



Leaders across industries bear the responsibility of focusing on mission accomplishment and the welfare of their people. They must cultivate a strong support system — a “village” — to navigate the anxieties of success, rediscover enjoyment in service, and ultimately reach their full potential. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dustin Biven)

# Find Your Village

## The Byproduct of Success

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Sergeants Major Course, Class 75

**L**eaders across industries bear the responsibility of focusing on mission accomplishment and the welfare of their people. This obligation fosters a winning spirit embodied by the warrior ethos. However, this relentless pursuit of success often perpetuates anxiety, driven by constant deadlines and organizational demands.

Despite such challenges, leaders rise to the occasion and deliver results under extreme conditions. Yet, success often creates anxiety, diminishes service enjoyment, and fosters a desire to quit before realizing one’s full potential.

This contradiction highlights a critical need for strategies to support those in leadership positions. Leaders must cultivate a strong support system — a “village” — to navigate the anxieties of success, rediscover enjoyment in service, and ultimately reach their full potential.

### Anxiety

The rigors of sustained operations, organizational demands, and family pressures increase anxiety for many, especially high performers. These individuals — often labeled “high speed” — strive for excellence, frequently disregarding personal sacrifices. Their mission is singular: success. This culture, ingrained in elite Soldiers, celebrates achievement but fosters anxiety, with the fear of failure often leading to chronic behavioral health concerns.

Constant organizational change compounds these challenges, creating unwanted side effects during transitions (Gilmore et al., 1997). The Army’s “up or out” culture exacerbates this issue, placing immense pressure on leaders and contributing to the anxiety that undermines their mental health.

## Up or Out

The “up or out” culture demands relentless forward momentum, often at significant personal cost. Leaders boast about minimal sleep and dissatisfaction with their jobs as if these are badges of honor. Organizational demands encourage leaders to “suck it up and drive on,” disregarding the toll along the way.

This mindset focuses solely on the next milestone — the next rank, position, or duty station — at the expense of enjoying the present. Failing to reflect on current experiences prevents leaders from fully appreciating their triumphs, failures, and lessons learned.

Research shows that mindfulness and character strengths improve job satisfaction, increase productivity, and reduce turnover (Pang & Ruch, 2019). The Army’s investment in Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F) programs helps Soldiers and Department of the Army civilians face adversity and thrive. Leaders must embrace mindfulness and encourage others to grow where they are planted, fostering service enjoyment and reducing barriers to success.

## Enjoyment of Service

While we take pride in our service, it isn’t always enjoyable. Beneath the surface lies the strain caused by service demands. High rates of sleep disorders, substance abuse, and poor self-regulation reflect the cost of these challenges.

Studies indicate that insomnia is a risk factor for depression and suicidal ideation. Alarming, 69% of service members are classified as having short sleep duration (SSD), sleeping fewer than six hours per night, which degrades performance and compromises resources (Good et al., 2020).

These issues, coupled with a high operational tempo and behavioral health stigmas, lead to unhealthy lifestyles and dissatisfaction with military service. Cultural shifts are needed to address the morale of the force and their families, who often feel discouraged by evolving expectations (Weathers, 2023).

Even high performers face burnout, as seen in Andrew Luck, the former No. 1 NFL draft pick, who retired despite a \$139 million contract. Luck explained he no longer enjoyed football and disliked the person he became while focused on his career (Wickersham, 2022).

Leaders must inspire Soldiers to value their contributions by highlighting their daily impact and showcasing the significance of their efforts.

## Reaching Full Potential

Reaching one’s full potential requires more than hard work, dedication, and commitment — it requires a village. A village provides support during tough times, encourages resilience, and fosters appreciation for the present. Leaders who reach their potential often rely on family, friends, health professionals, and mentors.

Work-life balance and spousal support significantly enhance workplace success and organizational commitment (Amin et al., 2017). To unlock your full potential, identify and leverage your village. A strong support system will help you thrive, discover untapped potential, and find joy in service despite life’s demands.

## Call to Action

As leaders, we must focus on achieving success and the journey and well-being of those we lead. Reflect on your leadership journey: Are you fully immersed in the present, appreciating your triumphs and lessons? Do you have a village that supports, challenges, and helps you grow?

If not, now is the time to cultivate your village. Reach out to mentors, peers, and loved ones who will help you navigate challenges and unlock your potential. A balanced support system is the key to leading with purpose, resilience, and enjoyment. Your village is essential to overcoming anxiety and achieving lasting success.

## Conclusion

Success often creates anxiety, diminishes service enjoyment, and hinders leaders from reaching their full potential. While high performance brings accolades, it can also lead to behavioral health challenges fueled by organizational demands and an up-or-out culture.

By immersing ourselves in the present and appreciating our experiences, we redefine our purpose and enhance our enjoyment of service. A supportive village helps us thrive, enabling us to unlock our potential and continue to lead with purpose and resilience. ■



The rigors of sustained operations, organizational demands, and family pressures increase anxiety for many, especially high performers. This culture, ingrained in elite Soldiers, celebrates achievement but places immense pressure on leaders and contributes to the anxiety that undermines their mental health. (U.S. Army Reserve photo by Sgt. Audrey Hayes)





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