



By Don Orlando

AIM 2.0 has a strong policy foundation for talent management for the Army and its officers. Like all new and better efforts, a key challenge is making that policy come alive...one officer at a time.

Virtually all officers are far removed from the nuances that influence policymaking. Yet, for the system to work best, the Army must rely upon every officer to act as if he or she had a complete understanding that goes beyond just “how to fill out the form.” Getting the best information is vital. That’s what it will take to make AIM 2.0 work really well.

In this post, I’ll point out some subtle disconnects and suggest ways to repair them. What you are about to read comes from more than my 26 years on active duty. Since then, over the following 26 years, I’ve spent some 50,000 hours helping transitioning officers and the rising, senior, and very senior civilian executives who hire them. My “PME” is as rigorous as yours. I hold six certifications (one shared by only ten other people on earth), speak

regularly at conferences, publish monthly in the leading trade magazine, and serve as a paid mentor to other career professionals.

One of AIM 2.0's strengths lies in encouraging officers to reflect on how they could use their careers to advance the Army mission. However, the execution can subtly undermine the goal, particularly in the résumé section. It falls into traps we, in the civilian careers industry, have struggled with for years: unintended, toxic "folklore."

Consider the first three words in the instructions for filling out the "Summary" section: "Sell yourself. Seriously." Those words are the Army's thought made visible. They carry toxic connotations far out of date today.

We haven't sold people in this country since 01 January 1863. Americans, particularly Army officers, don't like "selling themselves." Even more important, nobody wants to be sold to. Ever. Especially about something as important their career or the Army mission.

You know this is true. Did you recoil when someone tried to have you "brother-in-law" his or her way into a new assignment? Did the word "occupationalist" come to mind?

What's needed is the intersection of brands. When officers' personal brands align with the Army's "corporate" brand, we will have an unstoppable force.

Please don't mistake a brand for a slogan, a jingle, a bundle of "attributes," or, even worse, an "elevator speech." A brand is a collection of observable capabilities that convinces specific people it will provide clear and enduring value organization must have. Brands rest on experience. AIM 2.0 is a good tool to capture and build upon that experience. But only when officers provide the best information.

"Experience" is not what you see on an ORB. Experience is the acquisition and effective application of wisdom under changing conditions, often with inadequate resources. That's what separates someone with ten years' experience from someone with one year's experience ten times.

Let's not inadvertently have AIM 2.0 be backward looking by having it concentrate on drawing out just simple facts. Lt Col Kent MacGregor and Maj Charles L. Montgomery were on the right track when they wrote "Talent Management: Right Officer, Right Place, Right Time," in January 2017. But their suggested questions may not have gone far enough.

Consider: "Are you on your local school board or active in your community? Any of these

attributes or experiences could be useful for an assignment officer trying to match an officer's knowledge, skills, and behaviors to a particular...requirement."

Wouldn't that harried assignment officer be even better served if the questions read like these: "Which problems did you solve in the local community using your leadership and skills? How did you solve those problems? What were the results? Was there a challenging context? Had you ever solved similar problems before? Were there time limits? Budgets? Did you deliver on time and on budget?" That approach is hinted at in the "Assignments" block. Making it very clear throughout the form should provide even better information.

Notice we've gone beyond just asking the officer to list "knowledge, skills, and behaviors." Just listing those things is reminiscent of the old KSAs ("Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities") that once drove DoD civilian hiring. KSAs have nearly gone away because hiring officials often saw them as minimum standards. They wouldn't consider anybody who *didn't* have those universally liked attributes.

If the back of the form is a résumé, why not tell officers what the roles and missions of that document should be? First, their résumés must provide clear and compelling proof the authors can deliver the most value at just the right time to serve not just the immediate mission, but also the Army's requirement to grow leaders. Second, they should entice assignment officers to ask the candidate the right questions. Last, those résumés should help the Army ensure every officer gets all the resources he or she must have to succeed, not just in their next assignments, but throughout their careers. Those resources might include PME, access to the right leaders at the right time, command, staff, budgetary, and hiring authorities.

It would be too easy to think of AIM 2.0 as a "talent management" tool. It must be a "talent leadership" tool.

That can only come when we educate and encourage officers to be full partners in the process. Army leaders at every level should help officers truly understand the philosophy behind AIM 2.0. That's required if the Army is to transform philosophy into capabilities.

Don Orlando is a retired USAF O-6. He wrote the Air Force's first Executive Transition Assistance Program. He supports transitioning senior military leaders and the senior civilian executives who hire them win the jobs they've always deserved, get paid what they are worth, and relieve some of the stress of moving their careers forward.

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