



By Jay Miseli

I'm a bit more than 2 years removed from command of a brigade filled with exceptional leaders across the formation - competent and committed men and women who worked extraordinarily hard to achieve my stated vision for the organization. Following brigade command, I deployed to Afghanistan as an operations officer for a year. From Afghanistan, I spent another year as a senior operations officer stateside.

In both operations positions, like my command tenure, I had incredibly talented teams working diligently and professionally to accomplish our responsibilities. I'm quite blessed that this pattern has existed throughout my career, in every position and at every echelon of the US Army. From my time as a platoon leader to HQDA staff, unit command, and a Corps

G3, I've worked with talented, hard working, caring, committed, and competent Soldiers, Leaders, and Civilians to accomplish anything I asked.

Somewhere in the past four years, though, I lost my way. I was, by most standards, continuing on a successful arc in my career. But knowing now what I do, I made two egregious mistakes.

First, I became an achiever, and in my own hindsight and self-assessment, I did so at the expense of being a leader. I got (and still get) things done, but I lost my direction in what I love most about serving in the Army - leading and developing others. I had become formulaic and mechanical in my approach - pulling levers and posturing personnel to achieve short term outcomes and growth through their hard work and experience for future service. And it worked...quite well. The approach continued to develop, through challenging work in my organizations, leaders for their subsequent service. In return, the hard work and accomplishment allowed me to posture qualified leaders for promotion or selection while also achieving the next result or outcome in the short term.

Second, I let a dangerous false narrative take hold of my life. I think this may be part of the why behind the first (and more egregious?) mistake. And shaking this narrative is proving to be incredibly difficult for me as I stare this misguided set of beliefs in the face and seek to change my beliefs and behavior.

I let the completely false narrative *that I am so (or too) busy* become a belief. **I chose to believe and follow this narrative - adherence to this belief is squarely on me, as an individual responsibility.** I've heard that statement countless times in my career, and I still hear it from others (and in my mind) almost daily. Spoken long enough, beliefs become behaviors. My change in behavior manifested as a pattern of engaging family, friends, and fellow service members in a staccato manner - short, to the point, done and gone

engagements. They say it's lonely at the top, and this sense of detachment, as I ran from requirement to requirement - one thing right after another - certainly isolated me from people on the personal and professional sides of my life.

Time blocking and compressed engagements seemed like tools to untangle myself from this busyness and make additional opportunities to commit time against myriad requirements. Instead, they became pry points for rapidly entering into, then quickly exiting, the current engagement so I could posture and shift to the next thing on the agenda. I heard and believed the narrative that I was *too busy* for deep, interpersonal engagements, so I cut to the chase, knocked out whatever requirement was at hand, and got on to the next task. Calls, conversations, and meetings felt forced because, simply, they were. They were not forced as in contrived or uncomfortable - I consider myself a gregarious person who truly enjoys interacting with other people. Rather, my engagements were forced, meaning hurried and unnatural, because they lacked the flow and connection of a true dialog.

My engagements, across the breadth of my life, had become transactional in nature and utilitarian in value. Under this false narrative, I truly believed that the people in and across my life were special and valued, but I completely and utterly falsely believed that the pittance of time I spared for them was a demonstration of the value of the relationship. Imagine if every engagement in your life ended with a comment like "I hope you appreciate the time I allotted you from my own busy life." Through the lenses of hindsight, introspection, and reflection, I now recognize that I carried that thought in my mind and belief in my heart for entirely too many years. I shudder to think how many people I have hurt along the way with a casual, and brutally utilitarian, dismissiveness under the guise of getting things done in my *too busy* life.

So my lesson is this - yes, I am busy. We all are. There's plenty going on in our lives, personally and professionally. But my change in perspective, which I am endeavoring to manifest as a new set of beliefs and corresponding behaviors, is this: while we are indeed

busy, we aren't too busy to invest heavily, deeply, and personally in the relationships in our lives. I am thankful that I've learned this lesson now, while I have time to seek to change my beliefs and behavior, as much as I wish I had learned it earlier in my life.

The following quotes, from [What Got You Here Won't Get You There: How Successful People Become Even More Successful!](#) illuminate my struggle and contextualizes the leadership failure my dismissive attitude and behavior represents. I am incredibly sorry for those I have hurt, and truly hope this short writing and admission of my failure can help others avoid this false narrative trap. **You are never too busy to engage with and invest in the people in your life - family, friends, and teammates alike - at the interpersonal level that makes the human experience so rewarding.** You cannot establish or measure the value of the time you "give" - you can't make it "quality time" for the receiver. All you can do is offer up the time you have available and seek to make it meaningful. What you do with your time is the one true way to show someone that they matter.

I wish I had read this book years ago. It is an excellent tool for reflecting on one's achievements and success, and how the methods we used to achieve that success are applicable, or not, in our future endeavors. In part, my accomplishments were based on, ironically enough, a level of energy and engagement as a young officer that I now realize was the "busyness" narrative emerging in my life before it started to be explicitly articulated by others. I think a read of this book before battalion-level command, and at some point afterwards, would have helped me immensely to calibrate myself in many ways, by driving critical self-analysis and reflection.

"Our personal stereotyping may have its origins in stories that have been repeated for years—often from as far back as childhood. These stories may have no basis in fact. But they imprint themselves in our brains, and establish low expectations that become self-fulfilling prophecies. We behave as if we wanted to prove that our negative expectations were correct."

“The solution is simple, but not easy. You have to step back, take a breath, and look. And survey the conditions that are making you obsessed with the wrong goals...Ask yourself: When are you under time pressure? Or in a hurry? Or doing something that you have been told is important? Or have people depending upon you?”

Jay Miseli is an active duty officer with 26 years of service from platoon to HQ, Department of the Army staff. His key experiences include commanding tank and HQ companies, a cavalry squadron, and an SBCT and serving as senior operations officer for both US Forces-Afghanistan and I Corps.

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