LESSONS *for* BUILDING COHESIVE TEAMS *and* READINESS DURING IN-PROCESSING

Center for Army Lessons Learned

The Center for Army Lessons Learned leads the Army Lessons Learned Program and delivers timely and relevant information to resolve gaps, enhance readiness, and inform modernization.

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Center for Army Lessons Learned - Information

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION 1

The Problem

"We must show not only in our words, but in our deeds, that we earnestly desirous of securing their good will by acting towards them in a spirit of just and generous recognition of all of their rights."

—President Theodore Roosevelt.[1]

Readiness is the most significant focus of in-processing. AR 220-1 defines readiness at the tactical unit level as "the capabilities of a unit to conduct its core or assigned quantitative measures of current resources and training." The quantitative measures used to assess readiness are:

- Personnel level (P level) based on deployability, skill, and grade of modified table of organization and equipment or tables of distribution allowance. (MTOE/TDA) Required Soldiers.

- Equipment Readiness (R level) based on the serviceability of on-hand-equipment.

- Equipment Supply Level (S level) based on the "availability" of MTOE/TDA required equipment.

- Training level based on the assessment of the Mission Essential Task List (METL).[2]

Although these four areas give you quantitative data on how ready a unit is at a macro level, there are elements of readiness pertaining to integration of new personnel that are critical for increasing a unit's P level. The Army has multiple systems and resources to help with Soldier integration and unit readiness, but leaders need to synchronize those systems for best results. Increased efficiency and effectiveness reduce in-processing time, jump-start Soldier assimilation and knowledge about the unit and duty position, and demonstrate caring leaders who foster a positive command climate.

The problem with how units currently in-process Soldiers is that the sponsorship program and unit assignment hinge on identifying a gaining Soldier and identifying that Soldier's corresponding duty position at a specific unit. Often, this is not identified until after a Soldier has arrived. This leads to an inaccurate and arbitrary assignment of a sponsor. The delay in Soldier identification reduces time that could be spent incorporating that Soldier onto the team. This would prepare that Soldier for their upcoming position to hit the ground running. Lack of foresight for supervisors on incoming Soldiers reduces the time preparing to receive and onboarding new Soldiers. Since most Army positions require on the job training, it is even more important to prepare Soldiers prior to assuming their assigned positions even with the fast pace of unit training, qualifications, and an expectation of readiness.

SECTION 2

Use of Current Systems

The Army's primary communication system for initial touchpoints with new Soldiers is the Total Army Sponsorship Program. The Soldier uses this online system to register for a sponsor and to fill out a Department of the Army (DA) Form 5434 Sponsorship Program Counseling and Information Sheet, 1 June 2019.[3] The gaining unit assigns a sponsor, and the system auto-generates a welcome letter. The information required on a DA 5434 includes the following:

- Acknowledgment of Total Army Sponsorship Program

- Gaining unit information and family information

- Losing unit information and supervisors

- Housing and childcare information[4]

Although the receiving company command team would benefit knowing this information, they cannot access it on the current system. Only the Brigade Unit Sponsorship Coordinator has access. Additionally, many Soldiers overlook completing this form while contending with moving their families and household goods. The last thing on their minds is logging on to a system only accessible through an Army computer to fill out a form and receive an auto-generated welcome letter.

The newly implemented Integrated Personnel and Pay System-Army (IPPS-A) provides more information than the Army Career Tracker (ACT) system, like a Soldier's talent profile, comparable to the old officer record brief/Soldier record brief (ORB/SRB). This talent profile provides information on past career assignments/locations, certifications, and additional skills identifiers (ASI), career timeline, and resume. While this is an excellent resource for Soldiers, only a first sergeant or commander can access this information for Soldiers who fall within that unit.

Soldiers are also able to use IPPS-A to view orders and follow-on instructions. These instructions include organizations a Soldier must contact to fully out-process the leaving unit plus those to contact to begin in-processing at the gaining unit. In addition to ACT and IPPS-A most, if not all, Army installations now have a digital garrison app to help orient Soldiers to post, upcoming events, gate information, and services provided. Within this app, Soldiers can access all installation agencies' locations and phone numbers.

An application that many Soldiers have probably not heard of is the My Army PCS app. This app allows Soldiers to input what unit they are leaving and the one they will be assigned to. There are eight different menu options to choose; Plan my PCS, Know the Process, Sponsorship, Resources, Location Info, Entitlements, Documents, EFMS Info. Each of these options has information beneficial to Soldiers and their families. Much like all the other current Army systems/apps, the feature missing is specific unit, leadership, and duty information critical to a seamless transition. Beyond apps, all units have a website with numerous resources and points of contact that is accessible without a common access card. Some websites are easier to navigate than others, but most require quite a bit of digging and then not much information is available when you finally get to the in-processing section.

SECTION 3

A Way Forward

UP AND OUT

The ACT system as it stands is a problem not easily solved with regard to the reception of new Soldiers. Currently, it is not user friendly or accessible on all devices and offers little information to new Soldiers or command teams during the permanent change of station (PCS) process. Improvement to this system could pay dividends in building cohesive teams.

DOWN AND IN

Divisions and brigades hold the cards in Soldier's assignment. Divisions need to identify gaining personnel to their units sooner and brigades need to release their losing Soldiers. This enables brigades and below to ensure proper vacancies are being filled while allowing enough time to properly utilize the sponsorship program.

Affectable change truly lies at the battalion and company level. Battalion and company commanders can implement processes now to aid in transitions.

As a company commander, I emphasized first impressions. I made it a point to meet every Soldier face to face which most commanders try to do. One battalion commander took this a step further and called every married Soldier's spouse and parent of single Soldiers, welcomed them to the unit and introduced them to the Soldier Family Readiness Group (SFRG). Creating initial dialog and a level of personability with your Soldiers is a key to gaining their trust.

Some other lessons at the battalion and company level that can pay dividends is assigning the right sponsor.

- Ensure the sponsor is in the same unit and section (if possible). This is critical in bridging the gap between that new Soldier and the squad, team, or section they are about to become a part of. Too many times sponsors are assigned solely by company and not the specific platoon or section that Soldier will be assigned.

- Use the initial sponsorship touchpoint not only to welcome the new Soldier, but also educate, give resources, and receive Soldier data sheets before arrival. This should be a give and receive touchpoint.

Commanders need to do a better job at outlining expectations of what information sponsors are required to give and receive. A standard template for all sponsors with critical information should include:

Information for the Soldier:

- Direct leadership information and contact numbers (include pictures if possible)

- Important policy letters

- A welcome letter with unit information and history

- The Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP), Equal Opportunity (EO), Chaplain, and career counselor phone numbers and resources

- New position details, expectations, and doctrine to learn and know

- Installation map

Information from the Soldier:

- Soldier data sheet (most units have one for in-processing with general information on rank, Department of Defense identification (DOD ID), military occupational specialty (MOS), phone number, family information, home address or that they need a barracks room, birthday, and officer evaluation report/ non-commissioned officer evaluation report (OER/NCOER) thru date). This is generic and information can be added as needed.

- Special family circumstances (Exceptional Family Member Program [EFMP], no childcare, Married Army Couples Program [MACP], etc.)

- Difficulties with PCS move or financials.

The items listed above will set a baseline of shared knowledge and understanding and will help jump-start building a cohesive team. Most importantly sponsors need to have conversations over the phone with new Soldiers rather than just an obligatory email.

With the four lines of effort of the Army People Strategy in mind (acquire talent, develop talent, employ talent, and retain talent), we must focus on the first reception of talent to retain them. This first impression showing diligence of a gaining unit might not solve all unit retention or readiness problems, however it could be a step in the right direction.

END NOTES

1. Roosevelt, Theodore. 1905. Review of Inaugural Address of President Theodore Roosevelt Text. Presented at the Presidential Inauguration, March 4. https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/troos.asp.

2. Army Regulation (AR) 220-1, Army unit status reporting and Forces Registration, 16 August 2022.

3. Army Regulation (AR) 600-8-8, The Total Army Sponsorship Program, 28 June 2019.

4. Department of the Army Pamphlet (DA PAM) 600-8-101, Personnel Readiness Procedures, 6 March 2018.

OTHER REFERNCES

Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL), Building Cohesive Teams Handbook, 2021.

Army Regulation (AR) 525-30, Army Strategic and Operational Readiness, 9 April 2020.

The Army People Strategy, October 2019.

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