



Soldiers from the 54th Brigade Engineer Battalion make every second count with tactical skills during their Leadership Reaction Course, assigning Paratroopers to puzzling missions designed for team building as well as physical productivity, Aug. 2, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Jefferey)

Development of Social Awareness in the Army

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Comprehensive fitness, as we know it today, began with the *Battlemind* program nearly two decades ago. The need to grow mentally tougher Soldiers became glaringly apparent as suicides grew 500% over the same period of continuous conflict. The first message, All Army Activities (ALARACT) 097-2010, once executed, brought in a new paradigm of thought to the forefront of military living in that it is okay to ask for help. The program stressed that the real strength of character was acceptance that even the best Soldiers face obstacles in their career and life challenges. Often the opportunity cost of military success and successive deployments was social isolation and the disintegration of the family unit resulting in a measureable increase in

domestic violence and a significant increase, as stated earlier, in suicide rates.

The idea of social awareness as an important aspect of Soldiering is not new. During WWII, General of the Army George C. Marshall was quoted in the resilience training program as having said:

“When you are commanding, leading [Soldiers] under conditions where physical exhaustion and privations must be ignored, where the lives of [Soldiers] may be sacrificed, then the efficiency of your leadership will depend only to a minor degree on your tactical or technical ability. It will primarily be deter-



A U.S. Army Soldier rock climbs as part of a Warrior Adventure Quest program event, July 7, 2010. WAQ combines high-adrenaline sports such as rock climbing with Battlemind training to help Soldiers adjust to the return to garrison life from a combat environment. (U.S. Army photo courtesy of Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs)

mined by your character, your reputation, not so much for courage—which will be accepted as a matter of course—but by the previous reputation you have established for fairness, for that high-minded patriotic purpose, and that quality of unswerving determination to carry through any military task assigned you.”

Comprehensive fitness was founded on four dimensions of strength and later added the fifth dimension – family - to become what is now known across the Army as Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness (CSF2). The five dimensions are:

Physical: Performing and excelling in physical activities that require aerobic fitness, endurance, strength, healthy body composition and flexibility derived through exercise, nutrition and training.

Emotional: Approaching life’s challenges in a positive, optimistic way by demonstrating self-control, stamina, and good character with one’s choices and actions.

Social: Developing and maintaining trusted, valued relationships, and friendships that are personally fulfilling and foster good communication, including the ability to comfortably exchange ideas, views, and experiences.

Spiritual: Understanding one’s purpose, core values, beliefs, identity, and life vision. These elements enable a person to build inner strength, make meaning of experiences, behave ethically, persevere through challenges, and be resilient when faced with adversity. Participation in the spiritual dimension of the CSF2 program is strictly voluntary.

Family: Being part of a family unit that is safe, supportive, and loving which provides the resources needed for all members to live in a healthy and secure environment.

In the Army directive for CSF2, Honorable John M. McHugh stated that

the Army needs to, “embrace the concept of building and sustaining resilience as a fundamental part of our profession and as a key component of readiness.”

Born from this effort were the Master Resilience Trainers (MRTs). The training of MRTs was administered and monitored by one of the most prestigious institutions of education in the world, the University of Pennsylvania, through Dr. Karen Reivich and her team of highly trained professionals in the Department of Positive Psychology. The course material was developed by some of the greatest minds in the country: Christopher Peterson, Marty Seligman, Carol Dweck, Dr. Karen Reivich, and many others.

Resilience is a process that consists of six competencies: self-awareness, self-regulation, optimism, mental agility, strengths of character, and connection. Self-awareness harnesses the skills of the Activating Event-Thought-Consequence (ATC) model for how our interpretation of activating events or thoughts control our consequences which consist of emotions and reactions: what we do or do not do in response to our ‘heat-of-the-moment’ thoughts. Embedded in those thoughts are ‘rigid patterns of thinking’ called ‘thinking traps.’ Thinking traps will cause us to miss critical information and take away from our ability to remain open-minded and accurate. The understanding of this skill provides a self-awareness that can help build stronger relationships.

Resilience we now know is not just about the individual, it's about relationships with family and all others in our sphere of influence.

An even deeper self-awareness is derived from our deep core values and beliefs which are influenced by our thoughts. Our thoughts in turn can radically modify our consequences to either achieve a goal (positive consequences) or create counterproductive behavior (negative consequences). The MRT program calls this form of self-awareness, 'detecting icebergs,' (because of the depth of self-awareness that is needed to look beyond what we can see in order to identify a deep seated core value or belief), icebergs influence our consequences. Problem-solving further defined as problem-understanding is a process for root cause analysis that encompasses all of the earlier resilience skills to gain objectivity, greater depth of understanding in regards to our thoughts about the problem, flexibility, accuracy, influence, and control which all lead to positive change through an IDEAL model. This form of emotional regulation can also create an atmosphere for building stronger relationships through a skill called connection.

The idea of true mastery of the resilience skills is the ability to connect the dots between the resilience competencies which have a primary target and to demonstrate the other associated competencies after each one is thoroughly exercised in training. Put-it-in-Perspective (PIIP) allows catastrophic thinkers to regulate their negative counterproductive thoughts through a jolt of positive energy to enable the individual to make purposeful action meeting the targets of both self-regulation and optimism.

Real-time resilience is a competency at the top of the pyramid for mental toughness which deals with counter-

productive thoughts that may creep into one's mind prior to an event taking place. We call it 'in the now.' This skill takes practice because the bug of self-doubt is sometimes hard to squash, especially if driven by a rigid pattern of thinking or deep core value and belief. The competency of strength of character has the skills of identification and application in leadership styles when enduring life challenges. The final competency of connection is one we describe as particularly important to building strong relationships. Influenced by all of the other competencies it is indeed the show stopper of competencies.

The ability to communicate clearly while in control and confident of the material known to the MRT world as assertive communication teaches the IDEAL Model of communicating with someone when there is a need for change. The skill of active constructive responding is a game changer that has a powerful influence on relationship building by teaching the best response to a person who wishes to share their good news with you. Because of a term we call the negativity bias, we are well adapted to respond to negative information in a certain manner while we tend to devalue the information presented even when it may be about something special which just occurred for a variety of reasons. This includes everything from your operational tempo, to a strong sense of concern about the information shared, to possible complications with active listening when the receiver of the good news hijacks the conversation.

Master resilience trainers are taught to communicate actively by engaging the conversation with authentic interest and the desire to increase the person's joy over what was shared because in the end, it is not the information that matters. We are taught that it is the person

that chose you out of all other people to share their good news with that are important in this process. The program ends with an understanding of how to be effective and disciplined with our praise so that the person does not misunderstand your intentions and truly understands why they are being praised or disciplined.

Emerging from the initial resilience guidance and follow-on material were the campaign strategies which included the proper identification and preparation of your unit MRTs. The Ready and Resilient Campaign



Soldiers chart differences between how fixed and growth mindset individuals approach criticism during an Executive Resilience and Performance Course at the Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness Training Center, Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston, Texas, Jan. 20, 2018. (U.S. Army photo by Tim Hipps)

“Quick Wins” directed units to set conditions at each installation where prevention programs were centralized into various forms of “Campuses of Resilience” where an installation’s various activities might act in unison. As a preventive element of services already available for treatment, their mission was to become “kinetic,” by engaging units on their terrain gaining the trust of their Soldiers, by becoming something more than a name on an index card used only in time of crisis. The Ready and Resilient Campaign which encompassed CSF2 linked many of the other preventative medicine measures on the installation such as the work conducted by the installation Community Health Promotion Council (CHPC) chaired by the senior installation commander.

The R2C Campaign Strategy was developed with four platforms:

- Integrate resilience training as a key part of the Army’s professional military education throughout a Soldier’s career from induction through separation or retirement.
- Synchronize and integrate key Army programs to reduce or eliminate suicide and suicidal ideations, sexual harassment and sexual assault, bullying and hazing, substance abuse, domestic violence, and any stigma or barriers associated with seeking help.
- Develop improved methods to provide leaders and commanders timely and accurate information and metrics to aid them in better identifying “at risk” and “high-risk” Soldiers, enabling early intervention.
- Continue to improve the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) to shorten processing times and improve the services provided to Soldiers and their families.

The programs were developed under the auspice that they would be enduring with key leaders at all levels engaged through program managers tasked to ensure quality training and relevance. The future of resilience is



From left, Sgt. Jonathan Brown and Sgt. Brian Dean, both of the 2nd Information Operations (IO) Battalion, 1st IO Command, place a board to negotiate an obstacle while participating in the Squad and Team Leader Development Course at the Resilience Obstacle Course, Fort Belvoir, Va., Sept. 12, 2019.

in the hands of leaders at all levels of the Army starting with the Army Chief of Staff, working its way down through the company MRT, and finally to the individual Soldier. The challenge will be to maintain a force of competent trainers capable to maintaining these perishable skills. Because of this challenge, the Executive Resilience and Performance Course (ERPC) was created which was designed to educate key leaders on every Army installation. Most of this training would be directed through the CSF2 Training Centers (CSF2-TC).

As this training community took a deeper look at the competencies for resilience, it was understood that the effective use of these skills helps to build relationships, optimism, and social awareness which in turn greatly impact the prevention of suicide and suicidal idealization. A person who has an appreciation for the previously mentioned resilience skills often have an increased sense of optimism in their lives and therefore they are less likely to think about suicide.

We also learned that by understanding the “always” and “everything” thinking traps, rigid patterns of thinking that lead to helplessness and hopelessness can be stopped. A person that finds a way around helplessness and hopelessness could also find purpose in their life. Although there are no specific scientific studies yet to confirm these principals, the theory makes practical sense on many levels. Many factors can help prevent suicide by promoting physical, mental, emotional, and

spiritual wellness.

These protective factors include problem-solving skills and social support that can help individuals cope with emotional distress. The use of these tools should be the norm rather than the exception. They should be taught at early ages to strengthen the resilience of individuals and communities in order to overcome challenges and crises. Policies and programs that foster social connectedness can help promote mental and physical health and recovery.

Although the education and application of resiliency skills and competencies can alter path and reduce the likelihood of them committing suicide, these skills have not replaced ACE (Ask-Care-Escort) or ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training). ASIST is the primary practice for intervention while other programs are centered on prevention through education. The annual requirement for suicide awareness coupled with our behavioral health care compliment this training.

When discussing quality of life there are many things to consider. First, quality of life varies across the force. What quality of life means for a senior leader is not necessarily defined in the same way for a private. The fact that the concept is so diverse based on demographics and social stratification, the definition of quality of life must be understood as living which promotes career growth and stability; a true balance between professional and personal values supported by all agencies responsible for resourcing morale welfare, and recreation programs.

Programs that enhance a Soldier's military experience have been an integral part of military living since the beginning of the Army. Gen. George Washington realized at Valley Forge that military success in the deprivation of that time would rest on his ability to convince these patriots that their sacrifice would lead to a life never before seen, the birth of a democratic republic free of repression and tyranny: "one nation under God indivisible with

liberty and justice for all."

In today's Army, large amounts of money are spent in order to provide Soldiers with an exceptional standard of living which has become a norm, an entitlement for an all volunteer force. Sequestration, furloughs, and fiscal uncertainty brought back the reality that one should never take quality of life for granted. As a basic fundamental, Soldiers need to be reminded of their personal responsibility for creating a stable platform for social and professional growth.

The platform for growing resilient, mentally tough Soldiers is not that of entitlement, but should be based on a powerful education which enables the ability to grow from adversity and thrive in any environment in order to ultimately protect our freedoms and the American way of life. All Soldiers must renew their professionalism and do what is right for the nation and each other regardless of the cost.

If you would like to learn more about this topic, I recommend you take the time to read Dr. Karen Reivich and Andrew Shatte's, *The Resilience Factor*; Robert Brooks and Sam Goldstein's, *The Power of Resilience*; Gina O'Connell Higgins, *Resilient Adult: Overcoming a Cruel Past*; Christopher Peterson's, *A Primer in Positive Psychology*; Carol Dweck's, *The New Psychology of Success*; Martin Seligman, *Learned Optimism*; Tom Rath and Barry Conchie's, *Strengths Based Leadership, Great Teams, Leaders, and Why People Follow*; and the following websites:

- <https://armyfit.army.mil>
- <http://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/Default.aspx>
- <http://www.wrair.army.mil>
- <http://hprc-online.org/files-1/totalforcefitness-pdf> ■



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