



by Ryan Cornell-d'Echert

I am an Army Logistics officer who – for better or worse – has spent much of his career separated from other logisticians. I wish to share some lessons and observations that may be applicable to other “outsiders,” including long-term and short-term attachments and enablers in any unit.

The Forward Support Company *(A logistician surrounded by combat arms personnel)*

As a new lieutenant, my first unit was an artillery forward support company (FSC). Several years later, my company command was an infantry FSC. In both cases, my fellow commanders across the battalion were field artillery or infantry officers. I quickly learned the importance of understanding command and support relationships. The FSC was organic and assigned to the brigade support battalion (BSB) but, at times, attached to the maneuver battalion.

As a young lieutenant, I felt as if the forward support company served two masters. It seemed two battalions shared ownership of the company, and we often felt as if we walked a tightrope while being repeatedly asked “*Who’s your daddy?*” When both battalions have a hail and farewell, whose do you attend? When both battalions have a command and staff meeting, whose do you attend? When both battalions have a command maintenance formation, where do you go? Whose family readiness group (FRG) do you integrate with? The questions are seemingly endless unless you are willing to do everything twice.

I carried much of that prior scar tissue into my company command, wishing to protect my Soldiers from feeling any organizational friction or being pulled in multiple directions. Some FSC commanders tried to go all-in with their maneuver battalion and eagerly burned bridges with the BSB. Some lingered too close to the BSB “mothership,” and did not spend enough time with their supported battalion to earn a seat at the proverbial table. (The “F” in “FSC” stands for “Forward,” after all.)

I chose to go all-in with the maneuver battalion while keeping in contact with the BSB. If I kept the BSB apprised of what we were doing, how we were supporting the infantry battalion's priorities, and where we needed help, we were unencumbered. We were invited to BSB events and meetings but were always free to place our supported unit first. I understood that, regardless of which battalion set our priorities, my FSC's resupply and reinforcements would always come from the BSB. (If I needed more cooks, mechanics, fuelers, or truck drivers, they certainly were not coming from the infantry battalion.) Therefore, I always kept the lines of communication open.

Ultimately, you must know who your rater is and ensure you keep him or her satisfied in accordance with the higher commander's priorities. Instead of "walking a tightrope," I found I could enjoy the best of both worlds, with twice as many opportunities to resource and promote my company. For my own professional development, I could see how two battalion command teams and their staffs operated. I could make observations and choose items to remember for the future. (For example, *"I like the way the infantry S3 does X, but not Y. I like how the BSB XO does A, but not B."*) Company command was lonely at times, because none of my fellow captains in my maneuver battalion were the same branch as me. But we still had a sense of camaraderie and recognized that we all played for the same team.

The Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group *(A logistician surrounded by EOD technicians)*

EOD technicians are still logisticians and can perform extremely well in that capacity. However, many EOD techs have told me they know considerably more about EOD operations than they do about sustainment planning, maintenance, or synchronizing and distributing classes of supply. As the sole non-EOD logistics major in an EOD group, I was alone among my peers (again).

I initially had trouble understanding the organization's unique challenges. I tried applying

familiar, standard Army logistics solutions to our ill structured problem sets...and was not successful. I struggled to transfer a brigade combat team's concept of sustainment (something I already knew well) over to a geographically dispersed EOD group with a huge catalog of unfamiliar equipment. I had to acknowledge and embrace the expertise of our EOD techs to solve our equipment challenges.

EOD companies are individually deployable, and typically request to order or purchase specialized equipment prior to their missions. I wanted to support our hardworking EOD techs while remaining a good steward of resources. I did not know enough about EOD operations to distinguish an item that provided real capability from an item that was only requested because it was purchased previously (or, in a few fringe cases, was an item that simply "looked cool").

I had to build a coalition. Thanks to the integral participation of EOD techs from within the group headquarters, my section developed a process - one far more efficient than any we had done historically - to provide our EOD companies with validated and sustainable gear well in advance of their missions. My team and I never could have done this without leveraging the expertise all around us.

The Army Management Staff College *(An officer surrounded by Army Civilians)*

I currently teach at AMSC's Department of Enterprise Leadership, where we prepare Army Civilians (in the grade of GS13 - 15, or equivalent) to lead and manage large organizations. This position is branch immaterial, but I am one of the only Soldiers among the faculty. My civilian co-facilitators are considerably more seasoned and experienced than me, many of whom are working toward their second retirement. My students are exclusively civilians, and most of them also have more years of service than I do.

Once again, I am the outsider. I humbly submit that I provide a valuable perspective of the Army for my students, some of whom have never been in uniform. They are typically curious about counseling, empowerment, and developing leaders. I am happy to share my experiences, which often differ greatly from what they have seen as civilians.

The Bottom Line

Show your worth, earn trust, and be value added. If you are an active participant in the organization and can prove yourself to be an asset, you will gain credibility. The more credit you earn, the more trust you will accrue, and the more your voice will be heard. Once your voice is heard and your expertise is actively sought, you can make greater and greater contributions to the organization.

Avoid your own jargon but learn theirs. I know a lot of logisticians who struggle with this. Many of us like to brief maneuver commanders in terms of pallets and gallons. We should strive to speak *their* language: in terms of operational reach and battlefield effects. When you are an outsider, the supported commander is interested to know how your capabilities can support his or her intent. Instead of, “Sir/Ma’am, we’re going to resupply you with 30,000 gallons of Class III(Bulk) and six flatracks of combat configured loads of Class V,” try: “Sir/Ma’am, at this point we’ll provide enough fuel and ammo for six hours of offensive operations. We anticipate providing your next resupply upon reaching Phase Line Bravo.” See the difference?

Love the one you’re with - but be an advocate for your home team. You might be the lone logistician (or engineer, or fire support officer, or chemical officer, and so on), but you are an ambassador. As the outsider, you represent the rest of your branch to the external organization you are supporting. How well do you know your own doctrine? Are you a master of your craft? How well do you know the doctrine of the unit you are supporting, so you can be a force multiplier upon your arrival? What perceptions will the supported unit

gather about your branch, or about the organization you were “sliced” from?

Finally, if outsiders are coming to *your* unit, don’t treat them like some unwanted stray animal. Treat them like special guests. Outsiders, attachments, and enablers bring unique perspective, expertise, and capabilities to your team. Will you accept and embrace them, and everything they are offering to help support the fight? As David W. Dunphy wrote in *The Iron Major Survival Guide* (p. 62), “Here’s the bottom line: taking care of Soldiers is a universal responsibility, regardless of whether they’re yours or not.”

Major Ryan Cornell-d’Echert is an Army Logistics officer with three deployments and nearly 14 years of active duty experience. He has previously been stationed at Fort Bliss, Fort Drum, Fort Lee, and Fort Carson. He currently serves as a facilitator within AMSC’s Department of Enterprise Leadership at Fort Leavenworth, KS. He is the author of [Facilitating Leader Professional Development in Your Unit](#), [You and Your NCO](#), [The Brigade S4 Survival Guide](#), and [Genuine Leadership](#). He has an MS in Adult Learning and Leadership from Kansas State University, and a BA in English from the University of Delaware. He enjoys spending time with his lovely wife, good beer, cruel and unusual workouts, first-person shooters, and cinema studies.

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