



Spc. Austin Birdwell, a patrolman with the 529th Military Police Company, Wiesbaden, Germany, gives a bag to a student who attends Vatra E Diturise, a school located in Pasjak, Kosovo, in 2014. During dozens of community outreach initiatives, the unit organized volunteer events to assist local schools and charities. (U.S. Army photo by Capt. Judith Marlowe)

How Engaged Leadership Can Transform the Force

By Master Sgt. Leonard D. Grimes

Sergeants Major Course, Class 75

Iserved in the 529th Military Police Company from 2010 to 2013. The experiences in this unit shaped the way I learned, collaborated, and developed over my 16-year career. I saw NCOs train, equip, and prepare Soldiers for combat and life outside the Army. My interactions with my leaders transformed a troubled child from one of the most distressed environments in the U.S. into an elite Soldier prepared for all the world's challenges.

Transformational experiences occur when people

value the organization. These actions require effort beyond the barracks and field — effort that reaches into the heart and mind of every Soldier assigned to the unit.

My transformational experience came in the form of mentorship from many unit leaders, which led to a continuous emphasis on coaching and mentoring for the rest of my Army career. Positive experiences shape the way we learn, collaborate, and develop. These actions generate an ability that enriches the NCO corps and supports the greatest fighting force in the world.

Learn

Learning is the cornerstone of a Soldier's personal and professional development. The unit prioritized learning by resourcing and executing tough training and emphasizing lessons learned in multiple forums.

Army doctrine states, "Army professionals are committed to lifelong learning and set the example for what it means to live by and uphold the Army ethic" (Department of the Army, 2019, p. 1-3). This prioritization enabled the unit to flawlessly execute the Army's mission, producing six sergeants major, 11 first sergeants, and a host of sergeants first class.

The unit's actions enriched the NCO corps by producing leaders who advised officers and led Soldiers in multi-domain operations. They allowed their Soldiers to experience failure by generating real-world solutions that produced productive members of the Army and American society.

This approach occurred during ceremonial support of a D-Day anniversary. The Army tasked Soldiers with planning and executing high-visibility ceremonial support in Normandy, France.

One team faced multiple setbacks, including miscommunication and suboptimal decision-making, leading to missed mission objectives early on. Rather than reprimand the team, leaders guided them through debriefing sessions focusing on identifying challenges' root causes and developing practical solutions.

Soldiers were encouraged to take ownership of mistakes and learn from failures, using the experience as a lesson for future missions. Over time, this approach helped build resilience and problem-solving skills, leading to stronger, more effective leaders who were successful in military operations and responsible, effective community members after transitioning to civilian life.

Collaborate

Positive interactions require leaders to be available and vulnerable with their Soldiers. This vulnerability gives people the freedom to be open to learning and experiencing new things.

The unit used collaboration to help every Soldier feel valued. Collaborative themes and messages created a winning culture and improved performance in physical fitness and law enforcement operations. The objectives of collaborative opportunities are to broaden perspectives and make use of collective knowledge and a unit's thoughts (Marquet, 2020).

Emphasized collaboration yielded high performance, mitigated external stressors, and minimized disciplinary occurrences. Soldiers felt like winners, performed like winners, and ultimately won the Brigadier General J.P. Holland Award (reserved for the top military police company in the active Army, the U.S. Army Reserve, and the Army National Guard).



529th Military Police Company Soldiers conduct Army Warrior Tasks (ATW) for individual and team elements at the Valle Ugione Italian training area, Livorno, Italy. The company structured its training to sustain lethality on the battlefield, generating success across each domain of the Army's Leader Development Model. (U.S. Army photo by Elena Baladelli)

Develop

The unit structured its training to sustain lethality on the battlefield, generating success across each domain of the Army's Leader Development Model and in private civilian organizations. Then a Sergeants Major Academy student and master sergeant, Ronnie G. Winberry (2017) found the following in his study (drawing insight from an Army Doctrine Reference Publication):

"A critical part of outstanding leadership is development. Soldier development cannot happen without accurate feedback and a method to outline steps for their future growth. Thankfully, Department of the Army (2012), prescribes a doctrinally mandated system in which leaders provide formal feedback to subordinates with the purpose of the subordinate having continued development." (p. 2)

The unit cultivated a spirit of achievement and placed significant importance on adding value to the organization and its communities. During dozens of community outreach initiatives, it organized volunteer events to assist local schools and charities. Inspired Soldiers participated in activities such as tutoring students, conducting community cleanups, and organizing toy drives.

This initiative strengthened the bond between Soldiers and the local community, fostering a sense of pride and accomplishment within the unit. By actively contributing to the well-being of the organization and the surrounding community, the Soldiers developed a greater sense of purpose and understanding of the broader impact of their roles.

This spirit of achievement translated into stronger performance in their professional duties, as the Soldiers saw firsthand how their efforts made a positive difference beyond their immediate law enforcement mission. The successes of so many of the unit's Soldiers throughout follow-on Army assignments and in civilian organizations validate the leaders' impact.

Leader Commitment Today

Despite geographical dispersions, unit members continue to stay involved in the lives of their Soldiers through mentorship, telephonic coaching, and employment referrals.

The Army should replicate this willingness to remain present in Soldiers' lives across the force. This action would encourage Soldiers who exit service to tell a positive Army story. The ultimate byproduct is consistent achievement and superb Army retention.

The practices discussed — prioritizing learning, fostering collaboration, and maintaining a commitment to development — aren't just ideas. They are actions that can transform any unit.



Pfc. Maria Clasby, a military police Soldier with 2nd Platoon, 529th MP Company, shares a laugh as she lets a group of children get a closer look at a book at the Mannheim Library on Benjamin Franklin Village in Mannheim, Germany, during the weekly after-school reading program sponsored by the platoon. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Adrienne Killingsworth)

Leaders across the Army must adopt these principles to ensure every Soldier is empowered to succeed and grow. They should take the initiative to provide mentorship, create teamwork opportunities, and continuously support their Soldiers' growth, ensuring the future of the NCO corps and the Army.

Conclusion

Positive experiences shape the way we learn, collaborate, and develop. They generate an ability that enriches the NCO corps and supports the most significant fighting force in the world.

A leader's engagement and willingness to show vulnerability instill a winning confidence in Soldiers, which generates development and positive cultures.

The leaders of the 529th Military Police Company mastered the art of leadership and inspired their Soldiers to excel in all aspects of their lives. Their efforts have enriched the NCO corps, hundreds of communities, and the Army. They continue to profoundly impact me and my family. ■

References

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