

Town Hall Sparks Online Discussion; Davenport Urges #Talk2TRADOC Talks Continue

By Jonathan (Jay) Koester - NCO Journal

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Liston Bailey, chief of the Learning Innovations and Initiatives Division of the Institute for NCO Professional Development, left, and Amy Robinson of U.S. Army Public Affairs, respond to NCOs' questions on social media while the town hall plays on the screen. (Photo by Jonathan (Jay) Koester / NCO Journal)

Out of sight of the cameras, a team of more than 30 people had just spent two hours quickly and professionally answering questions from noncommissioned officers on Facebook, Twitter and a chat room as part of an NCO Professional Development Town Hall on Thursday at Fort Eustis, Virginia.

The team fielded many questions during the night, calling in experts when they could, and passing other questions to the six people filming live in the studio. It was late, and the team was tired, but Command Sgt. Maj. David Davenport, command sergeant major of U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, wanted to let them know their efforts, however appreciated, weren't finished. Davenport had asked NCOs to continue to use the #Talk2TRADOC to provide feedback and ask questions on social media channels, and he wanted to make sure those questions received answers.





With the chat room questions displayed at the front of the room, a group of NCOs and experts answer questions during the town hall. (Photo by Jonathan (Jay) Koester / NCO Journal)

"I know a lot of effort went into this, but our work doesn't stop here," Davenport told the team at the end of the night. "We can go high-five one another and have fun tonight, but tomorrow we have to get right back in there and start rowing the boat. We need to answer those questions, because our word is our bond to the Soldiers. If we say we are going to answer and we don't, they will immediately point the fingers at us and say, 'See, I told you they don't care; they're not listening.'"

Building a foundation

Hundreds of NCOs filled the chat room during the town hall, and questions flooded in on social media. Davenport said he felt the event built a good foundation for continued discussions.

"I think when you're open and honest with Soldiers, and you sincerely want the best for them, that's when you build trust," Davenport said. "Hopefully, I built some trust with the force tonight, and they know I'm trying to think through this as we build toward the future."

One of the behind-the-scenes experts answering questions on social media was Liston Bailey, chief of the Learning Innovations and Initiatives Division of the Institute for NCO Professional Development. Bailey said he thought the forum provided some short, credible answers to NCOs, which they could use to follow up with their chain of command or other sources.



A group of NCOs and policy experts quickly answer questions posed during the town hall. (Photo by Jonathan (Jay) Koester / NCO Journal)

"We received a lot of questions about how Soldiers are going to manage their careers, and their concerns about the feasibility of being successful as they move from grade to grade," Bailey said. "Questions about opportunities for broadening assignments were another big topic. Soldiers are interested in their growth and development and their access to information."

Panel teams together

Charles Guyette, director of the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy's Directorate of Training, participated by answering questions in the live chat room during the town hall broadcast. He said there were many questions concerning professional military education.

"The questions were very thought-provoking and relevant to the force," Guyette said. "You can tell there is a need for information out there because there are a lot of things they are not aware of. There's some misinformation. There are misconceptions about NCO PME and the NCO professional development system. This helped better inform the Soldiers out there, especially related to their professional military education. We want to get this right, make sure they understand what they need to do to get to those courses."

Both Command Sgt. Maj. Jim Wills, the command sergeant major of the U.S. Army Reserve, and Command Sgt. Maj. Brunk Conley, the command sergeant major of the U.S. Army National Guard, were part of the on-camera panel taking questions from the force.

"It shows that we are one Army team," Conley said. "When Sgt. Maj. Davenport asked both me and Sgt. Maj. Wills to attend, it showed that we're all in this together and we're one team, one fight. It's a pleasure and an honor to be here."

"We're going through a lot of changes right now, and the Soldiers are concerned," Conley said. "They have a lot of good questions about how this affects them and what they need to do to be successful. They want to hear senior leaders' thoughts on how this is going to affect the Army, the Guard and the Reserve."

The two-hour town hall has been posted to TRADOC's YouTube page for those NCOs who couldn't watch it live. It may be found at: <https://youtu.be/5z1QDL2qWts> (<https://youtu.be/5z1QDL2qWts>). Also, check the NCO Journal at <http://ncojournal.dodlive.mil/> (<http://ncojournal.dodlive.mil>) next week for a complete report on the questions and answers from the town hall.

The event is over, but the conversation continues, Davenport said.

"This is not just a one-time event soliciting feedback from our Soldiers," Davenport said. "If they want to continue the dialogue, we have all the social media outlets, we will answer all the questions. But more importantly, they can follow me on the blog that I do. It's tradocnews.org (<http://tradocnews.org/>). You go on that page and you see *Straight from the CSM*, and that's my blog site. I solicit feedback on there to things that we are talking about. That feedback has really made a change in our Army in everything from structured self-development to the STEP policy."