



Secretary of the Army Dr. Mark T. Esper hosts a media roundtable to discuss the new U.S. Army Talent Management program with *Military Officer*, *Army*, *National Guard* magazines, and the *NCO Journal* at the Pentagon, April 24, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Brandy Mejia, photojournalist to the Secretary of the Army)

# Secretary of the Army Talks Talent Management

By Staff Sgt. Jarred Woods

NCO Journal

**T**he Secretary of the Army Dr. Mark T. Esper held a round table discussion with journalists from the *Army*, *Military Officer*, *National Guard* magazines, and the *NCO Journal*, April 24, 2019. Although the discussion largely centered on talent management, Secretary Esper also addressed topics such as military families and modernization.

## Talent Management

Setting the stage, Esper highlighted the Army's initiative to make a market-based model of talent management the driving force or *backbone* behind the Integrated Personnel and Pay System – Army.

**Q:** How would it work, and how do you see it coming together?

**A:** "Right now, you have two factors," Esper said. "If you're going to be a battalion S-3 (operations officer) in an infantry battalion, the two factors are: you have to be a major, and you have to be infantry."

Rather than just focusing on two criteria, the future system would have more than 20 factors listed for each Soldier, such as special talents or language skills; which are not currently listed.

"This gets to the talent piece of this, it's understanding the person's knowledge, skills, behaviors, and preferences," he added.



Secretary of the Army Dr. Mark T. Esper discusses the tactical use of military equipment with senior members of the U.S. Army during Exercise Warfighter 19-03 at Fort Bragg, N.C., Feb. 9, 2019. Esper visited the warfighter to observe the tactical capabilities of the 82nd Airborne Division. (U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Hubert D. Delany III / 22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

Esper stressed the importance of making the new personnel management system more transparent, and allowing the Soldier to have more influence regarding future assignments.

“If we start taking into account people’s preferences, your retention will probably be better off,” he said. “We’ve all heard stories where someone was told to go to an assignment, they didn’t want to do it, and it ended up being their last assignment because it was not a good fit for them or they were unhappy with the process. Whenever you allow people more voice into the system, I think that’s a good thing.”

**Q:** The new system would also allow units themselves some degree of control regarding the selection of mid-career Soldiers for positions within their respective organizations. With this in mind, one might ask, to what extent could favoritism play a role in selecting personnel?

**A:** “I think that most people are looking for the best person,” Esper said. “If a brigade sergeant major gets a list of folks he or she wants for a position, there’s still going to be the opportunity to compare resumes and see whose best.”

“On the other hand, I don’t think it’s wrong that if you’ve served with somebody in the past, and you trust them, and know they’re a performer, to pick them again. That’s what happens in the civilian and commercial sector; you build trust and rapport with individuals you’re comfortable with, and that’s not abnormal.”

“But we do have to make sure there are safeguards built into the system. I think the most important thing is for people to have very competitive records, and make sure they know what the employer [unit] is looking for.”

## Military Families

Esper also talked about easing the burden on military spouses and children regarding frequent relocation. Allowing Soldiers to stay at a respective duty location for up to eight years, provided they’re performing their duties, continuing to grow, and the unit wants them, could potentially be common practice in the future.

“I’m talking about fewer PCS moves,” he said. “We have people now moving eight, nine, 10, 12, 13-plus times – that’s too many times.”

“In my short 10 years of active duty service, I must have moved five or six. It’s tough, and I think people want more stability. As you spend more time in the Army, and your kids grow up in the Army, you want more stability; particularly as they enter their high school years. And for many folks, that’s when the pace actually picks up.”

## Modernization/Soldier Lethality

**Q:** What new equipment should Soldiers expect to receive in the near future?

**A:** Esper explained testing of the new squad automatic weapon is slated for this summer, as well as the replacement for the M16/M4 rifle prototype within the next 18 months.

Esper highlighted the new Integrated Visual Augmentation System (IVAS) and its potential to substantially enhance training.

“The combination of the weapon and the IVAS goggles will also change how we train, because it will allow you to do virtual reality/enhanced reality training anywhere,” added Esper. “You can put them on and link your squad together, take any open location, and practice room clearing. You would see an enemy scenario, whether it’s a village, town, or city, against any threat. There would be a common picture, and you could repeat the battle drill over and over again.”

“It would be a game changer, because it won’t just be about the equipment, it’s now the equipment improving training.”

## Advice to Leaders (NCOJ specific)

**Q:** As the Army continues to place more emphasis on writing at our NCO Leadership Centers of Excellence... how important do you think authorship is regarding the attributes of a leader?



A U.S. Army Soldier assigned to the Hillclimbers, 3rd Battalion, 25th Aviation Regiment (General Support Aviation Battalion) reunites with family during a welcome home ceremony on Wheeler Army Airfield, Hawaii, March 10, 2019. The "Hillclimbers" are the CH-47 Chinook Company of the 25th Combat Aviation Brigade and have been deployed for nine-months supporting combat operations, in addition to air-lift operations throughout the U.S. Central Command. (U.S. Army photo by 1st Lt. Ryan DeBooy)

A: "I think for any leader, whether you're an officer, a warrant officer, or an NCO, you have to be a good communicator," said Esper. "It's not just the verbal word; it's the written word."

"It's important for all leaders at all levels to be very good communicators. If you want to be able to write an effective NCOER, you have to be a good writer. If you want to be able to write an effective operations order that your Soldiers can understand, you have to be a good leader. And good writing means that you

can convey a thought clearly and concisely.

"It's important that we think about all the skills

needed at different levels of leadership. For a senior NCO, it's probably more important that you're an effective communicator than it is that you know all the latest camouflage techniques.

"We have to look at it in those terms: what do NCOs

at different levels of leadership need to be effective in the roles they have? I think it's part of continuing education for all of us." ■

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—Secretary of the Army Dr. Mark T. Esper

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