



By Jeff Horn

Staying focused on the “right things” in a company-level command is easier said than done. Commanders begin their commands committed to this noble endeavor, but other priorities and external commitments emerge and they end up in crisis mode. Below are eight thoughts on how to gain and maintain efficiencies and stay focused on the essentials. While some of these may seem like common sense, the most common sense solutions are not always obvious in the fog of work and life.

Get away from your computer and ensure subordinate leaders do the same

Personally observing training, maintenance, and daily operations develops you, enables you to develop your subordinates, ensures you are capturing efficiencies, and allows you to assess the readiness of your unit. More importantly, you can gauge the azimuth of your organizational purpose, perspective, and proportion. Nothing will handicap you more than staring at your computer all day and trying to lead through email.

Less is more

My words would fail if I attempted to summarize the benefits of the “essentialist mindset.” When it comes to our training schedules, readiness is often more enabled when we say “no” than when we say “yes.” We should question everything that does not channel our time and energy into making the highest possible contribution to increasing lethality in our formations. The book [*Essentialism: The Disciplined Approach to Less*](#) helped me navigate the waters of competing priorities. I believe it should be mandatory reading at every commissioning source. Read it early in your command – or better yet, read it before you take command.

Apply pressure where it is needed

Enable uninhibited training for the individuals, crews, sections, or platoons that need to train the most. This can be as simple as using a qualified section to cover down on taskings while an unqualified section trains. Or it might mean giving a platoon access to your headquarters to finish up administrative tasks. You are only limited by your ability to think of creative solutions to everyday problems.

Systems, Systems, Systems

Establishing systems – from maintenance operations, to training management, to daily administrative tasks, and everything in-between – enables process improvement and makes your life and your best performers’ lives easier. Too often, organizations are propped up by a few individuals doing all the work. This keeps the most talented and important leaders in a perpetual “knife fight,” incapable of seeing the big picture. Unfortunately, many commanders will fail or culminate in exhaustion before they see the importance of having robust systems.

Do recurring, well-planned, and resourced Sergeants Time Training (STT)

Due to the limited amount of training time, Soldiers straight out of Advanced Individual Training (AIT) require significant additional training. This is not an indictment of our AIT instructors or our Soldiers. They do the best they can with the limited time and resources they have available. Without recurring, well-planned, and resourced STT, our Soldiers will lack the necessary skills for success. Unfortunately, you will find that the urgency of “the now” will often detract from planned STT. The key to minimizing disruptions is to train and certify junior leaders (using the eight-step training module) to carry on when senior leaders are pulled in every other direction.

Encourage and enable decentralized training opportunities at lower echelons

Leaders at all echelons must take initiative to find time to train, whether planned or spontaneous. I hesitate to call this hip pocket training because I believe training should sometimes extend beyond individual Soldier skills. These decentralized training opportunities are enabled by efficient garrison systems, and should be encouraged through positive reinforcement, careful time management, and training schedule predictability.

Don't forget to develop yourself and fence off your own personal white space

If you find yourself overwhelmed with the day-to-day, use Outlook calendars to schedule time for self-development and even time to think. Some of the world's best and most famous businessmen and CEOs deliberately (and regularly) put time on their calendar to think and/or read. If you don't manage your time, someone or something else will.

Don't lose yourself

Howard Tullman, a very successful serial entrepreneur, aptly stated that “[i]n the frenzy of work and life it is easy to lose our sense of purpose, perspective, and proportion – and risk losing ourselves in the process.” Too often we find ourselves consumed with unnecessary busyness, devoid of any true focus on being “ready to fight tonight.” At a certain point, unfocused busyness can cause us to lose authenticity and inhibit leadership – both at home

and work.

Preparing for the next fight requires the wisest possible investment of time and energy. In fighting the reaction mode caused by the daily crises, priorities, and external commitments of command, you have to find creative efficiencies to solve everyday problems. Maintaining authentic leadership and maximizing the talents of those around you are vital in this endeavor.

CPT Jeff Horn commissioned as a Field Artillery officer from the Officer Candidate School in 2010. He commanded twice in his career. The first was Bravo Battery, 1-320th Field Artillery Regiment, 101st Division Artillery, and the second was Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 101st Division Artillery. CPT Horn is currently an Observer Controller / Trainer with 2-307th Field Artillery, 157th Infantry Brigade, First Army."

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