



By Will Laase and Todd Turner

The *Iron Major* who understands Mission Command, commander's intent, and practices the *5 Give a \$#!t (GAS) Principles*, is the team member that commanders request "by name.". Regardless of the leader's background, military commanders at every echelon require disciplined staff officers to shoulder the majority of the roles, functions, missions, and tasks of a staff. Competent and confident staff officers that leverage the *5 GAS Principles* are much more likely to meet a commander's intent than those who do not. These 5 simple principles, compiled from the authors' composite 61 years of experience, are a framework to

build the iconic *Iron Major*:

5 GAS (Give A \$#!t) Principles:

GAS 1: Grit and Sense of Urgency

GAS 2: Gumption And Solution Maker

GAS 3: Garner A Shared Understanding

GAS 4: Grow Active Subordinates

GAS 5: Grow And Self-Develop

GAS 1 (Grit and Sense of Urgency)

Commanders want majors that understand Mission Command and can easily translate a commander's intent into actionable operations, activities, and investments. *GAS 1 (Grit and Sense of Urgency)* is foundational to the four sister principles; it is the *primer inter pares*, or first among equals. As the Brigade S3 is *primer inter pares* of the majors on the brigade staff, and "Mutual Trust" is the foundation of the Mission Command philosophy, *GAS 1* is the foundation of the *Iron Major*.

Grit, otherwise known as courage and resolve or mettle, is that intangible determination to do the right thing or do what one perceives as right, despite all obstacles. Operating with a *sense of urgency* requires that majors work their tasks (and often related tasks to the left and right) with the intent of meeting or surpassing the assigned suspense and finding answers *now*.

Majors who operate with *GAS 1* are determined to accomplish their task the *right way*,

quickly. They let nothing stand in the way of “moving the ball down the field”. They understand the mission, they understand their commander’s intent, and they use resolve to overcome obstacles and a sense of urgency to ensure tasks are accomplished in a timely manner.

Young majors, still operating with a company grade officer mentality, often halt forward progress due to the *three-foot wall*. These *three-foot walls* prematurely hinder forward progress and mission accomplishment. They stop majors who have no *GAS 1* in their tracks, leaving them alone and afraid to return to their commanders with no progress to show. However, Majors with *GAS 1* know that, with some *grit and sense of urgency*, the *three-foot wall* can easily be circumnavigated, stepped over, or simply plowed through.

To summarize *GAS 1*, *Iron Majors* don’t stop at a *three-foot wall*. They cinch up their belts, get a time check, and go around, over or through (within the realm of the legal, moral, and ethical) to accomplish their task. A healthy dose of *grit and sense of urgency* allows them to do so.

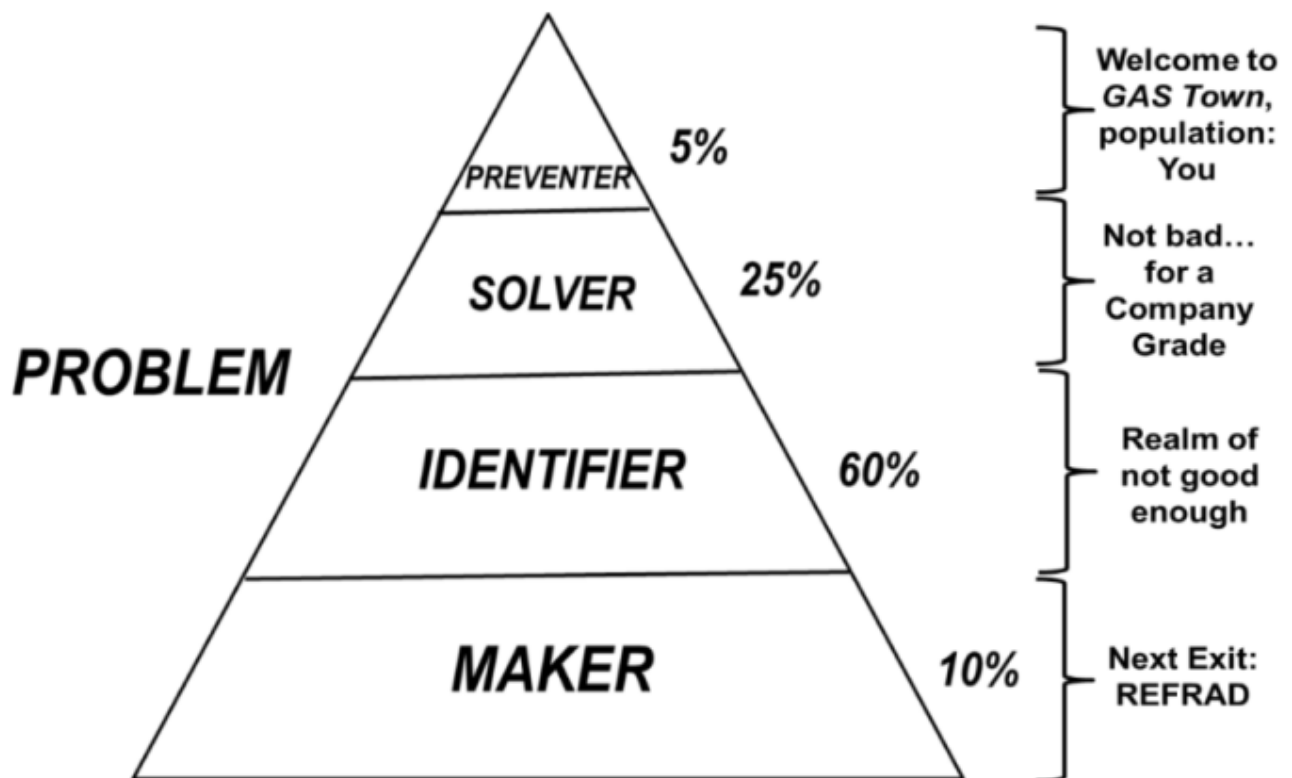
GAS 2 (Gumption and Solution Maker)

Merriam-Webster defines *gumption* as “shrewd or spirited initiative and resourcefulness.” Robert Pirsig, the author of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, said, “A person filled with *gumption* doesn’t sit around dissipating and stewing about things. He’s at the front of the train of his own awareness, watching to see what’s up the track and meeting it when it comes. That’s *gumption*.”

Majors are expected to exercise *gumption* much as they are expected to exercise breathing. With *Gumption* comes the expectation of being a *solution maker*. At the major level, in and of itself, problem solving isn’t enough. *Iron Majors* must get ahead of the problem-solving-boom, operating with one foot in the present and one in the future, addressing problems before others are even aware a problem is looming. Majors identify, then prevent *potential*

problems before they ever materialize into actual problems. Company Grades and NCOs fix problems; Majors *prevent* problems. Gumption, disciplined initiative, and foresight allow them to be *solution makers*, setting conditions for future success.

As a major, it is no longer acceptable to operate in the *identifier* or *solver* realms of the *Problem Identification Pyramid* (see image below). Majors who embrace the 5 GAS Principles reside at the *problem preventer* (*solution maker*) apex of the pyramid and urge peers and subordinates to do the same. That's what GAS 2 (*Gumption and Solution Maker*) is all about.



GAS 3 (Grow a Subordinate)

Commanders are charged with developing future commanders to eventually replace themselves and leave the Army in good hands. Growing capable replacements requires dedicated action on the part of the senior. From formal and informal professional development, to “under the oak tree” counselings, to challenging discussions on subordinate performance and potential, the senior leader must *Give a \$#!t* about growing subordinates and developing eventual replacements.

GAS 3 sounds easy and intuitive, but effectively growing a subordinate to eventually become a field grade officer, or even a battalion or brigade commander, is a holistic process that places one’s professional, spiritual, mental, physical, and even private life under scrutiny. The infamous “all in” can be difficult to accept for those not fully committed to the profession of arms concept (addressed further in *GAS 5*). It’s also the reason that officers who embrace the *5 GAS Principles* are more likely to be career officers, whereas those who don’t go “all in,” or appear to *not GAS*, are ushered off the professional elevator at the lower floors.

The challenge in growing subordinates does not typically reside in technical or tactical proficiencies. Developing subordinates is far more artistic than the black and white realm of doctrine or other codified tasks. The rub lies in developing *potential*.

If the senior rater comment “Future Battalion/Brigade Commander” is not derived from performance, but solely on *potential*, how does one determine this *potential*? How does one increase one’s own *potential*? Clearly *potential* requires more than being \$#!t hot at MDMP. The recipe for *potential* is often based on unwritten rules and tradition, handed down from mentor to mentee. How does a leader address those “all in” topics not often discussed... topics addressed in manuscripts like the tried and tested *Army Officer’s Guide*?

Majors, both as mentors and mentees, must accept the reality of the *total package*, the above mentioned “all in.” *GAS 3* charges mentors with teaching mentees those innuendo-

laced rules such as “you’re never off duty.” Field Grades are always under the microscope and often judged in seemingly unfair ways: according to their choice of civilian clothes worn to a work function; participation (or non-participation) in a social or volunteer event; and even with whom one is seen socializing with off duty. Like it or not, conforming to established Army standards and unwritten norms sets conditions for strong *potential*.

The take away of GAS 3 is simply to *Give A \$#!t* about mentorship. When the mentor major fails to *care*, then he fails to properly *grow the subordinate*. When the mentee major fails to care, or is not receptive to the teachings of a senior, then he self-nominates his next evaluation as HQ fodder at the end of the rating period.

GAS 4 (Garner a Shared Understanding)

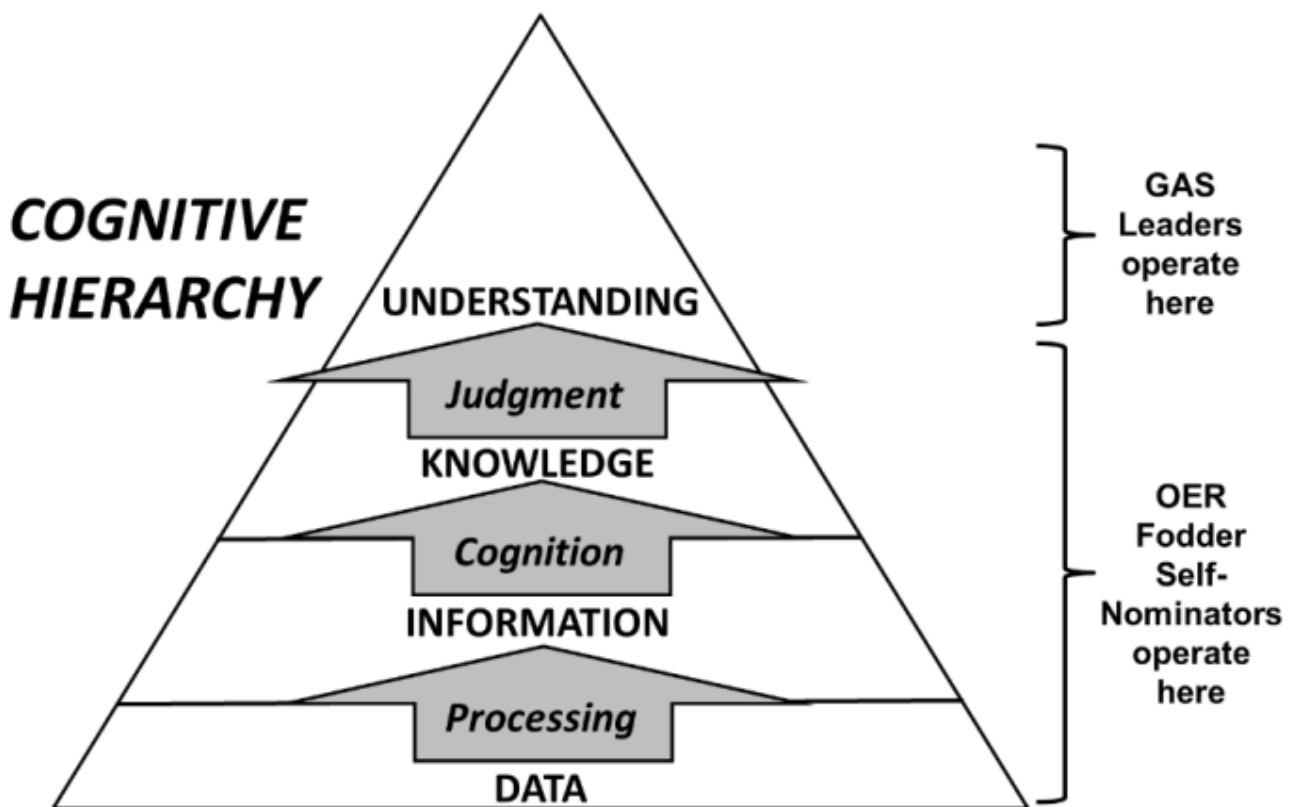
Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0 Mission Command states, “A defining challenge for commanders and staffs is creating a shared understanding of their operational environment, their operation’s purpose, its problems, and approaches to solving them.” Battalions and brigades are only as good as their cumulative understanding of the operating environment. Like the *create shared understanding* tenant of Mission Command, GAS 4 (*Garner a Shared Understanding*) charges majors to relentlessly inquire more than just “Who else needs to know?”

Most majors are situationally aware enough to disseminate information to subordinate units and/or higher HQ. Unfortunately, that is not good enough. GAS 4 is not about ensuring everyone on *your* team is aware – it’s about ensuring everyone across *the enterprise* who needs to know is aware *and understands*. Informing higher and lower is JV... GAS leaders ensure adjacent partners who may need to know *actually* know. They ask if *supported* units know. And they ensure everyone *understands* the “so what.”

We’ve all seen the “Who needs to know?” signs posted in command posts and operations centers, but the GAS 4 doctorate level question is: “Does everyone in higher, adjacent,

lower, supported and supporting (HALSS) know if they need to know and do they understand?" Garnering this level of shared understanding takes a concentrated effort to identify the HALSS actors, to include affiliated joint and combined partners, as many staff officers don't actually know what (or whom) they don't know.

In order to GAS 4, one must go above and beyond the Captains Career Course adage of "Who needs to know?" GAS leaders take into account the entire HALSS community when sharing information and take it a step further up the cognitive hierarchy from simple data or information sharing to *garner a shared understanding*.



FM 6-0, Commander and Staff Organization and Operations, Appendix B

GAS 5 (Grow and Self-Develop)

GAS 5 (Grow and Self-Develop) is the process of continued education. Army officers are distinguished members (whether you believe it or not) of the profession of arms. In his 1957 work *The Soldier and The State*, esteemed political scientist and Harvard professor, Samuel P. Huntington addresses officership as a profession. Huntington argues that the military officer corps is, by definition, a professional body as it meets the three qualities of professional ethic: 1) expertise, 2) responsibility, and 3) corporateness. He also charges the officer corps to uphold their obligation to study the science of war.

Former Army Chief of Staff GEN Odierno's 2013 *Army Leader Development Strategy* breaks down self-development into three lines of effort (training, education, and experience) across three domains (operational, institutional and self-development) with the desired end state of growing Soldiers high in the "3 C's": character, competence and commitment. That sounds great, but most mortals focus on the more tangible *self-development* methods, including reading, writing, dialogue, and doctrinal data mining.

As *professionals*, majors are expected to proactively grow professional knowledge, from branch-specific expertise to general officer (and sometimes General Officer) protocol, military history, geopolitics, and current events. The great thing about self-development is that nearly all reading or writing contributes to growth because it offers the opportunity to expand vocabulary or terminology, presents new ideas that may challenge pre-existing beliefs, and teaches useful (and possibly useless) facts. Just read. And watch the news. And write. And participate in professional dialogue with those who may not think like you. Be bold enough to accept that there *are* divergent opinions out there and that yours is not necessarily the *right one*.

Consider *GAS 5 (Grow and Self-Develop)* as an investment. You get out what you put in. If you're not getting better, you're getting worse (because *Iron Majors* are reading, writing,

discussing, and proactively seeking self-improvement).

Conclusion: Do Better At Giving a \$#!t

The transition in rank from captain to major is arguably the most challenging transition a US Army officer will face in his career. Expectations of majors increase drastically when the railroad tracks are replaced by the gold oak leaf. Upward progression from company grade to field grade is a trial of fast-paced on-the-job-training for many; a teeth-gnashing, stressful trial for some; and a dumpster fire of disappointment for others. This challenging transition ultimately results in Majors and Iron Majors. *The 5 GAS Principles* are not about title or position, they are about leadership behavior. So, *Iron Major*, give yourself a hard, objective look in the mirror and determine... do you *Give A \$#!t*?

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