



U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Rayon Hughes is recognized by First Army Soldiers and civilians during his retirement ceremony at Rock Island Arsenal, Illinois, Dec. 3, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Warren Marlow)

# Maximizing Talent by Improving Retirement Options

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**A**s the 20th anniversary of the events of Sept. 11, 2001, approaches so will the 20-year career mark of many Soldiers. The individuals who stood up to defend the nation in the months after this world-changing event will begin to transition out of our ranks following two decades of war. A 20-year career is the benchmark for many professions and remains the hallmark point of commitment in the military due to its rigorous physical demands (Federal Retirement Network, 2021).

Replacing these trusted and talented veterans will not be easy with the recent changes to retirement evaluation

boards, the sergeant major (SGM) and command sergeant major (CSM) command slate list (CSL), and the Assignment Satisfaction Key-Enlisted Module (ASK-EM). These adjustments have increased challenges related to terminal assignments and retirement submission, especially for the Army's highest enlisted ranks. This article suggests updating the Army's end-of-career talent management models for NCOs so they appeal to mid-level NCOs as well as longtime Soldiers who otherwise may choose working for private sector companies or non-profit organizations that offer more favorable options and benefits.

## The Tension: Army People Strategy vs. “Needs of the Army”

Over the last 24 months, the Army Talent Management Task Force (ATMTF) has made significant strides in transitioning from its industrial-age “needs of the Army” approach to a “data-rich, information-age model for talent management” (ATMTF, 2020). Improvements like order of merit lists (OML), dual-slate CSL releases, and the ASK-EM have improved talent management for most NCOs; however, the changes have ignored the needs of senior NCOs.

A major problem affecting talent management in the senior NCO ranks is the CSL. For example, when a brigade command sergeant major unexpectedly turns down PCS orders and retires instead, the resulting short-notice reassignments can effect up to four different sergeants major and their families. Under the “needs of the Army” methodology, such adjustments are normal business. But today, where Army spouses are just as likely to have careers, Soldiers and potential recruits are less likely to consider — or remain in — a profession that requires frequent moves (Malandrino, 2020).

## Reimagining Army Retirements

No matter how great or long the career, retirements and transitions are a reality for every Soldier. The Army needs to adopt people-friendly retirement solutions that will appeal to senior NCOs as well as build confidence in younger Soldiers that they are taken care of when they near their retirement timeline.

**18-month retirement submission.** Under current policy, NCOs who plan to retire must wait until 12 months (19 years) before their proposed transition date to submit a retirement request (Department of the Army, 2016). However, the HRC processes building requirements for the enlisted marketplace and evaluation board take place beyond 12 months before report dates. Instead of the current 12-month policy, allow Soldiers to submit retirement requests 18 months ahead of time. The longer 18-month retirement submission timeframe would be ahead of the CSL and enlisted marketplace cycles and reduce the number of declinations in lieu of retirement. This also reduces the number of vacancies created due to last-minute changes when NCOs decide to retire after assignments are released.

**Option to decline *competitive consideration* (DCC) for evaluation boards.** Retirement-eligible NCOs with 20 or more years of service could decline *competitive consideration* for an evaluation board—similar to the current CSL release process. Competitive consideration includes career-progressing assignments and advancement decisions, but does not remove the NCO’s records from the evaluation board panel (in the event the Soldier is found not fully qualified for retention). The implication for this proposal is that the Army would remove the option to decline a PCS after HRC releases assignments.



Graphic courtesy of Soldier for Life

The decision to decline would take place before the board convening, not after the assignment release.

Those who decline would need to leave the Army no later than the board convene date + 90 days or their current projected change of responsibility date + 90 days. NCOs who choose to participate and are selected would then be required to accept the CSL for at least 12 months. This would improve the command preference designator (CPD) since it could open *after* the decision rather than before the board. Also, HRC could limit certain assignments to individuals with appropriate skills, knowledge, abilities, experiences, timeline, and OML.

**Terminal and Permanent Expiration Term of Service (TAP-ETS).** This requirement would allow NCOs with 19 or more years of service to apply for a TAP-ETS date 36 months or more in the future, essentially renegotiating their enlistment contract to have a terminal and irrevocable end date. Rating chains, HRC, evaluation boards, and slating officials could then manage the rest of that NCO’s career with respect to that TAP-ETS. This option would provide predictability and transparency to Soldiers/recruits, their families, and the Army.

## Benefits of a Strategy that Appeals to People

The current “needs of the Army” approach is simply unsustainable for retaining the best senior NCO talent up through retirement. Our NCO Corps is the *backbone* of the Army and must be kept healthy with America’s top talent. Without improved end-of-career talent management, the Army will continue to lose talent to the private sector and nonprofit organizations. The proposed solutions provide predictability for Soldiers and their families, those nearing retirement and at the beginning

of their careers, as well as informing HRC assignment managers and slating officials in order to fill openings with the most qualified candidates. Known and predi-

cable retirement options will help the Army extend the benefits of the Army People Strategy to career NCOs and encourage recruits in the process. ■

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