A CALL FOR AN EFFECTIVE MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

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In 2000, MAJ Robert Harney outlined the need for a formal Army officer mentorship program while attending the Command and General Staff College.[1] Now 17 years later, his thesis continues to be relevant as the Army still does not have an Army-wide program. Recent research demonstrates that the Army is still struggling to improve leader development, increase minority representation in combat arms, and increase retention of high-quality officers.[2] Furthermore, these problems will be exacerbated in the future by cultural changes of the millennial generation, increases in minority populations, and females in combat arms. Fortunately, countless evidence shows that mentorship programs improve leader development, retention, and minority representation.[3] It is time for the Army to create an effective formal mentorship program that will prepare the Army and its leaders to face future challenges of the 21st century.

Current Army Mentorship

Mentors and followers have a long history together. In Greek mythology, the original Mentor cared for young Telemachus. Later in the fable, Athena, the goddess of war, assumed the form of Mentor for Telemachus and led him abroad. Since this age of Odysseus, many famous mentor relationships have shaped the course of history. For example, GEN Dwight Eisenhower's rise to Supreme Allied Commander was a direct result of mentorship from GEN Fox Conner.[4] In order to understand how these relationships develop, leaders must first understand what mentorship is.

> *Mentorship is the voluntary developmental relationship that exists between a person of greater experience and a person of lesser experience that is characterized by mutual trust and respect. The focus of mentorship is voluntary mentoring that extends beyond the scope of chain of command relationships and occurs when a mentor provides the mentee advice and counsel over a period of time. Effective mentorship will positively impact personal and professional development. Assessment, feedback, and guidance are critical within the mentoring relationship and should be valued by the mentee in order for growth and development to occur.*
>
> **— Army Regulation (AR) 600-100, *Army Leadership*[5]**

The Army's definition highlights that mentorship is a voluntary relationship, involves different levels of experience, is characterized by trust, and extends beyond the chain of command. The Army goes further and includes coach, counsel, and mentor as part of its core leader competencies.[6] The Army emphasizes mentorship as a leadership technique and attempts to incorporate it into required developmental counseling and officer evaluation reports. Furthermore, the Army has attempted to use tools such as Army Career Tracker (ACT) and Multi-Source Assessments and Feedback (MSAF360) to provide officers with candid feedback and mentorship from their superiors. It is clear that the Army places a strong emphasis on mentorship and encourages it.

On the surface facilitating mentoring seems simple, but even establishing a common definition can be a significant challenge. Mentoring is a component of professional development in each service yet each service has its own definition of mentoring.[7] Adding confusion, the verbal triplet "coach, teach, and mentor" is thrown about carelessly enough that the words need entire articles to redefine them.[8] Lastly, although military doctrine repeatedly uses the term mentor, mentorship and patronage are often confused. This muddled understanding of mentoring is where our problem begins. Unfortunately, this is compounded by the Army's mentorship approach, where the shortcomings show most in the following two regards.

First, the Army's chain of command leadership style approach does not allow much mentorship from outside of the chain of command. Mentorship from outside of the chain of command allows for officers to expand their networks, learn about different career paths, and receive advice from experienced leaders who have limited interest with their mentee's unit. Even in efforts to encourage socializing, leaders have defaulted to mandatory social events despite the fact that mentoring is inherently a volunteer activity.

The second shortcoming of the Army's current approach to mentorship is that it does not promote long-term mentor relationships. Research shows that most successful mentor relationships last more than 10 years, which extends beyond the typical 18-month chain-of-command relationships.[9] Evidence shows that most mentor relationships go through four stages of development (initiate, cultivate, separate, and redefine), and the chain of command relationship only accounts for the first two of these stages.[10] While mentorship within a chain of command can promote initiation and cultivation, it fails to encourage growth through the separation and redefinition stages that occur after a chain-of-command relationship ends.[11]

In the absence of a formal mentor program, long-term and non-chain-of-command mentor relationships develop haphazardly. These mentor relationships have several negative by-products. Foremost, informal mentoring often focuses on the most qualified Soldiers while excluding most highly qualified Soldiers whom account for a majority of the ranks. Additionally, cultural biases result in real and perceived favoritism and exclusiveness. A formal mentorship program combined with mentorship training as part of professional military education (PME) may improve the Army's shortcomings.

Despite the benefits of a formalized program and numerous recommendations for it, the Army has been slow to adopt broad sweeping change. MAJ Harney proposed that some of the reasons why the Army is reluctant to change are because:

1) The Army has not been challenged to change,
2) The informal mentor process is part of the Army culture, and
3) A formal mentorship program is not a leader priority.[12]

However, recent surveys of Army officers are challenging the Army to change. Furthermore, the growing populations of millennials, minorities, and women will continue to challenge the Army even more. The Army must adopt a formal mentorship program and make it a leader priority if it seeks to remain a premier leadership institution.

Benefit #1: Improve Leader Development

The Center for Army Leadership (CAL) conducts a CAL Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL) to assess the quality and development of Army leaders. The 2012 report surveyed more than 27,000 officers and NCOs. The report identifies that "[d]eveloping others is the core leader competency most in need of improvement." Although the Army focuses on developmental counseling, the CASAL report actually finds that mentorship from outside the chain of command has a much larger impact to leader development than developmental counseling or formal leader development plans. Fifty-six percent of leaders reported that mentoring had a strong impact on leader development, while only 29 percent said that developmental counseling had a strong impact. Despite the perceived benefit of mentors, only 33 percent of leaders reported actually receiving mentorship from someone outside of their chain of command. The report clearly shows that leaders value mentorship but do not receive it as much as they should.[14]

Figure 1 shows a full list and ranking of the surveyed best practices for leader development. It is important to note that almost all items on the list have formal Army programs except for "Mentoring from outside CoC." Although the Army has published memorandums about mentorship, they have yet to establish an effective Army-wide program.

Unfortunately this problem is not new. The Professional Development of Officers Survey in 1985 analyzed the results of a survey from 3,684 officers. Similarly to the CASAL report, the survey revealed that officers strongly value mentorship but do not receive much of it. Seventy-six percent of officers said that being coached by a mentor was one of the top three learning experiences that prepared them for command; respondents agreed that mentoring was either extremely helpful (21 percent) or somewhat helpful (32 percent) in preparing them for their current assignment; and 88 percent of officers believed that officers should be mentors. Despite the strong value they placed in mentorship, only 41 percent of officers reported having a mentor either within or outside of their chain of command.[15]

The results from the 1985 survey and the 2012 CASAL indicate that the Army has failed to provide the desired level of mentorship to officers for at least 30 years. A formal mentoring program would not only connect mentors with mentees but also provide mentor training and track the progress of the relationships. Combined with training during PME courses, a mentor program would help increase the percentage of officers that receive mentorship and subsequently increase professional development, performance, job satisfaction, and retention.
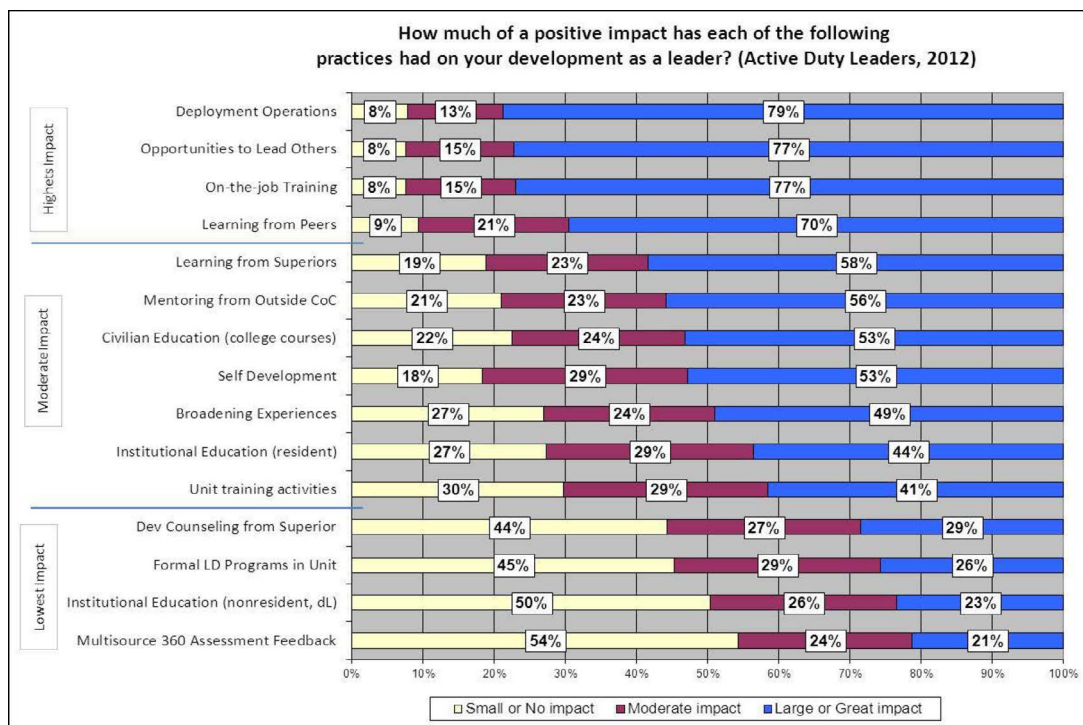
How much of a positive impact has each of the following practices had on your development as a leader? (Active Duty Leaders, 2012)

	Small or No impact	Moderate impact	Large or Great impact
Highest Impact			
Deployment Operations	8%	13%	79%
Opportunities to Lead Others	8%	15%	77%
On-the-job Training	8%	15%	77%
Learning from Peers	9%	21%	70%
Moderate Impact			
Learning from Superiors	19%	23%	58%
Mentoring from Outside CoC	21%	23%	56%
Civilian Education (college courses)	22%	24%	53%
Self Development	18%	29%	53%
Broadening Experiences	27%	24%	49%
Institutional Education (resident)	27%	29%	44%
Unit training activities	30%	29%	41%
Lowest Impact			
Dev Counseling from Superior	44%	27%	29%
Formal LD Programs in Unit	45%	29%	26%
Institutional Education (nonresident, dL)	50%	26%	23%
Multisource 360 Assessment Feedback	54%	24%	21%

Figure 1 — Leader Development Best Practices[13]

Benefit #2: Leverage the Power of Millennials

A formal mentor program will have the greatest benefit for leader development of the millennial generation. This generation — generally those born after 1980 —is distinctly different then the Gen X or baby boomer generations that preceded them. Millennials value mentorship and job satisfaction more than previous generations. This latest generation already makes up 56 percent of the Army's officer ranks and 80 percent of the enlisted ranks.[16] Due to their growing majority and potential, this younger generation will have the greatest impact to the Army's mission, retention rates, and development.

A key to understanding millennials is to understand their history and values. During their early developmental years in school and in entry level jobs, millennials were the primary users and founders of many social networks. They are intimately connected through social media, and they perceive their networks as a source of power. Their social networks extend beyond the digital realm. For example, Kickstarter, a crowd funding social network, has funded over 75,000 projects with more than $1.4 billion in pledges; 92 of the Fortune 100 companies use LinkedIn's Corporate Talent Solutions to recruit employees; and one in six marriages begin through online dating websites such as Match.com.[17-19] Although older generations often dismiss social networks as a narcissistic pastime of youth, the millennial generation understands that these networks translate into tangible results that affect professional and personal lives. Networks — and the mentor relationships that develop through them — are even more important to millennials than previous generations.

As a result of their connection with social networks, millennials desire to be more connected with their community and work. A 2010 survey polled 2,200 professionals and the most significant results showed that millennials:

1) Want constant feedback, and
2) Work in order "to make new friends, learn new skills, and connect to a larger purpose."[20]

Mentorship provides millennials with the feedback and sense of purpose that encourages them to achieve their full potential.

Another part of understanding this generation is to realize that job satisfaction is more important than salary. Millennials saw many Gen X and baby boomers lose their wealth during the subprime mortgage crisis and recession in 2007-2012. As a result, millennials value wealth less than older generations. Their defense to economic uncertainty is to make less money. The Brookings Institution noted, "Almost two-thirds (64 percent) of millennials said they

would rather make $40,000 a year at a job they love than $100,000 a year at a job they think is boring."[21] This debunks the Army's classic approach to increasing retention. Historically, the Army has attempted to retain highly qualified Soldiers by offering them bonuses, such as the Critical Skills Retention Bonus (CSRB) in 2007-2008. The CSRB program offered captains $25,000-$35,000 to stay on active duty longer and cost the Army $500 million. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that it improved retention.[22]

The Army will continue to be challenged to compete for talent against other firms such as Google and Apple that are rapidly growing. In order to retain the best-qualified officers, the Army will have better success by providing them strong mentors through a formal mentor program than by offering them monetary bonuses.

Luckily, an effective formal mentor program can improve leader development and retention of millennials. Such a program would empower millennials and foster a professionally networked environment that reflects the social network worlds that they are intimately familiar with.

Benefit #3: Increase Representation of Minorities and Women

Diversity is always a military priority and strength. The "United States Army Diversity Roadmap" outlined the Army's diversity vision as the Army being "the national leader in embracing the strengths of diverse people in an inclusive environment."[23] In general terms, diversity is the different attributes, experiences, and backgrounds of individuals. Although diversity accounts for a vast array of differences, this article focuses on black, Hispanic, and female minority groups which are usually the most underrepresented.

A review of black Army officers reveals that they are far underrepresented, especially in the combat arms branches. In 2012, blacks accounted for 22 percent of the Army but only 13.5 percent of officers.[24] Recent draw downs in the Army also are affecting blacks harder than other races. A recent Officer Retention Board dismissed 10 percent of black and 8 percent of Hispanic majors compared to 5.6 percent of white and 5.8 percent of Asian-Pacific Islander majors.[25] In 2014, *USA Today* reported the sobering data point that in 2015 only one of the 78 combat arms battalion command openings would be filled by a black officer.[26] These combat arms battalion command opportunities are a key developmental job for many future general officers. LTCs Remo Butler and Irving Smith III presented several reasons for the lack of black diversity in the officer ranks.[27] Although a full detail of those reasons is beyond the scope of this article, one assessment that both of them repeat is that mentorship is a way for the Army to overcome these disparities.[28]

Compared to the national population, females are also underrepresented in the Army and officer ranks. Females only account for 16 percent of officers, a figure that has not increased since 2002, and only 7 percent of general officers.[29] Once again, mentorship arises as a key tool to increase female representation and promote their success.

In a *Forbes* article, Heather Bresch, an extremely successful female business CEO, expressed her thoughts on mentorship:

> *Looking back, I realize that the first decade of my career was somewhat happenstance. I fell, or lucked into, some exciting roles and for this I am grateful. However, at the start of my second decade at Mylan I realized I needed to be much more purposeful about reaching my goals — and be more ambitious about the goals I set for myself. Finding a mentor allowed me to do that. My advice to anyone — but I think this is even more important for women — is to find mentors, whether inside or outside your company, that can be a sounding board for discussion about your career, help you navigate the curves in the road, and empower you to think bigger about what you can achieve than you might be able to visualize for yourself.*

> — **Heather Bresch**, CEO of Mylan[30]

The greatest evidence to support mentorship benefits for females and minorities are testaments from successful minorities and females such as Bresch. They report having mentors at a much higher rate than their white male counterparts, which indicates that it is often key part of their success.[31]

Hispanics will be the next major challenge for the Army's diversity program. While traditional diversity programs and research have focused on blacks and females, Hispanics are actually the fastest growing minority in the U.S.; their population has nearly doubled over the past decade. While they are 17 percent of the U.S. population, they only account for 11 percent of the total Army force. In comparison, blacks are 12 percent of the U.S. but 21 percent of the Army. As the U.S. Hispanic population continues to grow, it will be imperative for the Army to take measures to increase Hispanic representation in the enlisted and officer ranks. If the Army fails to make Hispanic representation

a priority, it will find itself with an ethnocentric senior leader population that is even less representative of the nation than it is now.

Altogether, blacks, females, Hispanics, and other minority groups will benefit from a formal mentorship program because of a phenomenon known as cultural bias. Evidence shows that mentors of all races and genders usually favor white male mentees over minorities and women. Cultural bias manifests itself as a "good old boy" network, where white males have an advantage over minorities and women. Two recent studies demonstrate that this phenomenon is still prevalent.

The first study surveyed a body of students and found that a majority of minorities and females perceive bias in mentoring while a majority of white males do not. The study found that these perceptions of bias "are a serious barrier to developing racial, ethnic, and gender diversity in leadership positions."[32]

Another study confirmed that cultural bias is not only perceived but is real. In the study, professors were sent generic emails from perspective students requesting mentorship about a research problem. The names of the prospective students were randomly changed to signify race and gender. The study found that in private institutions, minorities and females were discriminated against 16 percent more than their identical white male counterparts.[33] A formal mentor program that assigns mentors based upon career information and professional goals would reduce the effects of race, gender, and other cultural biases, and ultimately increase representation of minorities and females across senior ranks of all branches.

Recommendations for Execution

In 2005 the Army G-1 launched the Army Mentorship Program. The program was a website suite that allowed members to upload their profiles, search for mentors or mentees, engage in chat room discussions, and access training and resources. By 2007, less than 1 percent of Army Knowledge Online users utilized the website and it was deemed a failure.[34] The website is no longer active. Other attempts at online mentoring have also fallen short. CompanyCommand.com and PlatoonLeader.com were both initial successes and then lost more than 90 percent of their membership when they were forced to migrate to .mil domains due to operational security. Solutions like MyVector and milSuite are locked behind CAC-enabled security features that end up leaving them unused, disorganized, and poorly maintained. The Army also does not distinctively teach mentorship as part of its PME courses which include the Basic Officer Leaders Course (BOLC), Captains Career Course (CCC), or Command and General Staff College (CGSC). For all intents and purposes, an Army mentorship program and formal mentorship training does not exist.

It is reasonable to assume that the military's ineffective professional development efforts add to the frustrations of the highly motivated but disengaged professionals who leave our ranks.

In 2010, Brad Johnson and Gene Anderson also observed a lack of mentor programs in the U.S. military. They noted that most mentoring occurs happenstance without a command level strategy; senior leaders do not "differentiate the mentor relationship from sponsorship, coaching, counseling, and leadership;" and that "some officers equate mentoring with exclusivity, unfairness, and cronyism."[35] In light of their evidence, Johnson and Anderson made the following recommendations for implementing formal mentoring in the U.S. military:

• Develop a master strategy before implementing mentoring programs;
• Avoid mandatory programs — facilitate a sense of choice;
• Demonstrate top-down support for mentoring;
• Develop a mentoring continuum;
• Select mentors carefully; and
• Develop high-quality training programs for mentors.[36]

Although the Army's 2005 mentorship program failed, it can be successful if it re-launches and implements the recommendations of Johnson and Anderson as part of a master mentoring strategy. As part of a master strategy, any formal mentoring programs should be voluntary. This voluntary participation is one of the most difficult parts of an effective Army-wide program. The dilemma is that the program must quickly reach a critical mass of participants in order to be successful, but mandatory or coerced enrollment will diminish the effectiveness of the program. Participants should have a choice to participate, but the 2005 Army Mentorship Program demonstrates that a program will fail if there is not enough pressure to participate. In order to balance participation and a sense

of choice, there must be strong command support from senior leaders, the program must be advertised, mentor training must emphasize the benefits of the mentor program, and the program must be simple.

In the same way that the Army teaches doctrine or leadership during PME, those same schools should incorporate at least one distinctive lesson on mentorship. In addition to highlighting the benefits of mentorship, lessons can also educate students on mentorship best practices and the mentorship initiation and development processes. Training during PME would be the first level of training required to be a mentor in the program, and students can then voluntarily sign up for the Army mentor program as a mentor and mentee. Mentor pairing could be completed by a pairing algorithm or by a mentor manager. In this way, mentorship education and programs would be the first steps in breaking the culture of haphazard mentorship.

As an example, a CCC student would receive mentorship training and volunteer to sign up for the program. These captains could potentially be assigned mentees from the local BOLC and possible mentors from the CGSC, as long as all involved were volunteers. Lieutenants would have captains as mentors and captains would have majors as mentors. As a non-chain-of-command mentor, these senior officers could provide mentees with invaluable advice, guidance, and feedback. Similar programs could be implemented in NCO Education System courses. In an ideal scenario, with 90 percent or better participation, almost every leader in the Army would have a mentor. In addition to traditional one-on-one mentorship, group mentorship programs can also be used to connect more senior officers and NCOs with larger groups.

We could also revisit and revamp the online Army mentorship program. The chat forums on the website digressed into inappropriate chats whose topics included "bi-sexuality, military pagans, gripes, and complaints."[37] These few topics accounted for a majority of the discussions. In order to be successful, the Army must implement training as a prerequisite for being a mentor and provide the appropriate level of leadership oversight. In addition, any in-person or online Army mentorship program should be a professional program led by dedicated and educated leaders.

Another example of a current model for an online program is MilitaryMentors.org, a social network that connects military professionals to each other and to professional development resources. Founded in 2015, the network functions similar to a dating site or an online gym membership and creates a venue for verified current military members to meet and create connections for professional development. No CAC readers or desktop work computers are involved — just a simple, secure, mobile interface. Of note, MilitaryMentors was started by two Army officers who have both education and experience in human behavior change, psychology, business management, and leader development. This enhances the site's ability to foster and sustain a community of military professionals through research-based self-improvement and group development. The site is currently open for users now. As a testament to its potential effectiveness, LTG Kenneth Tovo, commander of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, utilizes MilitaryMentors staff as instructors during his quarterly Young Lions Mentorship Program.

The Army also already has some successful local mentorship programs. One example is the West Point Sponsor Program. As volunteers of this program, freshmen cadets are assigned sponsor families from the staff and faculty of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y. The sponsor family provides the cadet with a "home away from home," and the sponsor (a captain, major, lieutenant colonel, or colonel) provides mentorship and guidance to assist the cadet during his or her first few years at West Point. The Quartermaster Corps also has a formal mentorship program for new warrant officers. Additionally, some subordinate commands have division- or brigade-level mentorship programs and some organizations such as The ROCKS, Inc., provide mentorship for minority officers.

Programs such as the West Point Sponsor Program, Quartermaster mentor program, and others like it are great examples of successful mentorship. Unfortunately, there are many more areas of the Army that do not have mentorship programs. Furthermore, many of these programs are distinct and not mutually supportive even though they could benefit from similar training tools and resources. An Army-wide mentor program must support a continuum of local programs. As an overarching program, there should be an Army-wide mentor pairing application that links mentors and mentees across branch or brigade boundaries. Simultaneously, the program must also support local priorities such as linking new warrant officers with chief warrant officers, cadets with faculty members, or retiring NCOs with veteran leaders in corporations.

Conclusion

The Army has a long tradition as America's premier leadership institution. Teaching, coaching, and mentoring is a

core competency within this leader development model, yet many Soldiers are unsatisfied with the mentorship that they receive. Furthermore, cultural values of younger generations and the changing demographics of America will continue to challenge the Army's leadership development strategy. The Army must adopt an effective formal mentor program in order to improve leader development, leverage the power of millennials, and increase representation of minorities and women.

The 2005 attempt to implement an Army Mentor Program failed, but senior leaders should examine the failures of that program and use its lessons learned to implement a more effective Army mentor program. The new program should be voluntary, but participation should be highly encouraged — not through coercion but through mentorship training, advertising, and support from senior leaders. The Army-wide program must promote and support a continuum of local mentor programs at subordinate commands, within different branches, and at education institutions. Mentors must be selected and paired carefully by commanders and human resources personnel. Furthermore, effective mentor and mentee training is mission essential and should be incorporated into PME, online training, mobile team training, and mentor events.

Ultimately, most senior officers and NCOs are eager to mentor junior leaders. In the same breath, many junior leaders are eager to receive that mentorship. An effective Army mentorship program could connect these mentors and mentees while providing them the resources and training necessary to develop strong and long-lasting relationships. The Army should establish an effective mentorship program in order to maintain its tradition as a premier leadership institution.

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