

The AIM Cycle: Two Sides of a Coin

by LTC Karl M. Harness

The U.S. Army uses the Assignment Interactive Module (AIM) to conduct hiring for officer assignments across the force. With the implementation of Integrated Personnel and Pay System-Army, the Army is sunsetting AIM as well as the Officer Record Brief (ORB)/resume and is transitioning to the Soldier Talent Profile (STP). Even though the Army is transitioning to STP, the hiring process will remain the same and the lessons-learned from the AIM cycles equally apply as most of the STP information is the same.

Many officers, both participants and hiring officials, have been unsure about the best way to navigate the process, as there is no regulation or doctrine that provides detailed methods for AIM participants and hiring officials. This leads to some frustration within the ranks, so this article seeks to assist those individuals by providing some techniques based on lessons-learned from serving as both a participant and hiring official.

Front of the coin (AIM participant)

ORB. Your ORB is your first introduction to the hiring official and is your first impression. It is extremely important that you ensure that your ORB is up-to-date and is clearly understood. Professional officers should review their ORB annually and ensure the information is accurate. This will limit the number of changes required before entering the AIM cycle and will also serve you well if you are applying for jobs outside the AIM cycle. An ORB that is not updated is an immediate indicator of your professionalism and how much you are concerned with your career.

Your unit S-1 is your primary point of contact to ensure your ORB is updated and accurate. But while they can make the corrections, checking and managing the correctness of your ORB is **your** responsibility. Work with your S-1 to clearly outline your deployment history, your family status and your previous assignments in your ORB.

While these areas are not disqualifiers for a potential assignment, they do provide an immediate look into your experience and any potential special considerations that may impact your assignment: Exceptional Family Member Program, Married Army Couples Program and others.

Your assignment history should be easily understood by officers outside your branch. Do not leave assignment info that has the unit listed as "TRP A, 2 AR CAV" and the duty position listed as "Incoming Personnel." Instead, work with your personnel office or branch manager and have the unit properly reflect the common name, such as A/1/2 CR, and the duty position is properly reflected, such as "platoon leader." This goes a long way in helping the hiring official understand what your experience is.

Organization	Station	Loc	Cmd	Duty title	DMOS
Ops CO, HQS, III Corps	Ft Cavazos	1TX	FC	Deputy G-33	02A0000000
HHC, 3BDE, 1Cav Div	Ft Cavazos	1TX	FC	Brigade executive officer	19A0000000
HHC, 6-9 Cav	Ft Cavazos	1TX	FC	Battalion operations officer	19A0000000
Cobra Tm, Ops Grp	Ft Irwin	1CA	FC	Observer/controller	19A00C6000
HHT/1/11ACR	Ft Irwin	1CA	FC	Troop commander	19A00C6000
D/1/11 ACR	Ft Irwin	1CA	FC	Company commander	19B0000000
HHT/1/2CR	JBLM	1WA	FC	Squadron assistant S-3	02A0000000
C/1/2CR	Ft Polk	1LA	FC	Platoon leader (FWD IZ)	19C0000000

Resume. Your resume is where you get to explain your experience more in depth. Just like applying for a civilian job, write your resume for the assignment you are seeking. Be clear and concise, and include items that are not

already on your ORB. Remember, the hiring official is potentially looking at **a lot** of resumes, so you need to make yours stand out.

Maximize your summary and state what you are looking for up front, key developmental (KD), broadening, etc., and state a little bit about yourself. The summary is what the hiring official will likely read in full, while all other sections of the ORB are glanced over. Put your summary into Word, conduct a spell-check, read it aloud to yourself, and make sure it makes grammatical sense. A poorly written summary is an indicator of your ability to communicate effectively via the written word. Summaries with poor grammar and a lot of spelling mistakes are an indicator of your attention to detail.

The rest of the resume should use bullet statements. The hiring official does not have a lot of time to read a novel about your life, and it is obvious when you are reaching for relevance. Bulletize items that are not present in your ORB or expand on assignments or events that need it. Avoid paragraphs and verbose statements. Again, specify things that are pertinent to the assignment you want. A clear and concise resume written for the assignment you want will enhance your chances of getting the one-for-one match.

Table 2. Example of resume with summary paragraph and bulleting of other sections.	
SUMMARY	EDUCATION
I am a highly motivated officer seeking the privilege of serving as a battalion commander or professor of military science (PMS). My experience throughout my career, both good and bad, has given me the tools to be successful at either position, with my most recent position as the deputy G-33 for III Corps. My Joint and combat experience has prepared me well, and it would be an honor to share this experience with the younger generation. Whether it is as a battalion commander preparing Soldiers for combat or as PMS preparing the next generation of officers, I view them both as the greatest privilege for an officer to participate in. Outside the Army, I enjoy various hobbies and interests that I do with my wife and kids.	-Master's thesis was on the impacts of sleep deprivation on skills retention in a training environment -Pursuing PhD from Really Good University in adult education
CIVILIAN	ASSIGNMENTS
-Hiring manager for Super Soldier Industries, responsible for recruiting and screening all employees -Project manager for GreatSoldier Inc., responsible for management of tactical-gear procurement throughout the United States	Combined/Joint experience: -Adviser to Royal Saudi Land Forces -Adviser to Afghan Nation Security Forces -G-33 Operations officer for USFOR-A Senior command and staff experience: -8 th U.S. Army (Republic of Korea) – G-33 -III Corps (FCTX) – XO for commanding general -1SFAB (OFS) – staff adviser to 1/201 ANA
ADDITIONAL SKILLS AND CERTIFICATIONS	CULTURAL EXPERIENCES AND TRAVEL
-PMP certified -Lean Six Sigma certified -Published author in ARMOR magazine	I have worked with various nations professionally: -Iraqi police as a platoon leader in OIF -ANA as an adviser -British Army as part of Eagle Owl -RoK Army while on assignment to Korea Places of travel: Mexico, Italy, Afghanistan, Iraq, England, Argentina

The interview. The interview is your last opportunity to leave a lasting impression on the hiring official. The interview can make or break your selection (just as in civilian hiring), and you must properly prepare for it.

Before the interview, you should research the assignment you are interviewing for, develop questions about the assignment and conduct a self-reflection of your strengths and weaknesses (at a minimum). Rehearse the interview with a counterpart if possible so that you are prepared to answer questions confidently. Unprepared applicants are obvious during the interview and are an indicator of their desire for the assignment, research skills and professional work ethic.

Keep in mind that the interview is a two-way street. Not only are you being interviewed by the hiring official, but you are interviewing them! The assignment information may be enticing, but after you gather more information from the interview, you may just change your mind about whether that assignment is the right fit for you. This is why your research and prepared questions are important in this process.

Back of the coin: hiring official

Reviewing candidates: indicators. When the AIM cycle opens, the hiring official must narrow the field of candidates for the assignment. There are many tools the hiring official can use to narrow the pool. Self-professed knowledge, skills and behaviors, preferencing officers, additional-skill identifiers and current career-progression status are all methods the hiring official can use to narrow the talent pool.

Preferencing officers should often move to the top of the list, followed by officers who are in the current career-progression status that the job demands (such as pre-or post-KD). These two methods are indicators of officers' potential to perform their duties well and their desire to work in the position.

Also, any officer who reaches out first is showing greater interest than their peers and should be given higher consideration, as their motivation for the position is much more evident.

Interviewing: indicators. After narrowing the pool of candidates, the next step is the interview process. The interviews for the AIM cycle are no different than a civilian job interview. You must prepare your questions in advance and be prepared to answer questions from the candidate. The interview is a two-way street, and it is possible for the hiring official to give a bad interview (usually the result of failing to prepare).

Hiring officials should base their questions on requirements for the job and not simply, "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" Reviewing job requirements help draft thoughtful and useful questions that help the interviewer determine if the candidate meets the needs of the position. This also enables the interviewee to determine if the position is a good fit for them as well:

- Does the position require significant writing requirements?
- Will the officer need to interact with senior leaders on a routine basis?
- Will the officer need to lead planning efforts, or will he/she conduct routine operations?

Asking more specific questions focused on job requirements enables the hiring official to make an informed decision on candidate ranking if there isn't a one-to-one match.

Several common indicators can arise from the interview that will determine the officer's compatibility for the position he/she is seeking:

- **The candidate's ability to communicate.** Does the officer promptly return emails? Is he or she on time to the interview? How well do they speak in conversation? These are indicators of a professional and dedicated officer. If the officer is self-aware, he/she may know that he/she is lacking in certain areas here and is working to address them, a positive indicator. Failing to respond, being late or poor verbal communication skills or writing ability can also be strong negative indicators.
- **The candidate's research capabilities.** When you ask candidates if they have any questions about the position, ideally they will have many well-thought-out questions. This will indicate if officers have researched the position and how serious they are about the assignment. Any officer who states they just felt like ranking it is usually a poor fit and is an indicator of their professionalism.
- **The candidate's motivation for the position.** This last one comes directly from the interaction, both written and in the actual interview. An officer who routinely makes contact to stay on the radar of the hiring official and is excited at the chance to interview is clearly a motivated officer worthy of higher consideration. If the officer seems as if he/she is going through the motions or has an attitude regarding the position, then the hiring official should consider moving them to the bottom of the pile. This is not to say that the officer needs to preference the position No. 1. Rather, even if the officer says the position is in their top three or is strongly considering the position, then they should remain a top contender if they

are meeting all your other requirements. Keep in mind: in accordance with AIM hiring instructions, the candidate has to offer this information to you.

Comparison. Once the interviews are complete, the hiring official needs to rack and stack the candidates in AIM. To assist with this decision, a technique to use is to adapt the course-of-action comparison method we often use in the military decision-making process.

Table 3 is an example chart used in the last two AIM cycles.

Table 3. Example comparison chart for hiring official.								
Weight	3	2	1	2	1	9		Notes
Name	Div or above experience	Adviser experience	Joint experience	Previous KSA experience	Master's degree or higher	Total	Bn cdr	
	3	2	1	0	1	7		Responded; SFAB; 10 Mtn Div Plans
	3	0	1	0	1	5		Responded; potential HAAP; experience at Pentagon
	3	2	1	0	1	7		Multinational experience (OAR)
	3	2	1	0	1	7		SFAB; 4ID HQs; 7 th ATC (Ger)
	3	2	1	0	1	7		SFAB; 1AD plans officer
	3	2	1	1	0	7		OPM SANG adv exp; USMTM armor adv 2018
	3	0	1	0	1	5	X	Bn cdr; experience in Turkey/Poland as scholar
	3	0	0	0	1	4	X	MCoE dir of tng; I Corps experience
	0	2	0	0	1	3	X	MCTP chief; USMA instructor/prof
	0	2	0	0	1	3	x	Bn cdr; former OC at NTC (not interested)
Top recommendation								
Special consideration								
Preferred position								

To effectively use the chart, the hiring official needs to consider the requirements of the job, assign weight to the categories and determine whether higher is better or lower is better. When applying this comparison in the AIM cycle, it is usually best to use higher is better with the most significant requirements weighted the highest. A technique to determine how to weight the categories is to ask the sitting officers what their opinion is. They are working the job day to day and can provide valuable insight that the hiring official may not be considering. The hiring official should use and reference the chart throughout the process, starting with the ORB review, results of the interview and any notes that may assist in the final determination.

Final thoughts

A few final thoughts on the AIM cycle and how to make the most of the process.

Participants:

- Ensure your ORB is updated and write your resume for the job you are seeking.

- Prepare for the interview with self-reflection and research of the position.
- Be honest in what you are looking for.

Hiring official:

- Establish your hiring criteria based on the job requirements.
- Prepare your interview questions based on the job requirements.
- Conduct a well-informed analysis of the candidates through a comparative analysis method.

The AIM cycle works best with all parties actively participating in the job hunt. This unique hiring process assists leaders and subordinates in determining the best fit for their organizations and themselves. This is the lowest level of talent management, and it requires all officers to fully participate. Your active participation in the AIM cycle, regardless of which side of the coin you are on, will not only help you in managing your Army career, but also assists you in developing skills that will benefit you when you leave the Army and enter the civilian work force.

LTC Karl Harness is the Maneuver Branch chief of the Land Forces Division, U.S. Military Training Mission, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Previous assignments include G-33 operations officer, 8th Army, Camp Humphreys, Republic of Korea; chief of operations, Security Force Assistance Command (SFAC), Fort Bragg, NC; deputy chief of Security Force Assistance Brigade Assessment and Selection, SFAC, Fort Bragg, NC; executive officer, 6th Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, TX; and battalion S-3, 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, TX. LTC Harness's military schooling includes Combat Adviser Training Course, Command and General Staff College, Cavalry Leader's Course, Maneuver Captain's Career Course, Airborne School, Air-Assault School and Armor Officer Basic Course. He holds an associate's of arts degree in liberal arts from New Mexico Military Institute, a bachelor's of arts degree in communications (radio/television/film) from California State Fullerton and a master's of science degree in adult and continuing education from Kansas State University. His awards and honors include the Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, Order of Saint George Bronze Medallion and Draper Armor Leadership Award.

Acronym Quick-Scan

AIM – Assignment Interactive Module

KD – key developmental

ORB – Officer Record Brief

PMS – professor of military science

SFAC – Security Force Assistance Command

STP – Soldier Talent Profile