

THE ROLE OF THE SENDING UNIT IN TALENT MANAGEMENT

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The Role of the Sending Unit in Talent Management

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“The Army People Strategy mission and vision are clear – The Total Army will acquire, develop, employ, and retain the diversity of Soldier and Civilian talent needed to achieve Total Army readiness. Our vision is to build cohesive teams for the Joint Force by maximizing the talents of our people, the Army’s greatest strength and most important weapon system.” (Department of the Army, 2019, p. 3)

Talent management is about putting people first. Leaders should be willing to position their best NCOs in the best opportunities, even if those exist elsewhere in the Army. At the end of a successful tour, top-talent Soldiers deserve a chance to compete for the best broadening opportunities that present themselves within their Professional Development Model (Department of the Army, 2018). Army senior leaders can enhance the assignment process by encouraging NCOs to expand their capabilities with career developmental assignments in other units (i.e., TRADOC, FORSCOM, and USASOC). By changing the way units think, counsel, advocate, and mentor departing Soldiers, we can shift

formation losses to developmental sends and improve talent management while putting people first.

What is Talent Management

Many leaders in the Army recognize a bit of mystery exists about who does Talent Management and where it occurs. The most obvious player in the employ portion of Talent Management is Human Resources Command (HRC) and the newly renamed Talent Management NCOs (TMNCOs; formerly Professional Development NCOs or PDNCOs) assigned to HRC Career Branches. However, the losing unit may have the biggest role to play. Leaders in the losing unit can serve as an honest

broker and provide wise counsel when the time comes for a talented NCO to enter the Assignment Satisfaction Key – Enlisted Module (ASK-EM) Marketplace.

ASK-EM is an online talent management marketplace for Active Component (AC) NCOs from staff sergeant to first sergeant. ASK-EM Marketplace participants can preference available requirements for their move cycle through an automated marketplace-type interface similar to the Assignment Interactive Module 2.0 (AIM 2.0) marketplace officers use. NCOs are identified to move based on Army readiness requirements, professional development needs, and individual year/month available (YMAV) dates, which are normally 36 months after arrival on station (Bock, 2019).

HRC examines unit strengths, Army manning guidance, readiness factors, and talent distribution before the ASK-EM Marketplace opens. However, once an NCO is placed into a Marketplace according to their YMAV, Army manning guidance gives high priority to the NCO's preferences. Senior NCOs (command sergeants major, sergeants major, first sergeants, master sergeants) can manage talent by providing what HRC likes to call "Market Mentorship". Those senior NCOs with their years of experience can assist NCOs in the market to make informed decisions based on identified knowledge, skills, behaviors, and preferences (KSB-P).

Rebranding the Loss into a Send

Once NCOs are in the ASK-EM Marketplace, they now belong to someone else. Losing units should shift their perspective from losing Soldiers, to sending talent to the Army. There is a bigger opportunity to advise the NCOs departing formations. This attitude shift solidifies an NCO's role as a leader in the Army Talent Management process. NCOs know their formation better than anyone else.

Leaders in the "sending unit" are best positioned to help interpret each Professional Development Model (PDM) to meet the needs of NCOs in the marketplace. The TMNCOs in HRC's career branches provide participants with broad guidance when the ASK-EM Marketplace opens. Those leaving units need specific advice to find the best use of their talents. Unit leaders can provide individuals the tailored mentorship they need. An NCO's emotional intelligence and experience as a leader will develop Soldiers the best (Horval, 2021).



U.S. Army Human Resources Command is continuing to innovate talent management for active component enlisted Soldiers by developing a new initiative -Assignment Satisfaction Key – Enlisted Marketplace (ASK-EM)- that will support enhanced interaction between Soldiers and talent managers. It allows Soldiers more input into where they would like to be assigned. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Steven Lewis)

When units are about to send an NCO into the marketplace, NCOs should inspire the budding talent available elsewhere in their formation. A leader's most talented NCOs quickly become key lynchpins in their unit. Sending them to other assignments will leave gaps. This is an opportunity for another NCO within formations to fill those big shoes. Talented NCOs grow best when presented with new challenges. A unit's best NCO entering the marketplace is a signal that it is time to develop their next "best NCO" through counseling, coaching and mentoring. This is Army Talent Management at its finest.

Top talent is usually the result of great leadership and mentorship. Command teams that demonstrate their understanding of how Soldiers departing their unit fit into Army Talent Management do not go unnoticed. Doing so demonstrates to next higher headquarters that your unit develops excellence. Talented NCOs who grow within formations often need to seek further growth outside the formation. When great leaders train the next NCO to fill the gap, the NCOs sent are not "losses" and the Army gains talent.

Counsel, Advocate, and Mentor

As your talented NCOs prepare to depart, there will be opportunities to advocate for their future success. If done right, you are likely to build enduring relationships as you mentor them. It all starts with developmental counseling as you help NCOs lay out a plan outlining actions to achieve their professional and personal goals (Department of the Army, 2017).

Counsel

Developmental counseling works best when you shape an NCO's path through questions rather than instructions or straightforward directions. When the ASK-EM Marketplace opens and your NCOs come to you with a list of available assignments, resist telling them how to order their list. Dialogue with them and ask them to consider their marketplace considering their background, circumstances, and personal goals (Stanley, 2004). Your counsel comes from your wisdom and experience, but you must also account for changes to Army career paths. Frame your questions informed by your personal experience, but not defined by it. Help NCOs identify their own priorities. This is a great opportunity for them to reflect on their [Project Athena](#) assessments completed at their PME courses and see if they are headed down the right long-term development path (Stewart et al., 2022).

Advocate

Leaders in the sending unit can take actions to ensure NCOs successfully land at their next assignment. Before the market opens, engage with HRC as an advocate. Reach out on behalf of NCOs and their development, rather than on behalf of your unit. Changing assignments after an NCO receives their assignment instructions is complex and difficult to achieve. A call to HRC after the NCO receives assignment instructions to say you absolutely "cannot lose" an individual may be too late to affect change. That looks very different from a call to HRC 45 or more days before that NCO's ASK-EM Marketplace opens to delay their move in order to line them up with a developmental opportunity in a subsequent market. The first instance usually goes against Army readiness requirements, where the second instance is the heart of Army Talent Management.

Advocating for Talent Management will make sure the Army stays the best fighting force in the world. Sending units may even want to seek early YMAV adjustments to pick the right time to send a talented NCO to a developmental assignment rather than keep them in the formation indefinitely. That is the path to thinking about the Talent Management big picture.

Once the market closes and your NCO's assignment instructions are in hand, you can posture their next unit for their arrival. You can enable them to land in the best duty position by contacting the gaining unit.

If you are sending your best NCO, tell someone in the gaining unit to make sure they know what kind of talent they are getting. If you are sending someone who needs a specific growth opportunity, make contact to get them on the right track from day one. When considering making contact, there are also negative phone calls you might be tempted to make. Consider, instead, providing the departing NCO with some wise counsel – let them know what they did well and what they will need to improve on at their next duty station. The gaining unit must give that new NCO a fresh start and let them grow through counsel, development, and mentorship (Jimenez, 2021).

While it is true Soldiers in the market belong to someone else, changes can happen after that market assignment is cut. Leaders in the losing unit are in a great position to advocate for NCOs in these circumstances as well. Before reaching out to HRC with a deletion or deferment request, seek to find a solution with the gaining unit on behalf of the NCO. The gaining unit, who will be left below manning targets if an NCO is deferred or deleted from orders, has the most power to get an approval for a needed assignment change.

Mentor

Finally, mentor NCOs beyond just your formation. Make yourself available to keep in touch. The biggest impact leaders in sending units can have on successful NCO careers will happen when they reach back for advice. We do not recommend you force that communication, but rather use it as an indicator of success if it happens on its own. The best NCOs will reach out to the mentors who helped launch them to their next step in a successful career.

Conclusion

Army Talent Management is a challenging new concept for many leaders. Senior leaders who shift their mindset from a unit-focused perspective as a "losing unit" to a talent-focused perspective as a "sending unit" will see the benefits in their own formations and across the Army. Great leaders have a genuine interest in the talent within their formations. Focusing on how you can make NCOs successful as they depart your unit is one way you can have a lasting positive impact on the Army. ■

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