



# People First

Chief of Staff of the Army, Gen. James C. McConville, attends the 2019 Army Navy Game in Philadelphia, Pa., Dec. 14, 2019. Image edited by the NCO Journal. (Original U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dana Clarke)

## Mindset Modernization

### Making People a Priority in a Mission-Focused Army

By Sgt. Maj. Charlene Crisp

*"People are always my #1 priority: Our Army's people are our greatest strength and our most important weapon system."*

—Chief of Staff of the Army, Gen. McConville  
(Department of the Army, 2019, para. 4)

**T**he U.S. Army is one of the most successful military organizations in the world, but this reputation doesn't come without obstacles or setbacks. While the mission comes first, Army leaders must also embrace a people-first mindset and take care of its

Soldiers beyond just using them to achieve objectives. If Army leaders embrace mindset modernization, Soldiers will have an opportunity for long and successful careers and the ability to pass on their experience and wisdom to new generations of Soldiers.



Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael A. Grinston, gives Paratroopers his coin on Fort Bragg, N.C., Oct. 19, 2021. This was in recognition of the 82nd Airborne Division's outstanding support during evacuation efforts in Afghanistan. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Emely Opio)

## A Mission First Mindset

The *Army People Strategy* describes culture as consisting of fundamental values and beliefs that steer an organization's social environment and has a significant role in mission accomplishment (Department of the Army, 2019b). People-oriented leaders could take this to another level, using measures of effectiveness to assess behaviors, capabilities, and climates across the formation while creating organizational cultures that help team members consistently achieve their mission. Leaders who focus on their people positively influences the organizational culture and climate (Department of the Army, 2019a).

## Culture and Climate

For decades, the Army has remained an all-volunteer force. However, unethical conduct diminishes the Army's credibility with the American people, discouraging recruits—like the investigation that triggered the Fort Hood Independent Review (Department of the Army, n.d.). Harmful and counterproductive cultures lead to unhappy and unengaged Soldiers, which negatively affect retention and community reception. Conversely, consistently seeking ways to invest in team members will set organizations up for sustainable long-term growth (Falcon, 2018).

## Current Civilian Culture

Innovative technologies enable companies to adopt a people-centric culture that influences collective organizational success. Timms (2017) found that “people-first” is not a set of activities, but is a viewpoint that should saturate every aspect of the corporate culture. Organizations that embrace a people-centric culture procure significant rewards, including better results and happier employees.

## People-First Organizations

Hougaard (2019) noted people-centric organizations value the satisfaction and well-being of their people. Castellano (2014) maintains, “Employees who see the impact of their work and believe in the organization's mission invest more of themselves when performing work” (p. 132). According to Falcon (2018), a team's purpose should focus on helping team members grow into effective leaders to sustain the group's continuity. When companies take care of their employees, employees feel valued, behave more constructively, and have more job satisfaction. Consequently, employees will be more productive and the company will benefit substantially in the long-term.

## Always Forward

Leadership plays a fundamental role in an organization's success. For instance, strong human relations motivate people to greater performance levels and maximize efficiency. The slogan “Always Forward,” which was the Sergeants Major Course Class 71's motto, encourages troops to focus on the tasks ahead despite current circumstances. As a result, both individuals and teams strive to address issues that may prevent them from focusing on and accomplishing the mission. This leads to better cohesion as teams work together to overcome obstacles. Army leaders must be adaptive, versatile, and ready to lead organizations through change by positively influencing people's behaviors and developing relationships built on trust.

## Army Initiatives

Master Resilience Training (MRT) is an example of an Army leader development program that supports a people-focused organizational culture by teaching Soldiers, military family members, and Army Civilian Professionals (ACP) vital skills that support resilience, relationships, and readiness. Investing in personal and professional development reaps returns on investment across the force.

## Strategic Messaging

For strategic messaging to be effective, people must understand what an organization wants to achieve and how to achieve it. The official Twitter account for the secretary of the Army, @SecArmy, tweeted, “The @Usarmy is a premier ground combat force and the foundation of its strength is cohesive squads. Investing in our teammates is crucial to winning on the battlefield. #People-First” (Secretary of the Army, 2019).

When it comes to modernization and a culture shift



within an organization like the Army, synchronizing initiatives and messaging can be a powerful, influential, and effective tool. One bold action would be to update the Soldier's Creed and Warrior's Ethos to reflect people as a priority. "I will always place the mission first, by making people my priority," five powerful words clearly stating what the Army wants to achieve and how to achieve it.

Tan (2019) illuminates how Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. James C. McConville took bold action and inspired cultural change in his address to the force:

"It's the people that are going to allow us to win on the battlefield. It's the people that are going to allow us to have readiness and modernization and reform, and that's what we're committed to as we move forward." (para. 9)

Using strategic messaging, McConville brought a voice to the Army's people-first vision.

## Conclusion

If leaders at every echelon embrace mindset modernization, the Army's people-first culture will succeed and build trust, teamwork, cohesion, high morale, and innovation for the Army as a whole. Leaders must take bold action and use policy, leader development programs, and strategic messaging to influence behaviors and drive successful culture change. Synchronizing initiatives and strategic messaging to provide a united, concise message supports the cultural shift and creates competent, confident, and committed teams, grounded in Army values, ready to develop and lead the next generation of Soldiers.

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**Sgt. Maj. Charlene Crisp** is currently the command paralegal for the 1st Cavalry Division at Fort Hood, Texas. She is credentialed as a resilience-building leadership professional trainer and holds a Bachelor of Science from Austin Peay State University and a Master of Education from Arizona State University. Crisp has served in 2nd Infantry Division, 101st Airborne Division, at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and at the Judge Advocate General's Legal Center and School in Charlottesville, Virginia. She has also served two tours in Afghanistan.

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