



U.S. Army staff sergeants participate in Sergeant Major of the Army Michael A. Grinston's "This is my Squad" panel discussion on how to win as a staff sergeant, Jan. 30, 2020. (Courtesy of U.S. Army)

Adaptive Leadership

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"Commitment is what transforms a promise into reality."
—President Abraham Lincoln

Leadership in the post-"War on Terror" age will be a challenge for future noncommissioned officers (NCOs) in many ways. The previous threats of the Cold War have faded to a distant memory since September 11, 2001; replaced by a stateless enemy that uses terror as its main weapon system. Conventional warfare has been replaced with asymmetric battlefields that require huge investments of time and manpower to adequately secure indigenous populations and enable free and democratic governments to establish themselves. The nature of warfare has evolved in the 21st century and in order to meet an ever-changing adversary the nature of NCO leadership must also evolve.

"The Army's primary mission is to organize, train, and equip forces to conduct prompt and sustained land combat operations and perform such other duties, not otherwise assigned by law, as may be prescribed by the President or the Secretary of Defense" (*ADRP 3-0*, *obsolete - superseded by *ADP 3-0: Operations* in 2019). With this broad mission statement in mind, the need for out-

standing leadership has never been more apparent. Our force has met the challenge of al-Qaeda and neutralized its most influential leaders such as Osama bin Laden, but the threat to our nation and our way of life still remains. The need to take a good hard look at our force and the leadership needed to shape the future of the Army has become abundantly obvious with our projected draw downs and limited financial resources due to economic uncertainty and recent budget constraints.

There can be no question; the future of our Army will not resemble our past. This would seem to be a fairly generic statement but don't let its simplicity fool you, the Army is rapidly evolving and with that evolution the need for the individual leader to evolve with it has never been greater. Society as a whole is driven by generations, that is, generations of individuals that define the very nature of the social, political, intellectual, and spiritual interaction that occurs on a daily basis in our nation. World War II gave us the "Greatest Generation" or as some historians like to call them the "Silent Generation." This was the generation that met one of the greatest threats the world has ever known in the Axis Powers, led by Nazi Germany, and defeated them on the field of



Men of the 377th Infantry Regiment, 95th Infantry Division, cautiously move a .30 caliber machine gun through the streets of Metz, France in search of enemy snipers still lurking in the city Nov. 11, 1944. (Photo courtesy of National Archives)

battle. This is the generation that embodied the “suck it up and drive on” mentality to its fullest. The “Baby Boomers” followed and thrived in the utopian dreams of the 1960s only to become more realistic as the 1970s and 1980s hit them with the cold hard facts of responsibility and accountability. Generation X followed and ushered in the “MTV age” and the beginning of the video game revolution. Generation X also saw the advent and wide scale embrace of the computing age. The age of communications began to blossom with the Gen Xers. All of this led to the coming of age generation that is presently beginning to populate society, Generation Y or as they are more widely known, the “millennials.” This is the current group of young Soldiers in our formations, and the young lieutenants and captains that are just beginning to take command of platoons and companies throughout the force. This generation, by its place in the hierarchy, must be our focus in what I will refer to as, the adaptive leadership strategy.

If we have clearly identified the target audience then it becomes important to clearly identify the ways and means of molding this generation to meet and defeat not only the current threat but the future threats to our nation. The answer lies in adaptable leadership; leaders that are inspired, informed, and flexible enough to meet the demands of a new generation while remaining com-

mitted to the principles that have made our Army great. In order to defeat this generational enemy we must bring all available weapons systems to bear and apply overwhelming firepower to ensure we are preparing for the future while meeting the current operational requirements.

Our most effective weapon in this battle will undoubtedly be education. We, largely members of Generation X, must understand what motivates and inspires Generation Y to want to excel, to build that same desire in their future that was invested in each one of us. Our education will have to begin with what makes Gen Y, or the millennials as I will refer to them, tick. The millennials are often viewed as the video game generation. Many of them

live in the “first person shooter” world where they are interconnected in ways that were unheard of 20 years ago. Social media has revolutionized the way millennials communicate and interact, this is a system, a tool or even a weapon that we as leaders can exploit in order to mold these future leaders so that we meet both their and our own leadership development needs. In my opinion, social media may be one of the most significant changes to human life in the last 20 years. It has led to revolutions in the Middle East such as the Arab Spring. It has led to the up-to-the-minute situation reports (SITREPs) that characterize the daily interaction of today’s youth. It has also led to what I will call a “shrinking society” concept. This concept can be applied equally to our country or on a global scale but the simple fact that communications are real or near-real time in this age is a significant difference from when Gen X grew up. This type of interconnectivity is a unique form of communication that must not be feared but must be leveraged to its fullest extent to ensure the most effective and efficient utilization of our most precious resource, the Soldier.

Social media quite possibly may be our most important tool in closing the generational gap. Connecting with the brightest young men and women in society must be made a priority to ensure we are recruiting and retaining the highest quality Soldiers necessary to ensure the

future of our Army and our Nation. Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn are important resources that must be utilized to their fullest in order to attract our future warriors, scholars and statesmen.

Video games are a resource that will become more and more important as we move into the future. Virtual battlefields with leaders immersed in tough, realistic scenarios will be a vital asset in training as we move forward. The current fiscal restraints appear likely to become the norm as we scale down and ultimately close-out our operations in support of the War on Terror but the need to train and maintain a smaller, more lethal force has never been greater. Leveraging virtual reality simulation technology will be a way to enhance training and maintain the warrior edge while reducing the cost of field training exercises and deployments to the National or Joint Regional Training Centers. Virtual, constructive and gaming style training events will never fully replicate or replace the live training events but they can be used as a way to compliment and reinforce a fewer number of live training events in order to sustain the warrior's edge while practicing good stewardship of our limited resources.

Understanding the motivations of today's youth, who will be tomorrow's leaders, is vital to how we educate our force. Some will suggest that these millennials have an "everyone gets a trophy mentality" which if true, is not consistent with the combat operations our nation asks us to perform. While it may be impossible to erase from their collective consciousness the underlying indicators and subconscious behaviors that reinforce this notion it might be preferable to overwrite it so to speak, by consistently instilling and reinforcing the Warrior Ethos. The Army Values and Warrior Ethos are what fundamentally set us apart from the rest of our society and will ultimately set us up for success as we train and mentor our next generation of leaders. Through training and education we can instill within our future warriors and leaders the will to fight and win. To quote a former brigade commander, "Skill + will = kill." War is not a glamorous job but must be respected for the vital role it plays in our national security and our way of life. The ability to adequately convey this to the next generation will be instrumental in our recruiting and retention efforts in the years to come. Education is the key. Education on the part of the current leaders, not only about current and future threats but education in

regards to our interpersonal skills so that we might better relate with and to our current junior and future leaders. Knowing what makes them tick will be key in effective communications. If the essence or factors of communication are the leader, the led, the situation and communication then education on the attitudes, beliefs and expectations of our future leaders must be addressed by our current leaders in order to ensure we are effectively communicating the importance of our current missions, while respecting the sacrifices made by our past warriors thereby enabling the future keepers of the flame. Education will form the bedrock for our ability to prepare for future endeavors and meet the needs of our nation. This is about stewardship of our profession.

Change is not the enemy. Change in thinking, change in the way we train, change in the way we interact with our junior Soldiers is imperative to forward movement in the current and future operating environment. Many people fear change but change in the way we do business is vital to meeting the challenges on the future



U.S. Army Soldiers with the Old Guard test the second iteration of the Integrated Visual Augmentation System capability set during a training exercise at Fort Belvoir, Va., Oct. 28 - Nov. 22, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Courtney Bacon)

battlefields our Army will be called upon to conduct operations. The change required to span the generational gap between Gen X and the millennials is not as great as some might imagine, in fact, that gap is being closed each and every day. For example, the new physical fitness manual, *Field Manual (FM) 7-22*, incorporates the lessons learned from over 10 years of combat operations in Iraq/Afghanistan to maximize the physical potential of our Soldiers by incorporating exercises and workouts that increase operational mobility while decreasing

the risk of injury. The changes were made due to the staggering number of combat related injuries that were not inflicted by the enemy but due to the necessity of wearing improved body armor and conducting dismounted patrols in extreme conditions. We also faced the challenge of how we might best prepare and protect a population of young men and women who have not received the same conditioning and physical preparation that we might have as we grew up. This type of change was an operational necessity driven by conditions on the ground; the real challenge will be to anticipate the operational necessities of the future before they manifest themselves in injured Soldiers and destroyed equipment. We must be creative in how we approach training in order to maintain our tactical advantage in a fiscally constrained environment. As previously mentioned, an example of forward thinking in training would be the use of virtual simulations and gaming systems to maximize training while minimizing financial considerations. This technology is not necessarily new but will have to be embraced by Gen X, encouraged by Gen X, and maximized by the millennials to maintain our Warrior edge.

In short, the old way of doing things, going to the field for weeks at a time in order to prepare for combat operations may soon become a thing of the past. That does not mean we need to lose the advantage we have gained in our War on Terror, that advantage being our tactical and technical competency. If applied judiciously we can actually turn this change in our business practices into an opportunity. The incorporation of technology

can diversify our Soldiers' skill sets much in the same way the diverse missions performed by our combat forces have improved the overall skills of Soldiers in every military occupational specialty (MOS). What was lost in core competencies by each branch during the non-standard missions required during the counter-insurgency fight could potentially strengthen the overall mission readiness of every MOS. By getting back to basics, simplifying our training plans and incorporating technology we can not only strengthen our force but we might also improve on the pre-War on Terror capabilities of our individual organizations.

The Way Ahead – our Corps of noncommissioned officers will need to meet this challenge much like they have in all others by embracing change, promoting the Profession of Arms and reaffirming our commitment to our Army; seniors, peers, and subordinates alike. “I will never forget nor will I allow my comrades to forget that we are professionals, Non-commissioned Officers, Leaders!”

If you would like to learn more about this topic I recommend that you take the time to read *Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 1: The Army*, *ADRP 3: Unified Land Operations* (*obsolete - superseded by *ADP 3: Operations* in 2019), *ADRP 6-22: Army Leadership* (*obsolete - superseded by *ADP 6-22: Army Leadership and the Profession* in 2019), *FM 7-22: Army Physical Readiness Training* and William Strauss and Neil Howe's *Generations: the History of America's Future 1584-2069*, 1992. ■



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