

*Editor's Note: This post is part of the FTGN Army Broadening Series that we are running from March 15-30, 2021. Each day, we will publish new insights into the Army's various broadening assignments, starting March 15th, 2021 with an overview of AIM 2.0 and a discussion on how to educate others on assignment selection criteria.*



By Anthony Williams

In recent years, the Army transitioned to a new talent management model called the Army Talent Alignment Process (ATAP) hosted on a web-based system known as Assignment Interactive Module (AIM2). This web-based system was designed to match Soldiers' skills, knowledge, and behaviors to pin-point Army assignments that complement their previous experience and personal interests. Despite this autonomy, some Soldiers have expressed skepticism for this process. These Soldiers feel inadequately prepared to navigate the market, relying heavily on career counselors and mentors to assist them in balancing job assignments that facilitate upward mobility while optimizing location considerations for their families.

However, in my experience, AIM 2.0 is an effective tool to align skills, behaviors, and interest to the needs of the Army. In an effort to improve AIM 2.0 efficacy, leaders must educate officers and NCOs on the criteria for effective assignment selection which includes career goals, location, and family consideration. Also, Soldiers must be willing to seek tough assignments in less than ideal locations in preparation for future leadership responsibilities, as they did under the legacy system.

In my personal experience, you have three main considerations in choosing assignments. The first consideration is the job selection. Before selecting an assignment, you should first open DA PAM 600-3. This publication outlines Soldiers' career maps by MOS and offers an understanding of what types of assignments you should select (key developmental (KD),

broadening, joint). Then, you should seek advice from your HRC career advisor. I didn't appreciate my career advisors' level of knowledge when I was a junior officer, but I've learned the value of these trusted agents over the years and rely on them now more than ever. They align your interests with your goals (perceived and realistic) and provide you with the best options for career progression.

Lastly, you should seek advice from your mentors, the incumbents, and anyone else willing to share their experiences in the positions that peak your interest. But don't just rely on one person's perspective. Seek multiple perspectives to find the right job for you and your family and reach out to those leaders who are responsible for selecting applicants for an interview. They will appreciate your effort and it will make their job easier when it's time to rack and stack candidates for their open positions.

The second consideration is location. Yes, everyone (including most spouses) wants Hawaii, Italy, and Germany. In fact, HRC has statistics on the most and least requested assignments. I have always tried venturing somewhere in the middle like Forts Benning, Bragg, and Gordon. In my humble opinion location is important but not as important as the job. In most cases, I always found myself within an hour or so from a major airport, and there were more things to do in the area than I anticipated. If you are going to seek location preference over job, do so understanding the career implications. For example, if you choose a non-KD job for location, try selecting one at a large installation or that has KD jobs in the local area, like Washington D.C. If you posture yourself correctly, you could try to transition into a KD assignment during the following cycle.

The third consideration, and arguably the most important, is family. "Preference time" is one of the most challenging times for my family. I tell my spouse the jobs I want which are not usually in premier locations, and she tells me the places she wants to go. After about 72 hours of intense deliberation, we agree, I submit my preferences, and in return, I receive something different than what we asked for. However, I could then blame the Army for the assignment and my spouse still felt included in the process.

To be fair, the experience I laid out was prior to AIM2! Nonetheless, family consideration is very important. I have always advised young officers and NCOs to have an honest and open dialogue with their spouse. Build your career map with goals and decision points, overlay your spouse's goals and children's schooling on it, and have the hard discussion with your family. Consider their professional, financial, and personal goals and incorporate them into your decision. Everyone may not be extremely happy, but I find it easier if you can decide together. Plus, my spouse enjoyed a couple of the places that she dreaded prior to our arrival!

Given these considerations, I offer you a thought that was passed to me when I was a company commander. My battalion commander at the time told me to “take hard jobs and do them well.” For a while, I assumed he meant taking hard jobs, specifically KD, offers you the best chance to demonstrate your performance and receive a successful evaluation. This may be partly true, but there are some intangibles you gain from tough assignments. These assignments usually provide an unparalleled opportunity to establish a tactical, doctrinal, and leadership foundation. In sports terminology, it gives you ‘reps and sets.’ Also, you are often forced out of your comfort zone, challenged to improve your weaknesses, and allowed to develop your own leadership style. These jobs don’t guarantee promotion or even a successful evaluation, but you will become, undoubtedly, a better version of yourself so don’t veer away from the path.

The Army and the Talent Management Model is a process Soldiers, like me, advocated for in the last two decades. The Army has taken on the task to align skills, behaviors, and interests with assignments and match them to the needs across the Army. Leaders must continue to educate junior officers and NCOs on the use of the system primarily through effective tools, like counseling, and recommend they use a holistic approach to choosing their next assignment.

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