



By CSM Michael S. Burke

Cue Morgan Freeman Narrator voice: “This is the best time of your life, Mike, relish in every single moment of it.” Of course I’m going to be biased but I’m proud to admit that I’ve never had so much fun in my life or had more purpose or fulfillment in a position. I’m getting ahead of myself though. So let me start from the beginning.

In the summer of 2019, I was informed I was being activated by CSM Branch to take a Brigade. When I heard this news, I took a big gulp and then asked the question that everyone asks when they’re notified it’s time to move: “where are we going?” I received the simple answer, “ You will be happy with it so don’t worry.” I was unsure what that meant but my wife guessed: “They are going to move you up to be the 2nd Cavalry Regiment (2CR) CSM.” No way in hell, I thought. That made too much sense which was not something that always equated to HRC (sorry, not sorry).

48 hours later, the email came in stating I was to assume responsibility of 2CR. Holy Sh\*\*, I thought as the self-doubt crept in. I was going to step into a position surrounded by talent and intellect. In any meeting I attended, it would be clear who the dumbest person in the room was- two thumbs pointing at this guy. As I reflected on the path ahead, I forced myself to remember why the Army would pick me for this job. I’m good at building teams, developing leaders, and pushing others to excel physically. With my strengths refreshed in my mind, there was one thing left to do; let’s get after it.

2CR is a complex unit with a million moving pieces, and there is no way to know or see it all. However, I did my best to lead well and develop others and learned many lessons along the way. To summarize what I learned, I want to share four tips for any leader, especially leaders of larger organizations, like a Brigade, Regiment, or even a larger corporation, to deliberately shape your engagements and expand your influence across the organization:

1. Be deliberate in the areas of your organization you dive into. Everyday, a ton of issues, concerns, and problems will be brought to your attention. It's impossible to fix them all and dig into the minutiae of every challenge. Instead, look for trends and ask yourself: "what is the real problem here?" Then, gather the details based on a focused set of information requirements, use subject matter experts, and develop solutions that solve the fundamental problem, rather than just symptoms of the problem.
2. Talk less and listen more. There is so much talent in an organization the size of a Regiment (about 4500 soldiers) that it will be overwhelming at times. The real magic is to glean the ideas from commanders and staff that are nested with the Commander's (or CEO's) priorities and intent. Provide some feedback, mentorship, and expectations. Then get the hell out of the way and watch these leaders exceed expectations. Rinse and repeat for best results.
3. Don't waste a second or an opportunity. Every engagement matters, and if a soldier steps through your door, you owe them your best. While their issue might not be the end of the world to you, to them, it's their entire world. Humble yourself in order to empathize with the problems they bring you, and invest in your people. Turn over every stone to help them, and get them the resources they need. If you are not using your positional power to make soldiers' lives better, then what the hell are you doing?
4. "Leader development is like printing money," to quote Colonel Ewers, the 81st Colonel of 2CR. Make time, program time, and create time so you can invest in your leaders. Don't just talk *at* them, engage in dialogue *with* them. You will be surprised at the ideas and initiatives that come out of those conversations that you can then share with the rest of the formation. The goal of your leader professional development sessions should be to accelerate the professional development of the leaders in your organization.

Serving as 2D Cavalry Regiment's CSM was the honor of my life, and I'm extremely proud of what we accomplished in our time. I'm a better man, father, husband, leader, and NCO because of it. I could never repay the investment every single Dragoon made in me. I'm thankful to have been a part of this journey with a team of talented professionals, serving our nation together.

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*hosts a weekly podcast with guests who are striving to be better humans in a variety of disciplines titled "Always in Pursuit." Find him on Instagram @alwaysinpursuit20. The views expressed in the article do not reflect official policy or position of the Department of Defense or US Government.*

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