



*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 David Beaumont

In May 2019, I relinquished Company Command and moved to Fort Huachuca, Arizona. I was assigned to take on the challenging responsibility of becoming a Small Group Leader (SGL) and Instructor at the United States Army Intelligence Center of Excellence Military Intelligence Captains Career Course (MICCC). Leaving the historic 25th Infantry Division "Tropic Lightning" at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, I was eager to teach the next generation of Military Intelligence Professionals, and share successes and failures from my three year tenure in the Pacific. However, I was a little apprehensive at the idea of teaching students who wore the same Captain (CPT) rank as me because I would be required to lead and teach

my peers.

When learning a new skill, training on the latest piece of equipment, or keeping up to date on doctrine, where or who do you turn to first? Do you go straight to your boss or supervisor for the answer? Most people prefer to consult their peers based on reputations of experience and knowledge to learn and build new sets of skills. In order to expand professional development, learners must have the intellectual curiosity and willingness to search for answers, make mistakes, challenge ideas, and speak up freely. This environment creates a space where the learner feels comfortable conversing with their peers without a sense that their boss is evaluating their performance while they are learning.

Peer-teaching is most effective when the whole audience embodies empathy, patience, open communication, and an awareness that everyone comes from varying backgrounds and experiences. Without these key factors, participants will not have the courage to share thoughts, experiences, and questions which may result in an unproductive work environment. Peers must be open and vulnerable enough to accept constructive input, and have the intestinal fortitude to give honest feedback rather than telling others what they want to hear. Feedback must be delivered as a generous gesture that should always be met with gratitude regardless of differing experience and opinions.

Students, as well as teachers, must never be mocked or embarrassed for expressing themselves in front of their peers. Peer conversations are likely to occur in areas that need further development and improvement rather than someone who has influence over their career. The dynamics of the hierarchy disappear. An open learning environment provides countless opportunities for personal and professional growth through lateral learning and sharing of knowledge and experience.

These lessons can be applied at all echelons. For example, CO Executive Officers (XO) developing platoon leaders, BDE S3/XOs and BN S3/XOs, CO CDRs and BN Staff Officers,

and CCC SGLs and students. What do they all have in common? They all wear the same rank and equate to peers but experience is where it differs. The challenge for the peer leader is teaching and delivering material to different types of learners. Each person comes from a wide array of experiences and mission sets from around the force who may interpret information differently than others. The peer leader bridges that gap to ensure commanders at all Army echelons have leaders ready on day one.

Significant development is made when concrete examples are presented on how it is applied in the force. Some may have slightly out of date experiences due to natural updates in new task organizations and equipment fieldings. For example, when I was a Military Intelligence Company (MICO) Commander, I had human intelligence, signals intelligence, all-source intelligence, intelligence systems maintainers, and tactical unmanned aircraft systems. About six months after I left, a completely different and complex warfighting function of electronic warfare soldiers and their equipment were integrated and assigned to the MICO. This is where my peer instructors and students become extremely valuable by sharing their experiences with others. Having motivated and participatory peers drives others to embrace lifelong learning and demonstrates a climate of professionals who want to make others around them better.

Just like anything else in life, not every experience has been positive. There have been times where my peer audience bombarded me with questions just to gage my credibility.

Sometimes the situation can develop into a dangerous game of “stump the chump” to see who is smarter and more experienced than the other. One must tread carefully because this one-upmanship can quickly escalate into a toxic working and learning environment. Not everyone has the answers to everything they teach but it’s important to maintain patience, composure, and treat everyone with dignity and respect regardless of position or authority.

It is tough to teach unreceptive people who may think that they know everything, especially if they have more recent experience from the force and believe that others’ experiences are

outdated and irrelevant. On the other side, it is easy when a group has peers who are willing to learn and better themselves and future organizations. In the end, it is important to remember that learning is constantly occurring as new capabilities advance and new methods are introduced.

Teaching and learning from peers has been one of the most rewarding jobs I have had in the Army both at FORSCOM and TRADOC. I have been blessed with the opportunity to develop future Military Intelligence Leaders ready to develop their organizations. Peers at all echelons are paying it forward to operational, strategic, and tactical echelons across the force. Having a positive experience and working relationship is imperative. Mutual respect and trust is a must, without it, how can teams be successful in complex problem sets in an ever changing competitive combat environment.

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