



Maj. Gen. John R. Evans, Jr, Commanding General, Fort Knox and U.S. Army Cadet Command, hands diploma to Sgt. 1st Class Misty L. Chantz, 1st Theater Sustainment Command during the Fort Knox Army Education Center College Graduation Ceremony at Waybur Theater, Oct, 17, 2019 on Fort Knox, Ky. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Nahjier Williams)

How to Make Time for College

By Sgt. Maj. David G. Cyr

NCO Leadership Center of Excellence

As Noncommissioned Officers, you are charged with the care, training, education and readiness of every Soldier in the U.S. Army. Your ability to coach, train and mentor competent Soldiers of character is the key to the success of our force. The Nation, our Officers and our Soldiers have placed great trust and confidence in the NCO Corps, and deserve nothing less than competent, confident, and trusted professionals to remain the world's premier land fighting force. This We'll Defend!

—Sgt. Maj. Of the Army Michael A. Grinston
(Department of the Army [DA], 2020, Foreword)

NCOs bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to every mission and enhance every unit in the Army. They are lifelong learners who are constantly improving their skills and knowledge to gain

a competitive advantage in operations (Laal & Salamati, 2012). Often, NCOs achieve this with assignment diversity and career-long learning in military institutions. However, they can sometimes overlook the benefits of



The 25th Infantry Division and U.S. Army Hawaii held the 2019 College Commencement Ceremony for more than 40 Soldier College Graduates at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, May 10, 2019. The ceremony honored all Soldiers who met the required qualifications to have their degree conferred but were unable to attend their home college ceremony. (U.S. Army photo by Pvt. Michael Bradle)

a civilian education, especially due to time constraints from high operational tempos. This article will give three manageable tips on how to make time for college in a Soldier's busy life.

Why College?

There are several pros and cons to pursuing degrees and credentials. Promotion selection boards generally view leaders who possess college degrees and technical certifications more favorably when compared to those without (Brutus, 2019). Also, attaining a degree or credential shows an individual's self-development, something highly encouraged by *DA Pamphlet 600-25, U.S. Army noncommissioned officer professional development guide*. In the guide, two out of the three self-development categories listed (guided and personal self-development) recommend vocational credentials, off-duty college courses, and technical certifications as means of further self-development (DA, 2018). Ultimately, furthering one's civilian education improves self-awareness, interpersonal skills, and critical thinking, which then helps NCOs build meaningful relationships with their Soldiers and expands their knowledge base and reasoning skills (Townsend et al., 2019).

However, pursuing a college degree while serving on active duty can be challenging, time-consuming, and require a high level of commitment. Effective time management and clearly defined priorities can enable NCOs to pursue a higher education while fulfilling their NCO responsibilities.

I currently hold three college degrees. At first it was a huge struggle, but it didn't have to be, I just wasn't doing

it the right way. I wasn't managing my time wisely. But while working on my master's degree, the light bulb clicked, and I finally figured out some time management practices that enhanced my efforts, and most importantly, reduced my stress. Here are three time management tips I found helpful which may help you in your efforts.

Limit Leisure Time

Once I decided to overhaul my time management, the first thing I did was audit the time I spent doing things not conducive to my goals. The unnecessary things I spent the most time doing were watching television, playing golf, and eating out. I found I spent more than 20 hours a week conducting these three activities, so I made a commitment to reduce them by 50%. I wasn't trying to cut the activities I enjoy out completely and make myself miserable, I just needed

to reduce the amount of time I spent on them.

At that time, I was taking one course at a time towards my masters degree and found I only needed to commit about 11-16 hours a week on my assignments. By repurposing 10 hours of my personal time, I was able to find almost all the time I needed for college without overworking myself. However, despite these efforts, it still wasn't easy and I needed to adjust a few more things to get all my work done comfortably.

One Hour Early

My next solution was to wake up one hour earlier every morning and use that extra time to focus on schoolwork. I found this time to be very productive as I tend to have more focus and less distractions in the morning. The combination of eliminating excess television and waking up an hour early gave me the time needed to complete my assignments without having to work late hours to finish my schoolwork. However, this method can be adapted at need when life unexpectedly puts challenges in your path that take priority.

Work Ahead

My final time management tip is to plan and work ahead. Not putting something off for another day is often easier said than done. Procrastination comes easy when the deadline is much farther down the road. However, there were times where I came under pressure because other obligations in my life prevented me from focusing on schoolwork. To mitigate these situations, I decided that I would work ahead whenever I could. For example, if I finished my work for the current week on

a Thursday, I would use my blocked-off time on Friday and Saturday to work on the next week's assignments. As simple as this may seem, it worked very well for me, kept my time blocks consistent, and reduced my stress as I completed graduate school.

Conclusion

Limiting leisure time, waking up one hour earlier, and working ahead are three manageable tips that

allow busy Soldiers to make time for college. While the thought of spending countless hours working towards a degree may seem daunting and overwhelming, the reward is worth the effort. With effective time management and clearly defined priorities, NCOs can pursue a higher education while fulfilling their Army responsibilities. Every Soldier is different, so figure out what works best for you and share that knowledge with others. ■

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