



U.S. Army Soldiers with the 2nd Information Operations (IO) Battalion, 1st IO Command, place a board to negotiate an obstacle during the Squad and Team Leader Development Course at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, Sept. 12, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Shaun Conway)

# This is My Squad

## Providing the Change at Every Leadership Level

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**I**n August 2019, shortly after assuming the role of Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA), Michael A. Grinston launched his initiative titled “This is My Squad” (TIMS). This program places unit pride at the forefront and directly complements Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. James C. McConville’s number one priority — its people (Brading, 2020). This article discusses the challenges in implementing a new organizational program, and offers solutions to ensure unit buy-in at all levels of leadership.

### TIMS

Grinston defines a “squad” as a group of select individuals who know you well, and who you care about deeply. It

is not just a group of Soldiers. A squad can be your family or even a close group of friends (Grinston, 2020).

The TIMS initiative is a philosophy bridging the gap between unit cohesion and readiness. It is designed around the closeness of special operations teams and the bond they form within their units. The pride and closeness of these units leads to more discipline and ownership. The idea behind TIMS is not only will units take more pride in their success, but it will also lower sexual harassment/assault cases, lower alcohol-related incidents, eradicate racism, and prevent suicides because units will now take better care of and protect each other (Rempfer, 2019).



Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael A. Grinston answers questions and discusses Project Inclusion, This Is My Squad, and force protection during a Facebook Live Town Hall event conducted at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, Aug. 3, 2020. (U.S. Army photo by Maria McClure)

## Leadership

Leadership is much more than just a position. The U.S. Army defines it as the activity of influencing others to accomplish the mission by providing purpose, direction, and motivation (Department of the Army, 2019b). For the SMA's initiative to stick, leaders at all levels must embrace the philosophy and implement it both at the formal levels of leadership (actual chain of command) and informal levels of leadership (junior Soldiers and NCOs who hold strong influence in a unit) (Stincelli & Baghust, 2014).

## Leading Change

While TIMS is a great program centered around caring for Soldiers, if it is not implemented correctly it won't last. John Kotter, Harvard professor and author, developed an eight-step model for implementing change throughout an organization. For this article, we will focus on the three most important steps and examine how they apply to the U.S. Army: Form a strategic vision, enable action by removing barriers, and instituting change (Kotter, n.d.).

## Form a Strategic Vision

One of the most important methods of relaying a strategic vision to an organization is communication. Accord-

ing to the Harvard Business Review, "Few things are more important during a change event than communication from leaders who can paint a clear and confidence-inspiring vision of the future" (Clayton, 2015, para. 5).

Clear and consistent communication is essential in garnering buy-in for TIMS. Three platforms readily available for communicating this vision are Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. What's great about these platforms is leaders' messages can travel directly through an entire organization within minutes. They can provide direct communication from the Army's Chief of Staff to its most junior Soldiers and are a way for an organization to be accessible to the public.

## Enable Action by Removing Barriers

Removing barriers and empowering junior leaders is also a fundamental step in implementing change (Kotter, n.d.). Ownership must be given to squad-level leaders both in garrison and in combat to promote decentralized command — a foundation for mission command (Department of the Army, 2019a). Squad leaders are the key to enforcing policy down to the individual Soldier.

## Institute Change

The final step is perhaps the most critical component for TIMS to be effective over the long-term. According to Kotter, "Articulate the connections between the new behaviors and organizational success, making sure they continue until they become strong enough to replace old habits" (Kotter, n.d., para. 8). Grinston is already doing this by consistently Tweeting relevant TIMS information and sharing his TIMS initiative at every leader engagement activity. But it's not all on him, we as leaders, must embrace and share this initiative to ensure it is promoted down to every Soldier. The world must know every squad looks out for its Soldiers and will not let them down.

## Conclusion

For TIMS to be effective, there must be significant buy-in and ownership from every leadership level within the U.S. Army. Doing this will ensure TIMS is a long-lasting initiative proving to the world the U.S. Army cares about its most important asset — its people. ■

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