



Ignorance and Arrogance

Misunderstanding the Officer Personnel Management System

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In recent years, several personnel management publications espouse that the current Army personnel management system stifles growth and discourages talented officers from remaining in the service. The flaw in this argument pits a comparison of an overburdened bureaucratic Human Resources Command (HRC) to a more efficient private sector human resources management model. Both an ignorance of the current system and an arrogance of a failure to identify individual “talents” possessed by officers lead followers to concur with the biased argument that the current system remains paralyzed in bureaucracy. Correction of the erroneous “assumptions” requires officers, as both leaders and members of the managed Army officer population, to exercise their duty to educate themselves on the current officer distribution process and develop individual officer careers.

Ignorance

Aptly summarized by Dr. Wayne Dyer, “The highest form of ignorance is when you reject something you don’t know anything

about.” This comment accurately reflects the problems when individuals reject the entire Army personnel management system. The lack of understanding of the officer distribution system in which officers are managed leads to unfounded accusations of personnel mismanagement. Within the Army, officer management is the primary function of the Officer Personnel Management Directorate (OPMD), at the Human Resources Command, which works tirelessly to balance both the readiness of the Army and the individual career of each officer. Unit readiness consists of the aggregate strength of, and talent requirements for, each Army brigade level and above command. Officer management consists of the professional development needs for the talents possessed by each individual officer managed. The distribution falls within the function of a balanced pendulum, requiring months of analysis and input from supported units within the Army and individual officers.

Army requirements impact the officer assignment system years before an officer fills the position. The functions of doctrine, orga-

nization, training, material, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy (DOTmLPF-P) greatly influence the force design model. Based upon the approved structure and identification of a vacant position, units establish their preferences of fills prioritized by position. The unit then provides its tiered inputs of vacant positions to Account Managers within HRC who work with Assignment Officers to fill the Army’s requirements within a six month period. This cycle occurs after forecasting unit strengths while balancing the needs of individual officers and their professional requirements. This process reassigns over 39,000 officers per year-and spans newly accessed officers, permanent changes of station, moves in-and-out of schools, to retirement.

The Chief of Staff of the Army and other Army leadership provide the Army’s Manning Guidance (AMG), which is “the” critical input for each cycle. This guidance prioritizes the Army’s mission requirements and unit needs. A focus on deploying units, readiness of the Army, and critical missions lead the order of precedence of the Army’s Personnel Manning

Authorization Document (PMAD) positions. Personnel Management “science” balances vacant positions, unit priorities and available officers to maximize units meeting AMG metrics. The analysis of matching positions to the skill and grade of an officer occurs through a logical algorithm looking at positions by skill, either one grade up or one grade down. The assignment officer then identifies critical vacancies that the model did not validate and identifies the best fit for each position based on available officers.

Some have argued for expedited promotions or lateral entry as a method to transform the current system. They use the ability of officers to serve one to two grades higher as a basis for their argument. This may benefit officers as they expand their knowledge and experience gained. The second suggestion, that someone could laterally move into the military from another government agency and excel in the military position of leadership, is possible. The risk in this scenario is not to the shareholders’ wallets but to the readiness of the Army and the taxpayers’ sons and daughters. The stakes

of lateral entry are higher and the “corporate mission” differs greatly when comparing the military to a company like Zappos.

Arrogance

Tim Kane’s “Bleeding Talent” highlights the argument that the military squanders its talent. His thesis, suggesting that the military personnel system fails to accurately select, position, reward, and promote officers based on merit, is deeply flawed. Kane’s research is one dimensional, analyzes a specific data set, and reeks of educational elitism failing to quantitatively account for aspects critical to the military. Qualities the Officer Corps desires are moral courage, emotional intelligence, and innate devotion to duty. An officer’s educational credentials alone do not necessarily predict success within the Profession of Arms. While education is important, successful officers must simultaneously serve as specialists and generalists, exhibiting multicultural understanding and adaptability across multiple skill sets. In an attempt to retain quality officers, the Army offers a variety of systemic and periodic retention incentives. However, the rewards and incentives offered to officers do not necessarily retain the most talented officers.

Undoubtedly, there are thousands of officers who possess extremely unique skills and highly individualistic talents. Unfortunately, some officers display a level of arrogance that suggests they believe their talents warrant special treatment. Furthermore, these officers believe they can and should be allowed to bypass key developmental building block positions in favor of more personally desired positions. The blatant dismissal of key developmental assignments, as outlined in DA PAM 600-3, fosters an Army culture where it is acceptable for officers to put their personal needs ahead of the needs of

the Army, the military overall, and ultimately the country they have sworn to serve. This attitude harms the military through the focus on the individual over the collective. Additionally, most branches develop their officer corps through successive leadership assignments that are enhanced through broadening opportunities. Dismissing the collective obligation of the volunteers who join the Army weakens the service of officers who continue to develop and broaden their expertise.

The term “talent management” has multiple definitions. The Army defines talent as “the unique intersection of *skills, knowledge, and behaviors* in every position.” Talent represents far more than training, education, and experiences provided by the Army. With a focus solely on knowledge, as suggested by Kane, the individual fails to develop the full set of skills and behaviors required for success as a leader. Nonetheless, some military leaders still define “talented” simply as the possession of a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) degree. However, as the Army’s definition of talent suggests, there are many opportunities for officers who possess different talents. Some officers possess the talent to instruct and excel in the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) environment, others recruiting, and others within Forces Command (FORSCOM). Acknowledging the fact that all Soldiers require good leaders should focus those concerned with only the top five percent that the rest of the Army misses out when only particular units are filled with the “best.”

The current system meets the military readiness needs - sometimes at the cost of the officers’ personal desires - and provides ample opportunities to broaden and build a solid foundation of experience through time. The importance of individual officer maturity

cannot be discounted in evaluating the current system. Maturity and a sense of selflessness can inoculate a population against the temptation to abuse power and authority that can flow from an excessive focus on individual advancement. Recent examples of fraud or misuse of authority exemplify the danger of valuing personal gain over selflessness. Following a career path because it “feels right” rather than one that meets the collective Army needs is contrary to the Army value of selfless service.

As noted after the drawdown of the 1990’s, the Army lost some of its most talented officers when it offered buyouts to officers. Lieutenant General Howard B. Bromberg, the Department of the Army G-1, stated that the current drawdown works at “resizing and reshaping the Army. This requires and understanding of the operational needs of the future.” Therefore, reducing those officers who fail to meet the moral or ethical standards required for Officership are focused on for reduction. Second, officers who do not remain competitive are reduced due to an overage at particular ranks of the Army. David Martino, director of the Officer Personnel Management Directorate at Human Resources Command stated the drawdown of the Army impacts, “even fully qualified officers to maintain readiness and reduce turbulence to the officer corps.” Overall, the diligence to which the Army works to drawdown is conducted with empathy and compassion allowing for retirement benefits, for those who qualify, and temporary early retirement authorization benefits for others. This display of compassion dramatically differs from the market system which the public sector human resources models are compared to by those wishing to change the system.

Conclusion

A comprehensive understanding of the personnel management system requires overcoming both ignorance and arrogance. Both are achieved by a better understanding of the current process, as well as individual ownership of the officer’s own career. A commitment to the Army values of selfless service, sacrifice, and duty are more than buzz words to professional officers. When one compares the Army’s officer assignment system to a “business-like” model, there remains a failure to acknowledge that the military profession is not reflective of its civilian counterparts. Simply put, when an officer states that the personnel management system is antiquated, broken, or bureaucratic they fail to acknowledge their participation in the Army’s unique profession.

Working in the civilian sector and military service are extremely different. While the market system drives promotion forward through economic models, the military promotion is compelled forward through a meritocracy process driven by a budget approved by Congress. For instance, there are no rules limiting the number of gains or layoffs by Google, but within the military there are strict adherences to accession allowances and the rate of drawdown numbers through both the ESERB and OSB. The discrepancies and differences between the two systems lends credence to the argument that recruiting and retaining a professional and dedicated pool of Army officers requires more than financial or educational benefits.

Natural attrition of officers results in the loss of extremely bright and skilled individuals. Talented individuals leave by choice and the hope is that they extend their lifetime of service by continuing to serve America in other organizations. Outside of the military, Fortune 500 companies choose to hire mili-

tary officers because of their leadership and commitment to a cause. For a great number of officers their experience is extremely marketable to civilian companies. Recruiting companies such as Bradley-Morris and Cameron Brooks inform employers that departing military members continue to offer leadership as their greatest asset. Encouraging those who have served to continue to support the mili-

tary, which honed their skills, should likewise be encouraged during transition from the military.

Encouraging officers to maintain and grow their unique skills remains an Armed Forces imperative. Officers desiring to grow professionally within the Army can educate themselves by reading AR 614-100 for assignment policies, performance, deployment

equity, individual preference, and how the programs such as married Army couples program impact assignments. They must also understand that while every effort is made to meet individual officer expectations, the needs of the Army and the officer's professional development needs are paramount. There are hundreds of unique reasons why individuals serve, and the Army, as a collec-

tive, benefits from their professional service. In the end, those most likely to continue their service are neither ignorant nor arrogant with respect to understanding the personnel management system and their own career. To such people, the extrinsic value of money does not match the intrinsic drive, motivation, and value to continue contributing to a cause greater than themselves. ■

Endnotes

1. Dr. Wayne Dyer, The Power of Intention <http://www.iwise.com/EOlh5> (accessed on 16 April 2014).

2. The best reference for further information is How the Army Runs, Chapter 2 "Army Force Development."

3. Lee A. Evans, Edwin H. Bodenheimer, and Lacy J. Fawson, "From Science to Art: The Officer Assignment Process," The Journal of the Adjutant General's Corps Regimental Association, (Winter 2013-2014), 50.

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5. Samuel T. Piper, "Improving Retention Under the U.S. Army's Captain Incentive Program," (Carlisle, PA, U.S. Army War College, 2008), 3.

6. Graduate School Additional Duty Service Obligation (GRADSO), Branch Additional Duty Service Obligation (BrADSO), or First Post of Assignment (PADSO).

7. Piper, 3.

8. Jim Tice, "High-Speed Drawdown: Army Ramps Up Force-Outs," Army Times, <http://www.armytimes.com/article/20131021/NEWS/310210008/High-speed-drawdown-Army-ramps-up-force-outs> (accessed on 14 April 2014).

9. Michelle Tan, "Army Will Cut Almost 2,000 Captains, Majors," Army Times, <http://www.armytimes.com/>

[article/20131216/NEWS/312160021/](http://www.armytimes.com/article/20131216/NEWS/312160021/) (accessed on 17 April 2014).

10. Cameron Books website, "The Benefits of Hiring Military," http://www.cameron-books.com/employers_benefits_of_hiring_military.html (accessed on 16 April 2014).

11. Evans, Bodenheimer, Fawson, 52.