



by Tom Dull and Matthew Schardt

It is the middle of the night and the Brigade is on schedule to uncoil and maneuver into the vast training area of the National Training Center (NTC) in just a few hours. Two Army Field Grades, Majors, are conducting one last condition check as the night battle staff works around them in the Brigade Tactical Operation Center. They are preparing for the imminent operation and reviewing Friendly Forces Information Requirements (FFIR) such as ensuring the sustainment, fires, and collection assets in place for the next transition.

As they conduct their final combat checks, it is evident that these two officers' have a collective shared understanding of the mission and a strong trust in one another as they prepare to maneuver the Brigade into battle. This sense of common understanding is not simply founded on their tactical or technical acuteness but rather from a collective trust in one another to fight right and spearhead the reputation of the Brigade; for the past eight months they have listened and learned from one another and now prepare to lead their Commander's intent over the next ten days of battle. This mutual trust in one another was not something that just happened overnight but rather was built over time and through a deliberate goal to work together in all areas to steward the unit's operations.

The method that built their comradery and solidarity isn't a great revelation but rather a

simple and deliberate practice of utilizing one of the [Army's Principles of Mission Command](#) (Army Doctrine Publication 6-0) and intentionally seeking Shared Understanding with one another.

Whether at the Battalion or Brigade, Field Grades - specifically the Executive Officer and Operations Officer - need to come together to effectively operate their respective units.

A way to establish an efficient relationship between the two Field Grades is to methodically acquire shared understanding between them.

"Shared understanding... allows units to operate effectively." Army Doctrine Publication 6-0

Gain **Shared Understanding**. Tangibly seek it out. Regardless of how the headquarters is physically set up, the two Field Grades should co-locate. Distant offices from one another lose effectiveness and deter efficiency. Whether side-by-side offices or taking over a larger room and sharing an office, the two Field Grades should be in proximity of one another. This will quickly assist in synchronization across the staff and efficiently build shared understanding between the two field grades.

Maintain **Shared Understanding**. As much as possible, attend each other's chaired meetings. The Executive Officer can attend the Operations Officer's S3 Sync, Training Meeting, or Commander's Update Assessment. The Operations Officer can attend the Executive Officer's XO Huddles and Unit Status Report. The one Officer may have one ear in the meeting and thinking about the next transition, but collectively the two Field Grades will maintain a relative knowledge of their unit's environment.

Sustain **Shared Understanding**. When possible, meet in the morning. Before physical fitness, while conducting physical fitness, or right after physical fitness. No need for the whole staff to join, just these two field grades. Confirm tasks for the day, identify due outs, look for solutions and check in on one another (to include family and health); simply stated, be a great teammate.

Build a friendship forged through shared hardship. Back each other up, fight together, and keep each other accountable. Finally, finish the day with team reflection. What did we do? What could we have done differently? Where can we improve? Collaborate - seek conversations and ideas that improve the unit effectiveness.

The humble pursuit of building shared understanding will likely deliver a formidable level of trust between the two officers. Trust that will matter most on the battlefield and in future

operations.

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