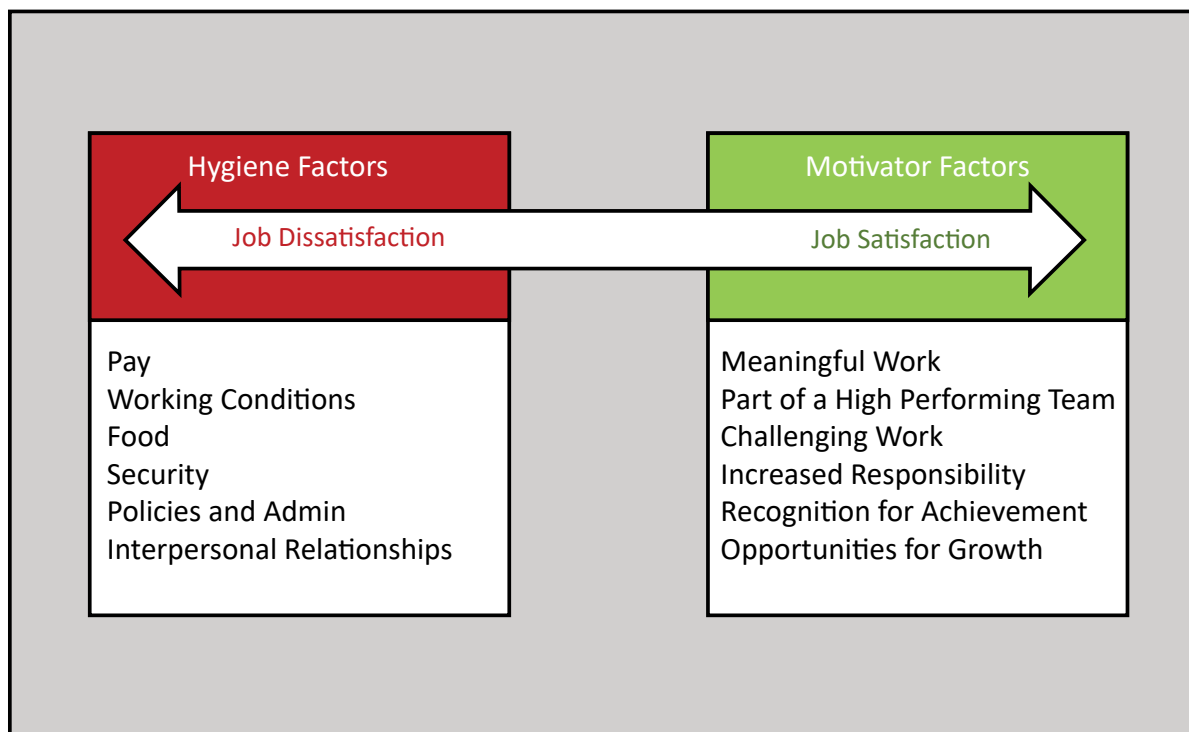
part of the solution. That is done specifically to put the right people on the podium to help with everyone’s institutional learning and self-development. Our Army needs to continue to ensure that instructor jobs are career enhancing to attract more talent into those critical positions.

While the base course of PME is not the only potential driver of development, the curriculum is continually updated, and the latest major upgrade from PME modernization is forthcoming. That change is influenced both by the changes in the operational environment and through feedback from serving company commanders and PME students. This resulted in 167 hours of time given back to centers of excellence to focus on branch-specific challenges related to large-scale combat operations and the core of the course directed away from counterinsurgency and toward the current operating environment. We will continue to improve our PME as we observe the environment and integrate the lessons learned from the field and from observation of the current conflicts throughout the world.

Reframe Command Experience

Two-factor theory, sometimes known as hygiene-motivator theory, proposes that there is a difference between what influences satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The theory states that improving hygiene factors such as pay, status, or working conditions serves to reduce dissatisfaction but *does not increase satisfaction* (see figure 2, page 5). Increases in satisfaction come from meaningful work, from seeing that efforts make a difference, and from recognition for doing well. The theory does not diminish the need to improve hygiene factors. However, it does mean that once there is enough money to satisfy basic individual needs for loved ones, an increase in pay only slightly reduces dissatisfaction, but it will not inspire satisfaction. This is something that many of us have seen in our friends as they work in the civilian sector; there are many people who make a lot of money but do not find satisfaction in their lives. Similarly, only reducing dissatisfaction will not make a good officer satisfied.⁷

The Army recognized that the administrative requirements were a negative hygiene factor that kept soldiers from concentrating on their missions, and it released eighteen directives removing various administrative requirements ranging from lowering the



(Figure by authors, based on Frederick Herzberg, *Work and the Nature of Man*)

Figure 2. Herzberg's Hygiene-Motivator Theory Reference the Army

amount of command climate surveys, removing the requirement for personally owned vehicle inspections, and removing the requirement for substance abuse training, among many others.⁸ Commanders have discretion to still conduct some of those mandatory training events if their mission requires it, but that can be a discussion among leaders at echelon to further remove burdens to their training efforts. Leaders at every echelon should discuss those things that keep them from doing the training they need to ensure the readiness of their formations. It takes feedback starting from the lowest echelon to make sure that a unit's priorities are properly aligned. Obtaining and analyzing feedback is hard work, but it can yield important results for readiness and morale. Army Regulation 350-1, *Army Training and Leader Development*, provides the avenue for leaders to turn their feedback into reduced requirements for their soldiers, as two-star commanders and state adjutants general are delegated the authority to exempt units from mandatory training requirements (unless prohibited by law or a secretary of the Army decision) in instances where the unit can demonstrate insufficient time available to achieve readiness

requirements.⁹ Through conversations at echelon such as during semiannual training briefs, commanders can get approval to exempt their unit from some mandatory training to focus on their mission. However, that will not be enough to truly increase satisfaction unless that training is replaced with something that contributes to people's feeling of purpose.

Finding purpose in a difficult time, particularly in combat environments, can be easy. Many of us who served in the early years of the conflicts in Iraq or Afghanistan found our purpose in making life better for good people and harder for bad people. The daily missions gave us an opportunity to impact lives at a level that could produce intrinsic satisfaction despite the sometimes-harsh conditions in which we lived. The amount of negative hygiene factors may have been extraordinarily high, but the positive motivational factors could far outweigh them.

Finding purpose helps increase satisfaction, but in a relatively peacetime Army, that can be difficult if soldiers only derive purpose from the daily mission. It can be hard to find purpose in day-to-day activities such as maintenance and supply actions. However, if

soldiers shift their focus, there are daily opportunities to find purpose. Truly embracing “People First” means a commander’s purpose is to develop those around themselves to be better—to help subordinates be better than they were when they took over their command position.¹⁰ “Each leader-subordinate interaction is a development opportunity. They are inseparable from training, enforcing standards, providing feedback, and setting a personal example.”¹¹ We must be the ones to plant the seeds from which we may never personally reap the fruit. The true efforts of a commander’s time in command may not be truly visible for years down the line, but the emails and texts they get in the first twelve months after they leave command, from those they helped grow, will give them a better idea of the impact they had.

Conclusion

The time spent after command can allow one to reflect on their experience and have a greater appreciation for the ripples in the pond left through interactions with soldiers and leaders. The only things that live on beyond an officer’s time in command are the leaders that he or she helped shape. Much of that shaping comes from the way the commander made them feel, not the words he or she said, and that feeling comes from the climate established in the unit.

Our hope is that over time, commanders truly get to appreciate the tremendous impact they had on the lives of the individuals under their command. Through personal example and the created climate, a commander likely drastically changed the trajectory of many soldiers’ lives. They, in turn, will do the same for others. Another recent article discusses the need to

recruit fewer “transactional” soldiers and recruit more transformational soldiers.¹² The author posits that the Army needs to focus its recruiting efforts less on what the Army can provide for new soldiers and more on what those soldiers can become in their time in uniform. We wholeheartedly agree—the Army needs people to join who do it out of a desire to be a part of something bigger than themselves and improve themselves in the process. The Army realized that as well and returned recently to the slogan “Be All You Can Be.”¹³ Commanders have proven through their desire to improve the organization that the Army got some of the right kind of people to join.

Thank you again for having the courage to say what many others believe. We agree that there are legitimate reasons to be disgruntled with the experiences in both CCC and command, and we believe there are things that we can do better. We owe the Army our best effort to improve every day. The Army will always be hard, but many of us did not join because it was easy, we joined to do something challenging and important with a great team. Improving the Army will be even harder, and we hope that leaders will reframe their experiences and help us continue to improve it.

The passion the leaders displayed in their articles shows that they are dedicated and truly care, meaning they are likely the right people to command again or the right people to lead change in CCC. After time and reflection, our hope is that everyone will see that the satisfaction generated by making such a difference in the lives of others will far outweigh the dissatisfaction a commander might have felt in the moment. That is what made us desire the opportunity to command again and not say, “Nah, I’m good.” ■

Notes

1. “On Command: A Confession,” *The Angry Staff Officer*, 16 February 2023, accessed 23 March 2023, <https://angrystaffofficer.com/2023/02/16/on-command-a-confession/>; David Kahan, “Searching for a Purpose in Professional Military Education,” *From the Green Notebook*, 30 January 2023, accessed 23 March 2023, <https://fromthegreennotebook.com/2023/01/30/searching-for-a-purpose-in-professional-military-education/>; Lindsay Gabow, “The Army Doesn’t Know Why Junior Officers Are Leaving,” *Army Times* (website), 24 February 2023, accessed 23 March 2023, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2023/02/24/the-army-doesnt-know-why-junior-officers-are-leaving/>.

2. Kerry Patterson et al., *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High* (New York: McGraw-Hill Contemporary, 2012), 1–2.

3. Bruce Clarke, “So You Want to Command,” *Infantry* 47, no. 2 (April 1957): 56–57.

4. *Ibid.*, 56.

5. Field Manual (FM) 6-22, *Developing Leaders* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], November 2022), 1-1.

6. *Ibid.*, 2-1.

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8. Office of the Secretary of the Army, "Army Secretary Releases Reduction Requirement Memos to Improve Readiness," Army.mil, 26 October 2018, accessed 21 March 2023, https://www.army.mil/article/207160/army_secretary_releases_reduction_requirement_memos_to_improve_readiness. To view all eighteen directives, visit "Army Directives," Army Publishing Directorate, accessed 22 March 2023, <https://armypubs.army.mil/ProductMaps/PubForm/ArmyDir.aspx>.

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12. Brandon Sanders, "Transactional vs. Transformational Recruits," *Small Wars Journal*, 24 February 2023, accessed 23 March 2023, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/transactional-vs-transformational-recruits>.

13. Steve Beynon, "Army's New Ad Campaign Brings Back 'Be All You Can Be' As It Courts Gen Z," *Military.com*, 6 March 2023, accessed 21 March 2023, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2023/03/06/armys-new-ad-campaign-brings-back-be-all-you-can-be-it-courts-gen-z.html>.

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