

# Q&A: The Army's New Talent Management Program

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Lt. Gen. James McConville, Army G-1 (Photo Credit: U.S. Army)

For the first time, the Army will use a talent management process that integrates the personnel records of active Army, Army Reserve, and Army National Guard Soldiers into one system. Lt. Gen. James C. McConville, the Army deputy chief of staff, G-1, shares his insights into the service's new talent management program and explains how it will change the Army and improve readiness.

## **Q: Can you describe the Army's new talent management program?**

**A:** The Army's most important weapon is its people. Where the other services may man equipment, what we do is equip the Soldiers, the women and men who are the Army. That's where talent management comes into play.

What we are doing is moving the Army from an industrial age personnel management system to a 21st century talent management system. This will allow us to manage the knowledge, skills, and behaviors of all of our Soldiers in both the active and reserve components so that we can get the right Soldier in the right job at the right time.

## **Q: How will the new talent management program work?**

**A:** We will have a new integrated personnel and pay system. For the first time in the history of the Army, we will have active, Reserve, and National Guard Soldiers in one personnel system. This gives us visibility over the entire force.

In the National Guard and Reserve, we have Soldiers with tremendous talents learned from their civilian jobs that we may not see when we manage them by rank and military occupational specialty. They may run a construction company on the side, they may be a design engineer, or they may have skill sets in technology — and we will now be able to see that.

We will be able to describe all lower enlisted Soldiers, noncommissioned officers, and officers beyond their basic branches. We will be able to develop a profile of their knowledge, skills, and behaviors; and we will define them with more variables than we do now, which is basically two variables — rank and military occupational specialty.

We will be able to define Soldiers by multiple variables: the countries they have visited, the language skills they have, if they are airborne or air assault qualified, how many combat deployments they have, how many flying hours they have and in which types of aircraft, and their certifications and hobbies. We will have a much better idea of what talents a Soldier can contribute.

We also want to know what Soldiers want to do and where they want to go. If we can match these desires and have them do the things they are passionate about where they want to do them, we think we will be a much better Army going forward. We are working very aggressively to implement these initiatives, and we think they will fundamentally change the way that the Army operates.

**Q: Does all of this fit with the chief of staff of the Army's number one priority of readiness?**

**A:** Absolutely. Readiness is defined by four factors: manning, equipping, training, and leader development. The talent management initiative really focuses on improving the Army's manning and leader development.

**Q: Is the issue of nondeployable personnel affecting talent management?**

**A:** We have fewer Soldiers in the Army, so every single Soldier has to be able to get on the field and play their position, both at home and away. If Soldiers cannot deploy, then we need to take a hard look at their ability to stay in the Army.

If there are Soldiers with deployment limitations who have certain talents that are critical to the mission, and they can contribute in nondeployable ways, we need to consider that. But as a general rule as we go forward, Soldiers will have to be able to deploy for the away games because that is what the Army does.

**Q: Will you be changing broadening assignments for officers?**

**A:** Some people think broadening assignments are just going to graduate school. It is much more than that. We have gone to three categories of broadening assignments.

The first is tactical broadening. These assignments are for those Soldiers who want to excel at tactical assignments outside of their area, [such as] going to a Ranger battalion, going to the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, or going to a special mission unit.

The second is institutional broadening. These Soldiers become trainers at the combat training centers, they become small-group instructors, they become recruiters, or they teach ROTC. We have tremendous opportunities for Soldiers to serve in the institutional Army.

The third category is scholastic broadening. Here we will send Soldiers to top-tier graduate schools or they will be Joint Chiefs of Staff or congressional fellows or instructors at the U.S. Military Academy.

**Q: You spent many years as an aviator. How did you manage talent?**

**A:** I would spend a lot of time with the Soldiers who I rated and senior rated. I would begin the conversation by asking, "What do you want to do in the future?" And once you start to have that conversation, you can determine, first of all, if they want to stay in the Army. That is a good question to start with. And if they do not want to stay in the Army, find out what they want to do in the civilian world and help them get ready for civilian life.

If they said they wanted to stay in the military, I would ask, "Where do you see yourself in 10, 15, or 20 years? Do you want to be a battalion commander? Do you want to be a sergeant major?" Once you know that, then you can start developing a path with them to achieve their objectives.

Only 10 percent of enlisted Soldiers stay for 20 years to retire; and only 30 percent of officers stay for 20 years to retire. So it is very important that we identify the best Soldiers, noncommissioned officers, and officers and manage their talent appropriately.

**Q: Will the Army's recruiting processes change?**

**A:** We are looking at putting better screening measures in place to ensure we get the quality Soldiers we need for the future. We are getting ready to put forward the occupational physical assessment test, which is a physical test on a recruit's potential.

We know the attributes that we want in Soldiers as we go forward. We know that we want resilient and fit Soldiers of character. What we are trying to do is put in place screening tests and assessments with more fidelity that will help identify those recruits that have the potential to be high-quality Soldiers.

We also want to ensure Soldiers have the character needed to serve in the Army. This is very important. The number one reason Soldiers do not complete their first term is misconduct, and that comes down to character. Number two is alcohol and drug abuse, and that's either resilience or character. And numbers three, four, five, and six are related to physical and mental illnesses or disabilities. So we want to screen for all of these very important factors up front.

**Q: How are Soldiers doing when they leave the Army?**

**A:** As Soldiers leave, we give them two missions: hire and inspire. What we mean by hire is we want them to go into the civilian world, live the American dream, take advantage of the GI Bill benefits, get a great job, raise their families, then get to a point where they are hiring veterans just like them.

And when they have the opportunity, we want them to inspire young men and women to come into the military and serve just like they did. We want to give young men and women the opportunity to do one of the most important things they will do in their lives: serve their country.

Right now, we are pretty happy—not satisfied, but happy—that the unemployment rate for our veterans is lower than the national unemployment rate, which is at about 5 percent. That is pretty amazing. We would like more Soldiers to use their educational benefits; only 30 percent are using

the GI Bill. We want more to take advantage so they can better themselves.

**Q: What one tip would you give to a new Soldier?**

**A:** The most important thing is to be willing to learn. The Army expects you to come in physically fit and with integrity, and that allows you to perform those tasks you need to do. Everything else we will teach you.