



By Casey Dean

Across the Army, orders are in hand. A new class of staff college graduates are getting ready to PCS, eager to use the skills and knowledge they acquired during their year in school. Several months ago I shared some thoughts on [Things I Wish I Would Have Known Before I was an S3](#). Following that, several folks asked about what went well during my KD time. Below are a few of the highlights I had as an S3.

Delegate, but be specific

It might be my inherently lazy nature, but I'm a damn good delegator. The bulk of my time

was spent with the Chief of Operations (CHOPS) and the plans shop. I worked hard at passing tasks with specific guidance, suspense, and an open door for follow-up. Giving freedom for subordinates to do their jobs granted them buy-in to our mission and allowed me time look ahead and across the team.

Use your NCOs

Whether it's your operations sergeant major, training NCO, or a solid electronic warfare SSG that really knows the defense training management system; maximize your NCOs. As a deployed S3 I shared an office with my operations SGM to help ensure we stayed in sync. The brigade master gunners worked for plans, but we would synchronize daily to ensure the brigade was properly resourced and meeting training standards, striving for a [gunnery mindset](#) across the formation.

Be approachable

GEN (Ret) Colin Powell said it best, "Leadership is solving problems. The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them..."

Although I can concentrate better when it is quiet, keeping a literal open door and amenable manner gives an opportunity for your team to get refined guidance, ask questions, and ensure they are on point. Sometimes you might need to walk in their space to spur the process. Either way, being approachable created space for dialogue.

Some folks felt more comfortable bringing their initial thoughts to the operations sergeant major, master gunner, or planner. I made sure to ask them and others if there were any other issues hanging out there. Those three have unique insight on which section might need a little more attention.

Relationships matter

Spend time building and maintaining relationships across the brigade, division, and installation. For example, I got to know the team at the installation plans, training, mobilization, and security office. A huge asset for training resources. And if there's a hiccup (like a missed training support center turn-in appointment) having that relationship will go a long way. There's a mindset shift from company grade to field grade officer. As a company grade officer, we have the tendency to hoard resources. As a field grade you have to share, because most of the resources you need are limited (and the company grade officers are hoarding them). Being a team player goes a long way in a crowded home station training cycle.

The brigade field grades are also a team. This includes the brigade staff and support operations section. For example, having the staff judge advocate on your side is a bonus, especially to assist with 15-6 investigations. If you're an XO, this relationship is an absolute must as you oversee all investigations, Congressionals, FLIPLs, etc.

Understand the commander's intent

You spend a lot of time with the commander. You'll get to know how he or she processes information, thinks, and communicates. From their philosophy, priorities, standing orders, quarterly training guidance, etc, you will pull it all together to give guidance, think critically, and parse problems to their core. Ensure the staff understands the commander's intent and can execute it correctly. If you're ever in doubt, ask.

Have a sense of humor (if you can)

Used appropriately and sincerely, a little [levity in your leadership](#) can go a long way to motivating your shop. After our BDE TAC found the "perfect" hide spot at 0230, keeping folks motivated (and awake) took some self-deprecating stories about patrolling in the woods at night, with the infantry, when you're the only tanker. If you're not the funny one,

then allow a little snark from that staff LT to keep things light. Take your job seriously, not yourself.

Last point. As you begin your KD journey, ensure you capture lessons learned and share them with your fellow Majors along the way.

Casey recently caught his post-KD breath as a battalion and brigade S3 in an armored brigade combat team. He's now rowing in the National Capital Region as an interagency fellow with Department of State. Connect with him on Twitter @Casey_D120 or casey.dean21[at]gmail.com.

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