



By: Colonel (Retired) Rob Campbell

Taking command of a Brigade in the 101st Airborne Division in 2013, I knew I had to focus on making people better people. I had to invest in them. To invest is to dedicate time, talent and resources to gain something. That something would not be better physical fitness scores or proficiency on the live fire range. It would be better people. If we got this investment right, physical fitness and live fire performance would follow. I had talented leaders who would make us as proficient as we needed to be for the rigors of modern warfare, of this I had no doubt. Our people would make the difference.

In the fall of 2013, the Army was struggling with several social and behavioral issues, some which were a result of years of sustained combat. While suicide rates were down slightly from 2012, they remained at a 5-year high and had bypassed combat deaths prior to my taking command. Sexual harassment had also surfaced as a military-wide problem gaining Congressional and Army senior leadership attention. Along with these issues, combat stress, family separation from repeat deployments, marital and relationship failures, and off-duty misconduct (like driving intoxicated), all proved to be a significant challenge for leaders at all levels. The Army was struggling to build resilience in its soldiers, and many lacked coping skills to overcome these personal and family challenges. Add to all this the ambiguous future the brigade was facing. We were unsure if the Army would return us to a battlefield or deploy us away from home for another mission. While the Army and leaders at several levels addressed these problems, many of them still exist today. It was then and is now an environment ripe for investing in people. In my brigade, "Investing in People" would be our #1 priority and that would never change. Here is my Investing in People "To Do" list prior to taking command.

Investing in People "To Do" List

- Investing in People events (counseling, soldier concern boards, sensing sessions, battlefield circulation) reflected by my personal calendar
- Personally select random soldier counseling packets for review and assessment
- Meet early with my S-1 early to set tone and explain my intent
- Visit and question leaders to test their understanding of our #1 priority
- Champion deserving leaders by communicating with their personnel managers at Human Resource Command
- Adopt and grow the Soldiers of Concern Program
- Get out of my office and visit soldiers and leaders

- Conduct sensing sessions with sample populations across the brigade to obtain and maintain the pulse of the organization
- Send personal notes to soldiers and distant family members
- Send notes to my leaders on their anniversaries and birthdays
- Establish and foster a strong family support and readiness program
- Measure the effectiveness of our effort

People would get us through this, not computers or weapons or helicopters. I believed that if I my leaders took care of our people if we could show them that we were human and vulnerable like them, if they knew we considered their well-being and personal growth our mission, everyone would step up and do the right thing. Moreover, by knowing our people far beyond their occupational skill and name tag, we would be better prepared to identify a change in them indicating a problem. If we built that trust between us, they would perform no matter the task. Because investing in people was the # 1 priority, I had to personally demonstrate it. Words alone would not suffice. I did this by verbalizing its importance repeatedly, monitoring and inspecting execution, managing my time in conjunction with this priority and by personally managing the careers of my leaders. I put into practice what I sketched out in my green book. Want to read more about this? Visit my website, www.robcampbellleadership.com where you can pick up a copy of my book "It's Personal, Not Personnel, Leadership Lessons for the Battlefield and the Boardroom"

Colonel (Retired) Rob Campbell served as an Army Infantry officer and commanded 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division. Rob has written a book titled [It's Personal, Not Personnel: Leadership Lessons for the Battlefield and the Boardroom](#). Rob consults and speaks on leadership. Visit his website www.robcampbellleadership.com to learn more.

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