



By James Brasher

You have been waiting for months and, finally, the Centralized Selection List (CSL) results are published. You have been wondering which brigade you are going to assume responsibility for. You open up the CSL, see your name, and the brigade you are assigned is...a garrison. How you react is proportional to how well you managed your expectations. Nevertheless, you are about to have a rewarding experience.

In a way, you have always been a part of the garrison, just as a customer. Any time you went through the gate to enter post, sent in a work order, or qualified on a range, you were accessing garrison services. You now have the opportunity to fix some of the things that drive you crazy about how the garrison functions. The intent here is not to tell you what a garrison does. That will be explained to you later in no small amount of detail. Instead, I would like to offer some insight as to how you can approach leadership as you prepare for your assignment.

It is always a good thing to be placed into a leadership role. As [Caesar](#) once said of a small Iberian village he was passing through, "I had rather be the first man among these fellows

than the second man in Rome.” As a garrison CSM, you will lead in a way that goes beyond your experience. You were not necessarily chosen as a garrison CSM based upon your assignment history. Rather, you were chosen based upon your demonstrated ability to lead. The unique nature of the garrison will create leadership challenges as you take responsibility as its CSM.

Civilians

You and your commander may be the only military personnel in your garrison. You will lead a primarily civilian workforce and have the authority to direct that workforce. As the garrison CSM, you will have to communicate your commander’s intent and direct processes to a depth that other CSMs at your level are not required to do. This is an aspect of leading civilians. Your civilian employees are highly skilled in often narrow functional areas. It will be your job to bring those functional areas together to accomplish your garrison’s mission. This can be challenging, especially if you are helping your commander drive change.

If one can point to a positive consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that it reasserted the commander’s authority in the garrison. When the crisis hit, everyone looked to the garrison leadership for answers. As garrison leaders led, they also implemented necessary changes to nominalize how things were done. It is imperative that garrison leaders seize this opportunity to drive change; not just as a response to the pandemic, but as a way to improve how the garrison delivers its services. As the garrison CSM, you will be fundamental in this. You must communicate your garrison’s priorities down to the individual employee. How you communicate must be clear and concise so that the message sticks.

As you communicate with your employees, they will come to see you as a resource for them to leverage. When they have issues with customers, they should feel free to contact you to help address those issues. However, they will not feel comfortable approaching you at first; you have to convey your willingness to help and quickly earn their trust. In many cases, they may not want to “get someone in trouble.” In truth, that is exactly why they should call you for help.

Tenant Units

Your garrison is your unit. The installation is the real estate that the Army community sits upon. The units on your installation are all customers for garrison services. That is true of a small chemical company tucked away somewhere on post all the way to a division’s headquarters. There are no inherently unique requirements from any organization that requires your garrison to provide that organization with services that are above baseline.

Why highlight this? It is important that you understand this as you communicate to unit leaders from across the installation.

Your primary touchpoint to the tenant units on your installation will be your peer CSMs across the installation. Likewise, you must be their single touchpoint for garrison services when they are having issues. As such, you must understand the functions of the garrison to communicate effectively. Your peers will all say that the garrison CSM is a job they would never want in a million years. On the other hand, they will be happy to tell you how to do it. You must develop a relationship with these peers in order to understand their requirements and for them to understand the garrison's capabilities. Always be willing to help any unit that requires assistance. In many cases, you will be able to help them out. In some cases, the issue they have is with a service that the garrison does not provide, like the CIF. Help them anyway. Do not be afraid to tell those units that the garrison cannot do something that the garrison is not resourced to do. This is not an aspect of not being a team player. As you develop a relationship with the other CSMs on your installation, they will understand where you fit on the team, and that you are just as constrained as they often are.

The Installation

As the garrison CSM, you will notice things that you never noticed before. More importantly, you will be able to act on your observations. Remember that the installation is where people live and work. You must get out and see the installation. Talk with your employees. Talk with Soldiers you see utilizing garrison services. Check on how AAFES is doing business. Make sure the vegetables are not all rotten in the commissary. It is no different than a first sergeant walking through the company area and interacting with Soldiers, only the scope and scale is different.

Doing something new after so many years can seem daunting. Once you get there and take on the role as a garrison CSM, you will find that leadership transcends the environment in which it is applied. Like any other unit, your garrison needs its CSM to be active and enthusiastic. You know how to lead; you have been doing it for years. Now, you get to do it here.

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