



U.S. Army Soldiers test out a new and upcoming Soldier and Leader Development Tool at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Oct. 6, 2020. The new tool will help the flow of developmental counseling by allowing the Soldier to make a self-assessment, in addition to leadership's evaluation. (U.S. Army photo by Audrey Chappell)

People First: PMCS Your Soldiers

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“People are our greatest strength, our most valuable asset, and our most important weapon system”
(Department of the Army, 2020).

If people are our number one priority and resource, we need to invest the time to build trust, ensure they are taken care of, and are mission capable. We do this not because it's in a manual, but because it's the right thing to do. Just as we maintain Army equipment as our own, we should maintain our assigned people as our own – with love and as family. This increases effectiveness, teamwork, unit cohesion, mission accomplishment, and embraces an Army family concept, all principles promoted by Sergeant Major of the Army Michael A. Grinston's This Is My Squad

(TIMS) initiative (Brading, 2020). This article examines the importance of regular leadership engagement through counseling and mentoring and ends with a personal reflection over events that occurred with subordinates.

Preventive Maintenance Checks and Services (PMCS) Standards Must Apply to People Too

Lt. Col. Jacy A. Park, a battalion commander at Fort Bliss, Texas, said the U.S. Army spends 230 hours a year servicing High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles (Park, 2020).



U.S. Army Spc. Gurbir Takhar, 297th Area Support Medical Company, 340th Brigade Support Battalion, administers a COVID-19 test to a California Air National Guardsman during a drive-thru testing line at Moffett Air National Guard Base, California. Jan. 19, 2021. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Ray Aquino)

“If we are expected to dedicate over 230 hours a year to a piece of equipment made of metal and rubber, how many hours should we be spending to ensure our Soldier’s personal and professional needs are being met?” (Park, 2020, para. 2).

Unlike issued equipment, the Army does not mandate a particular number of hours to maintain, check, and service assigned personnel. The counseling process dictates we should conduct regular developmental counseling sessions to include event, performance, and professional growth (Department of the Army, 2014). The only firm frequency given to counseling sessions is that individuals requiring an evaluation report receive an initial counseling within 30 days and a performance counseling quarterly thereafter (Department of the Army, 2019a, 2019b, and 2019d). Monthly counseling annotated on a DA Form 4856 is the guidance for junior enlisted Soldiers. If we allocate an hour to each mandated counseling session, we only reach 4-12 hours of counseling sessions a year, which is nowhere near on par with the 230 hours required for equipment. As leaders, we must maintain, check, and service our Soldiers to the Army standard through consistent mentorship and development.

Engaged Leadership

As leaders, we cannot just “walk the motor pool” and stay clean with no effort. We have to get under those vehicles to check for leaks, and this hands on approach should also apply to caring for our Soldiers. Good leaders must be present and attentive to “catch the leak” and keep Soldiers healthy, resilient, and mission capable. We, as engaged leaders, must be present daily and perform these critical checks with our Soldiers by consistent leading, coaching, and mentoring from the moment Soldiers report to the unit (Department of the Army, 2016).

In order to properly PMCS your people you need to be an authentic leader Soldiers trust and open up to. I have had supervisors who knew nothing about me, my family,

or my life, and chose to keep things that way. In fairness, I have also been guilty of not knowing as much as I should about my own subordinates. So ensure you counsel when you should to get to know your Soldiers and lead them properly – before, during, and after operations.

The *before* check can be a reception, integration, or initial counseling (Department of the Army, 2013). The *during* operations check is the consistent mentorship, coaching, and development that should take place regularly. And the *after* operations check is an event-oriented or performance counseling. But you should not limit yourself to these intervals, as PMCS is a continual process. These conversations are imperative in getting to know your people and gain their trust so you can better assist them in solving issues before they become large problems, helping manage their careers, and mentoring them to have a positive impact on the Army.

My current and former Army National Guard battalions were activated in March 2020 and assigned to conduct COVID humanitarian missions. Soldiers were spread out across the state, separated from their families and serving the community in food banks, medical care facilities, and other critical places. During this time, our state also experienced civil unrest and a natural disaster in the form of wild fires. This all happened along with other national issues such as overly high suicide rates, racial division, political polarization, and mental health problems. The burdens placed on my Soldiers this past year were both unprecedented and overwhelming.

Understanding the pressures my Soldiers faced, I asked them directly what they thought about current situations. One in particular said, “Man, sergeant major, you just came at me like that?” I said, “Yes, you are a valuable part of the team and your opinions are important to me.” I told him I understood it’s a heavy topic and to gather his thoughts and come by later to talk.

That discussion ended up being one of the most deep and enlightening talks of my career. That junior NCO trusted me enough to tell me about how he overcame the racism he was exposed to as a child and how his mentality changed to not blame others when situations were difficult or outcomes didn’t happen as expected.

I knew he lived in one of the most violent cities in the state so I asked about his experiences in dealing with racism, police harassment, and discrimination. He said he had to often conduct himself in a manner to not attract police attention, but told me the frequent stops were frustrating, especially because he sometimes “fit a description” by what he looked like and the car he drove. I will never know what it is like to be him, but that brief and honest interaction helped us build a two-way foundation of trust.

Conclusion

Army regulations do not explicitly dedicate a concrete amount of time to conducting PMCS on Soldiers like it

does with assigned equipment. But when we dig into *Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 6-22: Army Leadership and the Profession*, we realize that Soldier PMCS is a continual process through countless hours of counseling, coaching, and mentoring. “Learning to perform effective, efficient checks and inspections is a critical leadership skill. Checks

and inspections are a fundamental part of caring for subordinates” (Department of the Army, 2019a). If done correctly and with a caring heart, these hours often surpass the time required to PMCS equipment, and are important in building trust, honesty, and taking care of the Army’s number one resource – its People. ■

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