



By *Thang Tran*

Change of command season is approaching and commanders at every echelon across the force will implement leader professional development (LPD) programs meant to develop leaders and subordinates. Several articles highlight the [importance](#) of a deliberate program and recommend [frameworks](#) of how to execute a plan. If you do not have a plan yet, it is not too late. Assess your formation and develop a purpose-driven approach to achieve your desired end state.

This article describes the implementation of a LPD program through weekly engagements on relevant topics aimed at increasing subordinates' understanding of the environment, equipping leaders with tools, or preparing them and their families for the future. Notice the purpose is not simply focused on the military profession, but developing professional leaders for future service as well.

**Make it a Battle Rhythm Event:** Just like physical training, you must implement a program that provides [predictability for subordinates](#). Depending on the size of your formation and level of command, this may be quarterly, monthly, or even weekly. Each event should be focused on a single topic, instead of a day-long or multi-day event, covering several seemingly disjointed topics. This allows subjects to absorb and reflect over time versus a "firehose" method of learning. Sometimes, scheduled LPDs are cancelled due to unforeseen events, so one way to minimize the risks of this happening is to tie LPDs to another battle rhythm event such as a command and staff meeting or a commander's huddle. Leaders are already present and it encourages them to keep both engagements concise.

**Identify Information Gaps:** Be flexible during your command time, adjusting topics of discussions and seminars based on what your organization requires. For example, if your unit has a slow OPTEMPO coming up next quarter, it may be a good idea to inform leaders and subordinates of opportunities through the education center such as [tuition assistance](#) or [credentialing assistance](#) so they can take full advantage of the lull in the training schedule. If you are preparing for an upcoming deployment to a new area of operation, academic seminars on relevant topics may be beneficial to increase subordinates' understanding of the operational environment and improve their ability to exercise disciplined initiative. Immediately prior to a deployment, it may be a good idea to educate subordinates on financial management. Ensure topics remain relevant and directly support the purpose of your overall program.

**Leverage Subject Matter Experts:** Your presence is necessary to provide oversight and command emphasis on the program, but no one expects you to know everything and lead discussions on every topic. Leverage available resources and your network for subject matter experts as guest speakers. Financial management advisors and Military Family Life Counselors can help equip your subordinates with information on available resources that can help them and their families make educated decisions in accordance with future goals.

There are also opportunities to leverage cross-domain expertise. Influence operations are an important part of today's battlefields. Most organizations do not have organic expertise in this area and must outsource completely. Therefore, units can leverage guest speakers from our psychological operations professionals and academia to discuss [narratives](#), [strategic communications](#), and [disinformation](#) in preparation for a future deployment. The right subject matter experts will bring a different perspective and expertise that are not organic to your formation, further promoting your formation's understanding of the operational environment and planting the seed of intellectual curiosity for personal development.

**Delegate Coordination:** As a commander, you cannot envision, plan, coordinate, and execute every LPD session. You will have competing requirements and distractions. Empower your subordinates as action officers. Beyond giving your program more horsepower, it helps to develop your subordinates' personal and professional networks. This is especially the case if they are coordinating with a guest speaker from outside of the organization. As an added bonus, subordinates can informally excite interest among their peers on the event and/or topic.

**Define Success:** Do not expect every participant to embrace every lesson learned during every LPD session and run with it. As long as one person is able to leverage a resource learned from an LPD session or employ a piece of information to provide purpose and direction during an action in the future - the LPD session is successful. If your topics are relevant and support your overall purpose, you will be successful.

In conclusion, be purpose driven in your approach to develop and implement a leader professional development program. It starts with your vision of what you want your leaders and subordinates to gain. This will come from your assessment of where they are and where they need to be, personally and professionally. The LPD program is your opportunity to develop your subordinates as leaders, both as professionals in our military and productive members of our community - today and in the future.

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