

Overcoming Rural Challenges

Staff Sgt. Travis Blunck, 57th Military Police Company, 728th Military Police Battalion

August 27, 2017



Staff Sgt. Brian Merritt speaks with a prospective applicant May 4, 2015, at the Virginia Army National Guard Recruiting Station in Newport News, Va. (U.S. Army photo by Capt. Andrew J. Czaplicki)

Recruiting is a challenging mission regardless of the organization that needs to fill its requirements. The U.S. Army is no different and recruits out of every geographical, sociological, and economical environment within the country. Finding able-bodied young men and women who are qualified and willing to serve can be overwhelming, and finding them in a

rural environment can be even more challenging. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, more than 59 million people live in rural areas with a steady decline in population.¹

With roughly 19% of the population living in rural America, it is essential for recruiters to be successful in these markets of opportunity.

Recruiting in these communities, this landscape can prove difficult and takes persistence and dedication to create a productive market. The first step to mission accomplishment is to get out of the office and talk to as many people as possible. There is not a single person sitting in the office who wants to join the Army. The only people in U.S. Army Recruiting Command tasked with enlisting young men and women every day are the guidance counselors at the Military Entrance Processing Station. A recruiter in rural America is mainly responsible for generating enlistments and building relationships with educators, parents, and leaders within the community. Trust and credibility is the currency of influence. Recruiters must begin to change perceptions and become role models that students want to emulate and educators can trust. If the purpose of these visits is solely to talk about the Army or pull students out of class, then the faculty will only see one side of the recruiter and will not be as welcoming. Also, listen to the students and faculty and offer services that add value to their education.

Remember, these young men and women will be the next generation of leaders so it pays to develop and mentor them even if they have no desire to serve.

As the customer base widens, enlistments and the propensity to enlist will also increase.

Social media is an important tool that acts as a force multiplier because a recruiter's area may span thousands of square miles. No Soldier goes into a planned enemy engagement without additional assets, so recruiters should have the same mentality. People generally do not understand there is more to being a Soldier than just kicking down doors and blowing stuff up.

Use a professional social media account to combat misconceptions and myths regarding life in the Army.

Use the acronym SOLDIER when posting to social media, but be creative and use personal photos and stories.

The acronym SOLDIER stands for **S**ervice to county, **O**ccupational enhancement, **L**eadership skills, **D**iversity, **I**ncome, **E**ducation and **R**espect. It is used by recruiters to determine potential applicants' motives for joining the Army. When posting on social media have a story to highlight a benefit of joining the Army. Develop a professional social media presence that also creates a story that young men and women can see themselves becoming a part. Keep in mind that the prospecting landscape has evolved over time and so have the recruiting techniques. The messages remain similar but the vehicle delivering them has transformed.

Finally, it is critical to self-develop and stay current on regulations, techniques, and ideas from across the recruiting command. The recruiting environment is extremely fast-paced and can change rapidly, altering the recruiting process. Not only do the rules change, but the market changes as well.

Many answers are in Army and Department of Defense regulations so use them to find answers and guidance. Use the field manual or regulation to find specific answers. For questions or information specific to your locale, speak with your supervisor.

It is also important to further your education and grow professionally. Not only does a college education help you with promotion and employment opportunities when you leave the Army, it is also the easiest icebreaker when speaking with the public. Many people believe

college is something you do after the Army, not while serving. But going to school and sharing your experience with the community, your market can see another side of your Army career.

Recruiting for the U.S. Army is a challenge and doing so in a rural environment can seem impossible. The best way to overcome it is to be genuine with your message and be available to the public. Supply the information in a creative manner and the demand will follow. In the operational Army, leaders do not accept mediocrity, they strive for excellence. Do not be a mediocre recruiter. Be a consummate professional in all that you do and be a value added asset to the organization. Invest in the future of our organization to ensure the safety and security of future generations.

Notes

1. U.S. Census Bureau. . *2010 Census Urban and Rural Classification and Urban Area Criteria* 2012, Accessed March 27, 2017. <https://www.census.gov/geo/reference/ua/urban-rural-2010.html>.