



(U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Todd Pouliot taken Sept. 3, 2019) U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Marion Chisolm, a platoon sergeant with the 554th Engineer Construction Company, 92nd Engineer Battalion, briefs his Soldiers on the mission, commander's intent, and safety before departing to support hurricane recovery operations at Fort Stewart, Georgia, Sept. 3, 2019.

From Talent Developer to Talent Manager

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During the Global War on Terrorism – which arguably defined the U.S. military's first decade of the new millennium – the Army's noncommissioned officer (NCO) corps experienced accelerated promotions to satisfy the service's increased force management requirement. As a benefit from multiple combat deployments and professional military education (PME), many of the Army's new sergeants first class excelled at performing individual tasks, leading small elements, and facilitating Soldier development through training. However, they were not fully prepared to transition from talent developers to talent managers, requiring a shift from small unit/individual focus to organizational/Army-wide focus. As a result, Army retention rates declined (Myers, 2018; Wenger, O'Connell, Constant, & Lohn, 2018).

Army doctrine such as *DA PAM 600-25: U.S. Army Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development Guide* provides a framework for NCOs to effectively develop their Soldiers, but a successful transition into a senior leadership role requires mid-level leaders to understand the three career phases of talent utilization as well as master the art and science of talent management (Department of the Army, 2018). The individual accomplishments and achievements that make NCOs successful during the initial stages of their careers do not always translate into continued success as first sergeants and talent managers.

Military Phases of Talent Utilization

Before becoming a senior NCO and talent manager, knowledge of each phase of talent utilization is essential

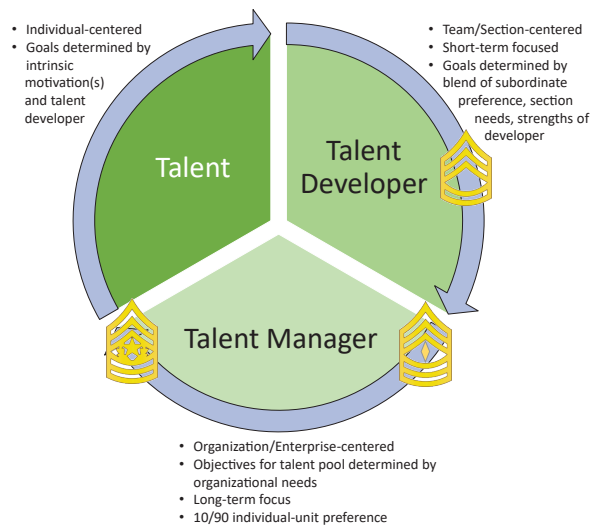


Figure 1. Phases of the Talent Utilization Cycle (Graphic by Sgt. Maj. Jason Payne)

to understand every Soldier’s arc of professionalization. The three progressive phases of talent utilization often align with organizational roles that begin at the unit level and culminate at direct reporting units such as the Army’s Human Resources Command (HRC). The three career phases of talent utilization in today’s Army are: the talent, the talent developer, and the talent manager (see Figure 1).

Talent Phase

Every Soldier begins their career in the talent phase focusing on personal growth and development. According to Dr. Wedell-Wedellsborg at *Harvard Business Review* (2018), “The talent phase in our careers tends to be profoundly self-centered” (para. 11). They seek tasks and duties either within their comfort zone or that align with their natural skills and abilities. During this phase, development is a result of the intrinsic motivation of the individual Soldier. This phase continues until the Soldier gains subordinates under their charge as a corporal or sergeant.

Talent Developer Phase

This second phase of the talent utilization cycle (TUC) describes team leaders up to platoon sergeants as these NCOs develop their subordinates to enhance sections, teams, squads, and platoons. According to the Department of the Army (2020b), the responsibilities for sergeants first class include:

- Develop adaptive and agile Soldiers.
- Coach and counsel the NCOs in the platoon.
- Tailor training to develop subordinate leaders.
- Ensure training is properly planned, resourced, rehearsed, and executed.
- Advise leaders of Soldiers’ talents and capabilities (pp. 2-11—2-12).

Many private sector industries and sports teams refer to talent developers as coaches. According to Noe (2017), “A coach is a peer or manager who works with employees to motivate them, help them develop skills, and provide reinforcement and feedback” (p. 418). Furthermore, “Effective coaches take the time to find out what drives and motivates their clients. Show interest in your employee as a human being first. Do you know their top five core values? Their goals, interests, strengths, aspirations?” (Jimenez, 2020, para. 6). NCOs often spend the majority of their careers in this phase teaching, coaching, and developing Soldiers into valuable assets within the Army system.

Talent Manager Phase

The position of company, troop, or battery first sergeant is the initial critical role for most senior NCOs to serve as organizational talent managers. This role comes with several unique responsibilities such as (a) identifying force management gaps and (b) appropriately utilizing the personnel present based on individual skills and mission requirements.

This final phase of the TUC is increasingly centered on the collective whole of an organization or enterprise. Talent managers often assign personnel within a unit based on organizational gaps before considering an individual’s needs and preferences. These placements are usually long-term focused in comparison to previous phases of the TUC. In essence, talent managers often make decisions about individual training opportunities and future assignments with the benefit of the larger enterprise in mind.

Mastering the Science and Art of Talent Management

There is a required proficiency in both the art and science of talent management that senior leaders must possess in order to be successful to the Army as a whole. *Art* is a subjective term, and when applied to talent management relies on the use of interpersonal skills, knowledge, and judgement when balancing force management requirements against an individual’s broadening and career development. The *science* of talent management refers to the leveraging of available processes, regulatory guidance, and information technology systems to satisfy personnel requirements across the force. Retaining and promoting the Army’s top talent is only possible through mastering both facets of the talent management field.

Science of Talent Management

The science of talent management dictates that first sergeants—the senior enlisted Soldiers of company-level organizations—know how to navigate personnel utilization within the framework of Army assignments and requisition processes. The objective of effective personnel

utilization is to “strengthen and broaden [military occupational specialty] qualifications and prepare Soldiers for career progression, greater responsibility, and diversity of assignment” (Department of the Army, 2019, p. 14). This benefits the Army by ensuring a ready pool of individuals are qualified to serve in challenging positions and assignments worldwide.

Art of Talent Management

The art associated with talent management lies in the soft skills required to coordinate assignment opportunities that simultaneously meet the needs of Soldiers, their Families, and the Army. As a first sergeant, this involves anticipating permanent changes of station (PCS) for unit personnel and engaging HRC professional development NCOs to coordinate follow-on assignments and intra-post transfers. Senior NCOs who have mastered the art of talent management and mentor subordinate leaders to be effective talent developers often produce exceptional volunteers for critical and challenging positions such as drill sergeants, recruiters, combat advisors, and victim advocates.

Making the Transition

Success at the top level requires more organizational and subordinate-centered focus rather than a self-focus. Dr. Wedell-Wedellsborg (2018), states that leaders in the talent manager phase “need to exchange ego-drive for co-drive” (para. 10). This requires leaders to recognize the performance and potential of other Soldiers that benefit the unit as a whole. Mentorship from command sergeants major and a formal education at the Master Leader Course are ideal means for preparing sergeants first class and first sergeants to become successful talent managers.

Conclusion

With the Army’s move to merit-based promotions for senior NCOs fully underway, the service is undoubtedly-



(U.S. Army photo by Wendy Arevalo taken Sept. 30, 2019) U.S. Army 1st Sgt. Paul D. Gomez, first sergeant of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Special Troops Battalion, 1st Theater Sustainment Command inspects new noncommissioned officer (NCO) inductees during an NCO induction ceremony held at Fort Knox, Kentucky, Sept. 30, 2019.

ly invested in selecting the best individuals to develop and manage its most valuable resource – its people. The *U.S. Army’s Vision* requires Soldiers to *Recruit, Retain, Organize, Train, Equip, and Lead* in order to successfully navigate the dynamic and evolving operating environments of the future (Department of the Army, n.d.). This is only possible through cultivating a technically and tactically proficient Army force through experienced and efficient talent managers. ■

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