by Aaron "Butch" Pucetas

The Army's current rewards system is mostly top-down, leader-driven, and formal in nature. If a Soldier excels in an event or area, their supervisor recommends them for a reward and it is processed through the chain of command. Once verified and approved by the chain of command, the Soldier is rewarded with time off, recognition at a unit formation, and/or an award that improves their performance file. In this rewards system, it is up to the supervisor to witness the exemplary behavior and initiate the process. Then the chain of command must verify and approve the reward. Furthermore, the accounting of the rewards is left to the unit. Command teams and their public affairs professionals must mine unit newsletters, S1 files/systems, and other data sources to paint a picture of how many "good things" happened in the unit over a given quarter or year.

By adopting a standardized peer-to-peer rewards program, similar to those at JetBlue and Southwest Airlines, the Army can improve Soldier engagement, reinforce its values, promote a positive workplace environment, and increase cohesion within its teams. The PIP

makes Soldiers more engaged because it empowers them with a more active role in the rewards process; a peer may witness any positive behavior on any given day and submit a nomination through a responsive, transparent, and user-friendly format.

This makes team members more aware of each other's contributions and focuses them on performing well not just for the sake of the supervisor or chain of command, but for the good of the team. A reward nomination from a peer is arguably more powerful than one from a supervisor or other member of the chain of command because it is not required. The peer-to-peer bond becomes more cohesive because the nominee sees that their peers acknowledge their contributions and want to reward them for it; demonstrating care and gratitude.

A standardized peer-to-peer rewards program can also be used to aggregate data and show how many "good things" happened in the Army in a given quarter or year; serving as a powerful narrative in the fight against harmful behaviors. Army Senior Leaders can use the data to tell the Army's story to the American people. The Army must not be defined by the recent negative press it has received; there are thousands of Soldiers who do extraordinary things and deserve the spotlight.

In practice, the peer rewards program (coined "**PIP**"-**P**eer **I**nformal rewards **P**rogram) is an app, Google form, spreadsheet, or any other simple technology where a Soldier can nominate another Soldier for a good thing. The recommender goes to the medium (by QR code, Google Drive link, etc.) and inputs the recipient's name, selects a category for the action, types in a short sentence of the action, and submits it to the approving officials. The medium should be transparent, allowing all Soldiers in an organization to view all nominations and approvals. Although there are arguably many categories for activities, I believe that using the Army's leader attributes and competencies (Character, Presence, Intellect, Leads, Develops, Achieves) would be most practical. For example, if a Soldier cooks a meal for another Soldier (who endured a recent loss in their family), the recommender would pick "Character" as an applicable category.

In order to differentiate and complement the current top-down/command-centric rewards system, PIP should be managed by a board of individuals across the unit, determined in consultation with the unit chain of command. This board should also include the unit's EO and SHARP representatives, since the nominations may shed light on the unit's culture and climate. For example, a sample Battalion PIP management board could be: one E1-E4 representative, one E5-E7 representative, one E8-E9 representative, one O1-O2 representative, one O3-O4 representative, EO representative, and SHARP representative. For each PIP nomination, the board verifies the action and recommends a reward through

voting (each member gets one vote). The rewards are developed in consultation with the unit's command team.

Due to the Army's requirement of command approval when it comes to certain rewards (specifically, Army Awards), the board's reward recommendation should be given ample consideration. However, If the unit command team disapproves the board's reward recommendation, the next higher command team could provide a second review of the recommendation for a final decision. This check and balance should give the board some level of power while also fairly considering the Army's hierarchical norms.

To ease the manpower burden of the PIP board, units can rotate out board members on a monthly or quarterly basis. This rotation of members would expose more unit personnel to the board process and improve buy-in of the peer rewards program. It could also serve as a professional development tool for junior Soldiers, NCOs, and officers.

Perhaps most importantly, the PIP board performs a vital gatekeeping function to ensure the peer rewards program is not abused or adversely influenced. For example, a nominated Soldier may appear repeatedly throughout the year for the same activity from the same recommender. The board could investigate this possible abuse of the program and address it with the recommender to prevent "gaming the system."

Some minor policy changes must take place to fully operationalize the PIP concept. Ideally, the approved PIP rewards should be reflected on the Soldier's ERB/ORB. For example, if a Soldier received a reward from a PIP nomination, their ERB/ORB should depict "PIP-1". This will maintain an official record of a Soldier's PIP achievements and portray a more detailed picture for promotion boards, Soldier of the Month boards, or other venues. Adding the PIP onto the ERB/ORB may require minor changes to AR 600-8-22, AR 600-8-104, and DA PAM 600-8. Alternatively, Army Senior Leaders may issue an HQDA EXORD, Policy Letter, or Directive to accomplish this minor change to the Army's awards and personnel file policies.

AR 600-8-22 allows commanders the option to use Award and Decoration Boards to advise them on appropriate levels of recognition. If the PIP is approved for Army-wide implementation,  a standalone paragraph in AR 600-8-22 to describe the PIP and how it complements the Army's current awards process is likely required. This may be alternatively accomplished through an HQDA EXORD, Policy Letter, or Directive until the decision is made to change the regulation.

Some may discard the PIP as an additional burden on units- another program that has to be managed, tracked, and briefed. But survey data proves that employees, especially those

aged 18 to 34, care deeply about peer recognition, and peer rewards programs have helped improve employee engagement and fulfillment. Whenever a peer extends gratitude, the positive effect is arguably more powerful because they are not required to do so. Ultimately, this program should bring our teams closer together and help us focus on all the good things happening across the Army because they are worth acknowledging, celebrating, and documenting.

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