



By: Jason Criss Howk

In the fall of 2002, I was a first lieutenant on the 82nd Airborne Division Staff in Afghanistan when I was selected by Major General Karl Eikenberry to be his aide. I extended my 4-month tour to a year-long deployment, and transplanted myself into the US Embassy in less than a week.

It was the best job a junior staff officer could get in the country. It was the equivalent to a master's degree in international relations. But more than that it was a chance to learn about the power of constant networking, or what I refer to as Eikenberry's 5% rule.

Over the course of 10 months, I spent 18 hours a day with Karl Eikenberry. I watched him use every minute of his day, every event, every meeting to network with others that could help achieve America's broader mission.

When most people here the word networking they immediately think of it in a bad light. It's for brown-nosers or people looking to cheat the army promotion and assignment system. But there's another way to look at it. It's the way some of our most successful war-time leaders view it.

Networking is not about you. Not about your next job. Not about an early promotion. Not about your selfish desires.

Networking is what makes good leaders great. It's about connecting every single person in the JIIM universe that might be able to make America's broad mission successful. Since 2001 some "masters of networking" have revolutionized military units like the Joint Special Operations Command, making it the model for other military units and interagency cooperation. In the end, networking is the glue that connects "teams of teams."

Networkers know every primary, secondary, and tertiary person in the world that is involved in some way with their project. If you are a counter-terrorism (CT) specialist or serving in a unit dedicated to CT then you are "networked" qualified when you can easily reach out to your colleagues in academia, the intelligence community, at the UN, in our allies and partner nations, at State, over at the NSC, in OSD, on the Joint Staff, and in the non-profit and Non-governmental (NGO) community. That list is just the tip of the iceberg for places you need to have professional contacts.

So how do you get there? Let's look at the 5 percent rule of networking.

The 5 percent rule as Eik explained it in 2002

Soon after arriving at the Embassy in Kabul, MG Eikenberry explained to me



how he likes to work as we started developing his battle rhythm and short and long-term calendars. He started by telling me about Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian, AKA “Mr. Five Percent.”

Calouste earned his nickname for his business habit of always **keeping 5% of the shares** from the oil companies he developed in the early age of oil exploration.

His ancestry was Armenian and Calouste lived from 1869-1955. He was a Petroleum Engineer by education and British businessman, and held many other jobs, causing him to live in multiple cities like London, Lisbon, Paris and Constantinople (Modern Istanbul). As a result of his role in helping the West access the Middle East's petroleum (the first into Iraq) he became one of the wealthiest people in the world. Later as a philanthropist he established churches, hospitals, and schools, and also became an art collector amassing a vast private collection.

But even Mr. 5% didn't just “take a cut” from everyone else in life. Before and after his death, he used his profits to conduct philanthropy. Today a Portuguese charitable foundation that is funded partly by oil money bears his name and focuses on art, music and science. (The [Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation](#))

So that is interesting I thought. But what does an oilman have to do with getting your work done as an Army officer?

Eikenberry explained how he refined the five percent rule. Every single moment of his day he looks for people to help and then he dedicates 5% of his day to helping connect people from various organizations and agencies that need to know each other. So, when we ran into an Afghan official that was trying to demobilize a militia in Balkh province we made sure he was



MG Karl Eikenberry by Pat Dowden, USCG (Ret)

linked-up with the political officer at the UN and the Japanese deputy ambassador at their embassy. It didn't take a lot of time to connect the people. It may or may not have even been a task or mission related to his, but he kept track of all the people he met and what they specialized in. Then he simply ensured that people focused on the same task knew who else should be on their team.

Eikenberry turned the idea of taking 5 percent from every transaction into giving 5 percent of yourself to other people for the good of the larger enterprise.

But you are too busy to network

I get it. You're not a two-star and don't have a robust staff, and clearly Karl Eikenberry must have spent valuable hours outside of his own job to do this. You just don't have the time or bandwidth to follow Eikenberry's 5 percent rule. Let's look at what he was tasked with by the SecDef while he was networking his butt off.

- MG Eikenberry had just 1 year to help the (10-month-old) Afghan government to build its first Afghan Army Corps in the new Afghan National

Army (ANA). In American terms that meant build 3 brigade combat teams and have them ready to fight in less than a year. That was only part 1 of the first task. He also had to create and implement a reform plan for the Afghan ministry of defense and General Staff; build the Afghan Army TRADOC equivalent schools, and multiple garrison commands; and then develop a network of nations and international organizations that would support the ANA—then increase it. Along the way he needed to get the Afghan people and government to fully support the new Army—easy peazy. And last but not least, build the airplane in flight: design a long-term U.S. Office of Military Cooperation unit structure that had to include, US military, civilians, coalition military, contractors, and Afghan civilians and military members. It did help that he was a certified pilot.

- His second job in Afghanistan was to act on behalf of the United States as the Security Sector Coordinator for all the international bodies involved with helping the Afghans build and reform their entire security sector (known as Security Sector Reform or SSR). As decided by the UN that meant build or improve the justice system, build an Army, build the police and border patrol, counter narcotics, and demobilize and reintegrate the civil war era militias that had also fought the Soviets and the Taliban. He worked with the Leader of the UN Afghanistan mission and they conducted the first U.S.-led SSR operation with their partners Italy, Germany, Britain, and Japan/UN. Along the way he was to train the Afghans about SSR and guide them to taking over the program in the long-run.

You can become a great networker. Karl Eikenberry did all the above with a shoe-string budget and pint-sized staff.

To read more about this first U.S. effort at SSR read this [monograph](#).

The 5 percent model in action

Karl built and maintained a massive network by turning every event into an opportunity to connect with and to connect others. He used every meal to talk to various people involved in the Afghan mission. He took various staff and acquaintances (no matter who their boss was)

with him as he went about his daily routine. He communicated constantly by phone and email—late into the evenings and early in the mornings. Eikenberry listened. He soaked up the missions and issues of every person he met and would jot down a note or two or nod at me to make the right connection to help ease his colleague's pain. He knew how to gently bring people together that didn't know each other, but needed to be best friends. Meals were a great moment to do this. He asked his staff to find linkages between all the players on the Afghan chess board and to make them stronger. He didn't want you to ask for permission to make the network stronger, he expected you to make it happen as if it was second-nature to do so.

Karl simply kept track of all the activity going on around him and helped facilitate collaboration that no one thought possible.

How did he learn to do this?

You may not have a career path like Karl Eikenberry's, but you can still become a great networker. Karl was an Infantry officer who grew up in Airborne, Light, and Ranger units. He learned to lead and to work around leaders that acted without seeking permission as they had the end-state of the mission stamped into their brains. But his networking skills really grew as a Foreign Area Officer assigned to China. Armed with a Master's Degree and a strong capability with the Chinese language Karl traveled the country and excelled working in Embassies and diplomatic circles. He learned how to get diverse groups of people to move in one direction and make them all think it was their idea.

Your Task

Learn to live on 5 hours of sleep and 1 or 2 meals a day working 6.5 days a week forever fueled by diet coke. OK, if you are not up for the exact Eikenberry model of the 5 Percent rule then use the Howk model.

I refined the 5 percent rule into the 50% rule. I spent the rest of my career using every other minute of the day to ensure other people on my team, and



GEN Stanley McChrystal by
Pat Dowden, USCG (Ret)

connected to my team, were communicating and collaborating. As McChrystal might describe it today, I was gardening. My success came from ensuring my people were able to grow and their projects ripen. (I was lucky enough to work closely with him as well and combined his networking genius with Karl's.)

My network didn't get me promoted early, didn't get me the dream jobs I wanted, and didn't make me wealthy. But it allowed me to always achieve my own narrow missions, to help my colleagues to achieve their assignments, and most importantly helped the larger enterprise accomplish the broader mission. Finally, networking allowed me to retire satisfied with my career and to constantly get reports from my old network about their successes in life..

How I network

Use LinkedIn to help others not just help yourself. Reach out to people in your career field from diverse backgrounds and communicate. Offer help.

Correspondence. Write often and write succinctly. Don't let messages linger in your inbox, get a note back and always prioritize requests for help from colleagues.

Mentor and find a mentor. Mentorship is a key element of networking. If you don't spend part of your day mentoring (informal is often best) then you are missing out. Help your peers, mentor down, and when you can gently mentor up. A colleague wrote a [great article](#) on the topic.

Give more than you take. If you network in order to get others to help you and never give back, it will be noticed. Spend your day helping others and when the time comes they will

be there to assist you. If you find they are selfish later then stop interacting with those parts of your network. It has a way of sorting itself out—nothing to get too worried about.

Stop what you are doing to help a friend (see my [article on 21 things great leaders do](#)). If a colleague, especially a close friend, asks for help stop what you are doing immediately and help them. People don't like to ask for help so they are coming to you for a reason. A great reputation to build is to be the person that always helps a friend in need. In the national security world that reputation is gold. You will get access to everything because they know you will add to the project and help it be successful.

Be nice. This should not have to be said but I worked with some real A-holes in my career and they always seemed to be wondering why no one would volunteer to help them out with big tasks. Just be kind to everyone and don't burn any bridges. Not rocket science.

Take odd assignments. If your organization asks you to do something you aren't trained for and which seems very difficult and likely to fail—that's a good thing. They believe you can fix it. Don't let it go to your head...you are not that amazing. You just seem like the person that can figure anything out. Again, that's a golden reputation. So, don't turn down the weird/challenging assignments—give it your usual 100%.

Be a sponge when you work with new teams. To be a great networker you need to understand the capabilities of other organizations so ask questions and learn all you can, whenever you can. It takes a curious mind to be a networked leader—curiosity is good.

Go do it. You will be a bit overwhelmed at first but it will get easier. I was blessed to have worked with so many committed and talented people over the years and now (as ever) my sole mission is to continue to help them in any way I can.

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