



Instead of just getting Soldiers who cannot pass the APFT to the minimal standard, take the abundance (or wholesome) approach and create an environment within the organization that a high fitness level is a way of life and is the cornerstone of our combat readiness. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Ken Scar)

An Abundance Approach To Organizational Leadership

Creating a Positive Deviance to Strengthen Combat Readiness

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This paper is written to provide an analysis and recommendation on strengthening our combat readiness by focusing on organizational leadership. This topic is designed to get leaders to focus less on a "problem-solving approach" to leading and more on an "abundance approach" to create or reinforce a "strive for

excellence" attitude throughout the organization, thereby enhancing overall combat and organizational readiness.

For the past 12 years our Army has been tried and tested in two major combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan conducting mostly counterinsurgency and stability operations as well as multiple deployments to

other countries conducting peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief among other missions, as well as exercises designed to shape the environment by building partnerships and partner capacity. As we all know, units and Soldiers over that course of time have experienced multiple deployments to all of these areas. This constant "turn and burn" as sometimes referred has caused organizations to be on short timelines for reset and redeployment. Because of this it has caused some units to execute shortcuts or shoot for minimal standards as they prepare for their next deployment. What normally suffers with this attitude towards standards? Usually it is the professionalism and skills of the individual Soldier or of the organization as a whole. Leaders take on a problem solving approach to standards, accomplishment of missions or to get stuff done.

When we look at what the problem-solving approach is, it generally means that there is a deficiency or something negative or wrong that needs to be "fixed." Meaning we need to get it back to normal or to the minimum acceptable standard. Another way to say it is that less than normal is present and the task or issue at hand has taken on a "negative deviance" and needs to be brought back to normal or to the minimal acceptable standard.

Examples of this include a Soldier who failed the Army Physical Fitness Test or body fat circumference test. Generally, leaders look to get these Soldiers to just pass the PT test or tape test. An organizational example of the problem-solving approach would be to meet minimal standards of Command Supply Discipline or Mission Essential Tasks or individual and crew-served weapons qualifications. Here again leaders sometimes look to achieve the minimal standard or normal.

How many times have we heard about a good leader who is known (and sometimes self-proclaimed) as a "problem-solver?" This implies that the leader knows how to take a negative deviance and make it normal. Or said differently, the leader knows how to get to the 60 percent needed to make the minimum standard. A problem-solving approach would be fine if our enemies only operated at 60 percent, or a 60 percent effort would get you promoted through the ranks.

The enemies we have faced generally look for precision and efficiency when conducting attacks against us to create the most lethal effect, a minimal standard approach could cost lives against that kind of enemy. Also, a Soldier who shoots for the 60 percent solution with regard to his or her career will probably walk the

retirement stage wearing Staff Sergeant rank.

I propose an "abundance approach" to leading that will cause a positive deviance in everything we do and an overall strive for excellence attitude within our organizations and ranks. We have a number of units and Soldiers within our Army who use this approach and operate at a high efficiency and performance rate. However, we still have plenty who operate in the problem-solving approach.

Let's look at the Soldiers who cannot pass the APFT or a tape test. Instead of just getting them to the minimal standard, let's take the abundance (or wholesome) approach and create an environment within the organization that a high fitness level is a way of life and is the cornerstone of our combat readiness. Get the overweight Soldiers to focus on a lifestyle change instead of meeting the minimal standard. Let's create an attitude of "we are going to smoke this inspection" or have a focus of "we are going to be such experts with our weapons they will be an extension of our hand" to instill a "strive for excellence" attitude in everything we do.

We should expect a positive deviance in everything our organizations and Soldiers do and those who cannot meet those expectations we should have a plan that takes them from a negative deviance to a positive deviance, not just normal or the minimal standard. We should not just accept normal from our Soldiers, we should instill vitality and flow and high motivation so they can grow and develop and reach their untapped potential.

Organizationally, we should not look to be just effective or efficient but shoot for excellent and extraordinary. When it comes to adaptation we should flourish and not just cope, and we should look to be flawless in our quality and not just reliable. This kind of approach will not only make Soldiers more excellent in how they do their duties but will create organizations that can operate in any environment, under any conditions and provide extraordinary results.

In summary, the more we instill a "strive for excellence attitude" in how we lead through an abundance approach, I submit we will see a decrease in the challenges we have affecting our current readiness and the more we will be prepared to face uncertain future conditions in our ever-changing and complex world.

I would offer up a good book to read on this abundant approach philosophy, "Making the Impossible Possible, Leading Extraordinary Performance," by Kim Cameron and Marc Lavine. ■



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