By Stephanie Worth

There are so many articles and blog posts about hustling hard, taking tough assignments, finding balance, leaning in when it counts, but so few of the authors go into detail about the specifics of their success. Now in my final year as a company grade officer, I wanted to share a few lessons that have worked for me

**Take every training opportunity to educate yourself**

I know that most officers don't look forward to staff exercises, however I learned that they offer us an opportunity to learn more about our units and capabilities. When I was was a first lieutenant serving on brigade staff, I threw myself into mission analysis for the Brigade's upcoming Warfighter Exercise. People say that it takes 10,000 hours to become a master of something, well, at this point I had spent maybe 600 reading the orders, annexes, understanding the task organization, and compiling my requests for information. I wasn't even close to mastery, but I did feel like I knew what was going on.

I prepared an order to pass through the SPO to the S3 at the outset of the exercise to change the task organization and command relationship between two notional maintenance companies assigned to the brigade during the exercise.  Because I spent so much time reading the orders and studying the task organization, I knew it would increase the capabilities of both units and significantly reduce our supported unit's maintenance requirements during the exercise. My SPO also asked me to write an email justifying why

the order needed to be published so he could send it to the S3.

**Be able to communicate effectively**

Looking back, it was 2300 at night, no one was left in my section of the tent besides the night battle captain, and I had no idea how many people would see the email I sent. I laid out the research on the unit's capabilities, the requirements I forecasted that the supported units would put on them, the shortfalls the units were likely to experience, and how combining the units at both ports of entry would mitigate nearly all of them. The email was short, less than 100 words. I finished writing, grabbed another cup of coffee, did a quick edit and shot it to my boss before reviewing the days reports. I then headed off to the sleep tent.

Little did I know that while I had a second cup of coffee at breakfast with the staff captain mafia, my email would find its way from the SPO to the S3, and from there to the supported battalion commanders, the brigade commander and pretty much every member of their staffs. My 100 word synopsis of how I addressed a problem I had found through staff work was, as the brigade commander said, the standard all staff sections should use and the thought process they should follow when requesting any change to the exercise orders. I know a single email sounds insignificant, but it lead to an opportunity down the road.

**There are opportunities in every assignment — you just have to make them**

I deployed in my brigade staff role and was given several unique assignments because of the special trust our brigade commander placed in me after that exercise. Because of the work I did during that deployment, I went on to serve as an S-3 and company commander in a Special Forces Group. This experience taught me that every job matters and offers us opportunities.

How you handle the "boring assignments" may have unforeseen consequences. For me, a few hours spent reading training orders, led to an email, that led to roles of increasing importance, concluding with a command that I look back on as the best 15 months of my life. Can a single action make or break your career? Probably not, but being prepared for an unexpected opportunity can make all the difference.

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