



By General Robert B. “Abe” Abrams

The emergence of social media over the last decade has impacted just about every facet of life, reshaping the ways in which we interact, socialize, and communicate. Digital natives - like my 24-year old son - navigate multiple social media platforms near simultaneously, day and night. For digital immigrants - those of us born before 1985 - not so much. Some are uncomfortable with the technology, or the content, and believe there is a high risk of engaging. Others lack the intellectual curiosity to explore the vast potential social media

has to offer.

If you are a senior leader in the military, being engaged on social media is becoming more of an imperative by the day. There are many reasons why this is essential, but here are my top 10:

10) Social media is another great way to stay connected with friends and family, especially when deployed or living overseas. Gone are the days of letter-writing. Today, you can keep in touch with loved ones at the push of a button.

9) If you are a Flag Officer, there are and will continue to be imposters seeking to impersonate you, as frequently as 4-7 times every week. You need to assist in stamping them out, and claiming a presence online is the first step in promoting truthful, valuable interactions over the internet.

8) Social media is a great way to keep up with current events. By tailoring your “feeds” as you see fit, you can curate the news, ensuring whatever is most important to your craft loads first on your screen.

7) Social media allows you to stay connected with current hot topics across the Department of Defense, not just within your Service. It does us all good to look outside our own worlds.

6) It’s a great tool to solve some of life’s stickier problems. For example, while I was out on recent travel, my flight itinerary was changed without warning. By sending a Direct Message to the airline, I was able to get immediate feedback from an agent, much faster than calling a hotline or using some website chat function. Solutions have become more instantaneous with the advent of social media.

5) Social media provides necessary comedic relief. There are many funny, intelligent people

on social media, and if you enjoy humor and downright sharp wit, these platforms are for you.

4) It's also highly accessible, providing a non-traditional platform to get your message out. The best thing about it is that you can do it yourself, whenever the mood strikes, or simply when you have time.

3) It is important for us to acknowledge that the higher you go, the more insulated and distant you are from where the rubber meets the road. Social media gives us the opportunity to hear directly from our service members about what is bothering them, or the challenges facing them and their families. It is not always glamorous - not unlike reading the inside of a porta-potty at NTC - but the majority of the time, you will get unfiltered, grassroots feedback, and that is something we can all benefit from.

2) Your subordinates are all over social media. As such, these platforms provide another venue for them to have access to you - think virtual open door policy. After establishing credibility, you might even get the chance to actually help people. Refreshingly, most are polite and professional in their interactions with senior leaders online.

1) When you get down to it, by engaging in social media, it lets people know that you are human just like everyone else. It gives others insight as to how you think and what you care about, and that very real human connection helps build strong, meaningful relationships.

At the end of the day, social media will proliferate with or without the presence of senior military leaders, but for all the reasons I outlined (and many more), it's better for us to get on the bus and enjoy the ride.

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