



By Cassie Crosby

After participating in the Army's Battalion Commander Assessment Program (BCAP) in January 2020, I received a mass email to all BCAP participants from Major General Joseph P. McGee, the Director of the Army's Talent Management Task Force (ATMTF), at the time. In this email, the Army offered all BCAP participants three options: 1) opt in for coaching only with five 1-hour sessions; 2) opt in for coaching with an emotional intelligence test (EQi 2.0), or 3) opt-out and not receive any additional developmental opportunities. I was strongly encouraged to participate if I desired to "...discover what really drives you, leverage your existing strengths, and learn new tools and techniques..." The email went on to say all coaches are bound by a Code of Ethics and provide confidential, non-attributional coaching. These highly valued coaches were hired to help us achieve our goals and provided an opportunity to invest in our future. Which begs the question: who wouldn't say "yes" to

that?

Subsequent emails from the ATMTF stated only 498 of 750 BCAP participants opted-in to this opportunity. I find this statistic intriguing, albeit rather disappointing, but the purpose of this article is not to explore why some officers declined the offer. Rather, I want to alleviate other leaders' concerns about their own participation in the program by sharing my own personal experience and convince others to participate, if afforded the opportunity. I think it would significantly benefit the Army and our Soldiers to see much closer to 100%, rather than 66% participation. This program is a worthy investment in the force and is demonstrative of the Army's commitment to talent management and leader development. That said, I believe coaching should remain optional, as you must be open *and* willing to change for the better in order for this program to remain effective.

A disclaimer: I have no personal connection to the ATMTF, other than my participation in BCAP and this coaching opportunity. The coaching I received is a contracted service, and I represent neither the views of the TMTF nor the Army. This coaching opportunity was hands-down one of the best developmental experiences of my career. The Army will cultivate a more professional force by continuing this program and expanding these services to even more Leaders. Not only do I believe all leaders should be willing and able to participate in this program, I think assessment and subsequent coaching should be offered as early as possible in a leader's career.

According to an Army G-1/ATMTF article published on [STAND-TO on the Army.mil website \(17 April 2020\)](#), as part of the pilot program, the Army intends to extend this voluntary program to select Captain's Career Course attendees this summer and fall. My advice for those Captains, and others who are afforded this opportunity, is this: if you are offered a professional opportunity for coaching - take it! Those who shy away from this period of self-reflection and growth will miss out on one of the most beneficial developmental opportunities of their career.

When I received this email from MG McGee, I was unfamiliar with exactly what coaching

would do for me. In fact, I initially thought there was no way I had time for one more meeting on my calendar. As I reflected on that email over the next couple of days, spoke to a couple of peers, and did my own research, I realized I couldn't afford to let this opportunity go to waste. I opted in for five coaching sessions with the EQi.

MG McGee's email gave a civilian definition of coaching as "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential." A quick internet search of professional coaching suggests a coach can help launch you to the next level, clarify and define what you want to achieve, and assist with achieving goals. All of that is somewhat vague so I am going to give you a snapshot of my experience to help better explain what coaching is and what it can do for you.

I learned through my experience that coaching is not therapy, nor is it an opportunity for someone else to solve your problems for you. Your coach is not going to boss you around or tell you how to run your organization, staff section, or your life. If you have the right coach, as I believe I did, you won't feel judged and you won't be admonished for your decisions. Moreover, your coach will provide you with tools and techniques to assist you with your specific developmental needs and with decision-making. They will act as a sounding board for your leadership challenges and guide you to a diverse array of written and digital materials to help you better yourself. A professional coach takes a holistic view of you as a person, rather than just considering your professional life in a vacuum. They will want to know what matters most to you in life and what motivates you so they can direct you toward achievable goals. They may explore how your developmental needs impact your home life as well as your professional life and help you improve in both. Most importantly, your coach will listen to you and over the course of your sessions together, help you articulate your strengths and weaknesses in a way that is meaningful and actionable. Just like an athletic coach, they will build your confidence by making you stronger and providing you with the resources to succeed.

My coaching sessions were a one-hour Zoom call with my coach. After the session, my coach would follow up with an email that synthesized our discussion and recommended videos and/or readings as well as homework in preparation for our next session. Her ability to

listen to what I was saying and then provide my own words back to me clearly and succinctly left me in awe every time we met. She was obviously listening. She provided academic resources and exercises that asked me to reflect on various topics from my leadership style, to my relationships with others, to my strengths and weaknesses. Finding the mental white space to reflect was, I discovered, the most difficult part of this process. However, after three months of carving out white space at least once one a week to reflect, I continue to block time on my calendar just to think (yes, I actually block time to think!). If you are afforded and accept the opportunity for coaching, don't let it go to waste.

**Honesty is key.** If you take any self-assessments to augment your coaching, you must be as honest as possible with yourself and the assessment. These assessments form the basis of your development as they reveal areas for improvement and opportunities to exploit your strengths. Furthermore, be honest with your coach. Don't just share the aspects of your career that are going well. Be willing to share the conflict you had with a peer or a situation in which you left feeling like it could have gone better. Your coach will help you get to the root cause of your challenges.

**Be open to growth and change.** If you go into this situation thinking you have no room for growth or you have it all figured out, you'll waste your time. We all have areas where we can be better. Be willing to acknowledge and accept constructive criticism.

**Do the work.** If your coach assigns videos, watch them. You may not see the relevance when you first watch or read some of the material because it may come from a perspective with which you're unfamiliar, which is why these diverse perspectives are so powerful. They open you up to new ideas and insights to expand your kitbag and your thinking. As you start to combine the academic work with reflection and discussion, you will begin to see how these elements all fit together and use them to action your self-development.

**Find time to reflect.** Don't wait for the last minute to complete your assignments. Commit

to building in the mental white space to reflect. We all process information differently. Maybe you reflect on your homework while you're running. Maybe you put some thoughts on a whiteboard outside your shower. Maybe you talk through them with a spouse or friend. Maybe you hang them in your home office and get up early one morning a week while the house is still quiet and you enjoy a strong cup of coffee. However you choose to reflect, put it on your calendar and hold yourself accountable.

By offering professional coaching, the Army is investing in you as an individual and in the professionalization of the force. Don't let this opportunity pass you by. My perspective is just one of 497 other lieutenant colonels across the Army who also participated in this program. I hope you are afforded this opportunity, are brave enough to accept it, and you then have your own experiences to share with others, as well.

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