



By Nick Alexander

Opportunities for intellectual growth within the profession of arms seem limitless. With the advent of social media, the growth of #miltwitter, and the plethora of international profession of arms blogs, it has never been easier to get a dose of PME. The other great thing about this network is that many of the platforms producing content are managed by serving members — on a volunteer basis - so what we're seeing truly is a collective of individuals, passionate about their work, engaging for self and organisational improvement.

With this wellspring of ground up discussion though comes risk. Risk to organisations that

members are employed by and risk to individuals if they fail to realise what is, and isn't, appropriate content for discussion and publication in the very open and unrestricted environment of the internet. For this reason many of the established blogs are very deliberate in their approaches to refining and assisting authors to develop content that contributes to the contest of ideas without committing career suicide or causing operational security (OPSEC) breaches.

At Grounded Curiosity, we're no different and what follows are the top three things we do to support our serving authors to avoid the traps of crossing the line in the public forum. These are not the be all and end all, and you may do all these things and still come unstuck, but by sharing these points, I hope to encourage more people to engage in a professional and rewarding way.

1. Awareness and adherence to Service communications policy.

Militaries have public comment and social media guidance for a very good reason. In Australia at least, this policy is pragmatic and balances the requirements of government and Defence effectively against the personal benefits of participating personally and professionally on social media. We often have authors and members engage with us who have either not read, or have sadly ignored, this policy guidance prior to jumping into the social media ocean. As digital leaders we believe it's part of our responsibility to highlight to individuals when their content is clearly at odds with current organisational policy. We do this because as part of the network we feel we have an ability to have these discussions without stifling the often excellent intent of members. Sadly formal action taken by organisations when someone mucks up step one will see them withdraw rapidly from the conversation - this is not something any of us should be seeking if individuals have legitimate value to add.

1. Discuss concepts rather than specifics.

Another pitfall we see is people attributing organisational failures to specific equipment, people or units and writing causation as such. When we receive pieces like this we will almost always send the piece back with suggestions on how to draw out conceptual root causes rather than playing the blame game. This is powerful as it makes our contributors take some of the emotion out of their writing, and also means that the work we're producing can have a greater reach. The decisions of a particular Battalion Commander on how to complete a Battlefield Clearance (BCT) being at odds with one of their Lieutenants views on the topic does not make for engaging reading. The challenges of conducting Battalion BCT within a complex multi-domain battlespace however may be. We've found our authors who fall in this trap value the opportunity to explore and research their topic in greater depth; rather than simply submit and have published the cathartic 'my unit sucks because...' article.

1. Two sets of eyes are better than one

The last thing that we do routinely to ensure the content we put out is hitting the mark is to ensure it is reviewed by at least two members of the team. The editing process is very collaborative and pieces will bounce back and forward between the author and one of our editors until both are happy with the content. Then, it will be put in front of one more impartial set of eyes before it's released. This is an important final safety net, by this stage the content is looking slick, this final check is to ensure that people who have gotten close to a piece aren't missing the obvious OPSEC or reputational issues.

Being part of the international PME network has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my career to date, and I love that I have the opportunity to support others who are looking to engage and improve. But it comes with risks, and for this reason platforms and military leaders have a responsibility to support authors and newcomers so that their experiences are positive and our community continues to flourish. I hope the experiences at Grounded Curiosity highlighted here help in that endeavour.

About the Author

Nick Alexander is a current serving member of the Australian Army. He is the Communications Director of the profession of arms platform Grounded Curiosity and a member of The Military Writers Guild.

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