



Meet Them Where They Are, As You Are: Being Present and Engaged in the Information Age

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By Thomas “Doug” Meyer, Founder of [The Company Leader](#)

“You will never find a more wretched hive of scum and villainy.” These immortal words of Obi-Wan Kenobi, spoken a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, referred to the city of Mos Aisley. But they could apply to some spaces on social media today. #MilTwitter can be like a version of the Star Wars cantina, with solo-artists singing “Me, Me, Me,” disgruntled Field Grade Officers drinking their glass of disdain for the Anonymous Lieutenants, and track stars who can’t deadlift hating on the new ACFT instead of training for it. So why should leaders risk operational and reputational security to engage on social media? Three words: **it’s your job.**

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The intersection of social media and leadership isn't a new topic. #MilTwitter OGs like Drew Steadman, Nate Finney, and Joe Byerly continue to contribute as more leaders join in like [Tyler Inman](#), [Josh Powers](#), and [Joshua Bowen](#). Today, it's commonplace for a private or lieutenant to instantly converse with a four-star general on Twitter. The Association of the United States Army recognizes this evolution in the profession of arms. For the fourth year, the AUSA Conference will include a live panel on Leadership in the Information Age. This year's panel will feature Doctrine Man!, Lady Loves Taft, Brig. Gen. Donahoe, and a *U.S Army W.T.F! moments rep.*

Every leader should have a presence online. Despite the [trolls](#), the risks, and—at times—the frustrations, we can't abdicate our responsibility to lead in all places where our soldiers reside and our profession is being discussed. If you treat others with dignity and respect, speak about topics you know/where you have credibility, and act with authenticity and professionalism—you will rarely have issues. And for the times you don't? [Own it, apologize for it, and fix it](#). Check out General Robert "Abe" Abrams (@DogFaceSoldier) Top 10 reasons why Senior Leaders need to get on the bus and engage with digital natives.

What if I told you there was a location where hundreds of thousands soldiers and leaders are engaging, opening up the door to their life, having conversations about everything from [Game of Thrones](#) to national security and strategy? You can talk with Donovanian commanders about their tactics at the National Training Center. You can discuss how to overcome those tactics with Ops Group's Observer-Coach/Trainers (OC/Ts). Or you can mix it up with Last 100 Yards, Sgt. Maj. Anthony Spadaro, 1SG Harlan Kefalas, and other phenomenal NCOs. This magical place where you can meet other people, where they are (figuratively and physically), for partnered development is known as social media.

But not all social media presence is the same, and just because a leader should be present doesn't mean they all need to do it the same way. Leaders' online presence should be congruent with their strengths, their comfort, their passions, and their knowledge. There are three major wrong ways to approach social media presence: 1. To Not Be 2.

Unprofessionally 3. Inauthentically.

So how do you get involved? There are many and varying degrees of involvement on social media. Here are five ways for a leader to jump-in and get involved:

The “I Will Engage Through a Unit Page”

You understand the importance of engaging on social media, especially as a leader in the Army, but you’re not sure if this is something you will continue long-term beyond your current position. Or, maybe you are just a first time adopter of social media. Whatever your reasons are, whether you are fully bought in or just testing the waters, the unit page is a great way to get started. Decisions are made by those in the room and this method is how you digitally join that room. Your content and your audience will determine where you engage. Whether it is on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or another platform—leaders maximize their audience and influence others just by being in the room.

Notable Examples Include: Lt. Col. Keller/Red Falcon 6, @1stBn_325thCDR; Lt. Col. Howell/Gimlet 6, @3_21IN_CDR; Lt. Col. Nelson/Red Knight 6, @RedKnightHQ66

The “I Have a Personal Page For Continued Engagement”

Some in this group joined with the intent to maintain their pages from the beginning. Others started out with a leadership page and found the experience personally and professionally fulfilling enough to continue. Whatever the reason, you don’t have to step aside after you hand-off the guidon. Continue the conversation, relationships, and your own development by transitioning your unit page/handle to a personal one—or if you passed off the page to the next person, then just create a new one.

Notable Examples Include: Lt. Col. Kranc, @CavRTK; Lt. Col. Wright, @102ndBlackhawk6; Brig. Gen. Donahoe, @PatDonahoeArmy

The “I Want to Be a Content Creator”

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Content creation ranges from individual blogging to multi-author initiatives like [Modern War Institute](#) or [Strategy Bridge](#). This can be a lot of work and for minimal, or in most cases zero, monetary profit. But writing provides a different kind of profit-individual development and contributions to the profession of arms. Here is a great starting point from [The Military Leader](#).

Notable Examples Include: Drew Steadman, "The Military Leader;" Joe Byerly, "From the Green Notebook;" Josh Bowen, "3x5 Leadership."

The "I've Got Someone For That"

Some leaders are great at connecting people. Like a librarian, they are proficient at organizing threads, indexing topics, and connecting people to the answers they need. There are a vast number of tweet threads, posts, lists, hashtags, etc. out there in the #MilTwitter and other social media-verse. These community organizers are the ones that help connect you with the right topic thread or leader to help you.

Notable Examples Include: @MotherOfTanks, @102ndBlackhawk6

The "I Retweet and Read Things"

Is this all a little intimidating to you? Perhaps you are more of an introvert. Or, maybe you just want to make yourself available and observe what others are saying, adding emphasis where you see value. That is ok! Being present is just that...being PRESENT. Be there. Make yourself available. Be aware of what the community is saying.

These aren't all encompassing, and they aren't mutually exclusive. You can be in multiple of these categories, or your involvement could evolve from one to the other. Or maybe you are in a season of life that requires you to step back. You do you! It should be authentic and fulfilling.

Some of the best leaders that I see on social media use their platform as a means to observe topics of conversation, engage where they have expertise, encourage their own leaders to join-in through their own personal example, and do it all from a position of influential (not

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positional) leadership. The key to this is [humility](#)—don't get all spun-up if someone gets a little “smart” or leaves a Sir/Ma'am off of their Tweet. If you do, you will only be [hurting yourself](#). Try to mentor through example. You will make a larger impact.

Stay Humble - Be Authentic - Have a Sense of Humor.

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