

ATSS-MH (870)

MEMORANDUM FOR Commandant, United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas 79918-8002

SUBJECT: Access Agreement for Personal Experience Papers

1. I, Vincent B. Brantley, have submitted a Personal Experience Paper to the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy archives regarding events and experiences from my participation in the US Army that may be of historical significance to the United States Army and the Noncommissioned Officer Corps.

2. I understand the manuscript and attached documents will be accessioned into the historical holdings of the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy archives and will belong to the United States Government to be used in any manner deemed in the best interests of the United States Army as determined by the Chief of Military History or his representative. I also understand that I may retain a copy for my own use subject to classification restrictions.


3. I hereby expressly and voluntarily relinquish all rights and interest in the paper to the United States Army with the following caveat/exception:

None
 Other:

I understand that the information in this paper may be subject to the Freedom of Information Act, and therefore, may be releasable to the public contrary to my wishes. I further understand that, within the limits of the law, the United States Army will attempt to honor the restrictions I have requested to be placed on this material.

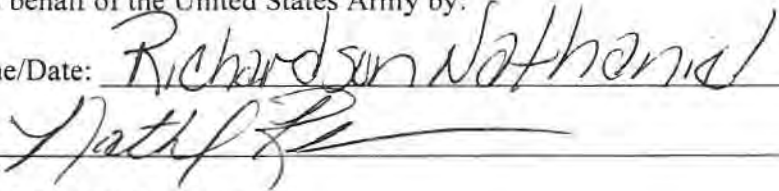
Date: 12 Aug 10

Printed Name: Vincent B. Brantley

Signature: 

Accepted on behalf of the United States Army by:

Printed Name/Date: Richardson Nathaniel

Signature: 

USASMA FORM 7273-R, APR 06

Changing the CMF for the Future

SGM Vincent B. Brantley Sr.

United States Army Sergeant Major Academy

SMNRC 35 Phase II

29 July 2010

UNCLASSIFIED

Abstract

This narrative discusses the experiences, challenges, and obstacles I encountered while trying to unify the goals, professional development strategy, and progression model for the 35Y/L MOS while serving as the Senior Enlisted Advisor, Career Management Field Advisor and G9 SGM for a Brigade Staff. Although over 50% of the Unit's 35Y/L personnel were assigned to subordinate unit Commanders, I assumed that my position and title would empower me to achieve success. I was wrong. Ultimately, I was forced to engage in a decisive and deliberate plan to win others over to achieve a solution that everyone agreed on in concept, but resisted in execution.

As the incoming CMF advisor for an over taxed occupational specialty that was dying on the vine, my first priority was to unify the force, restore its strength in numbers and depth of experience. The wear and tear of the workload and lack of upward mobility had caused the force to erode, and attrition had deprived the field of its future subject matter experts and leaders. Every prediction indicated that, unless change was implemented, the force would be at mission failure within the next three to five years. I immediately began devising a plan to get the CMF healthy, but it would require the entire Unit's effort to accomplish. All at once, every leader rallied to support the cause. Everyone wanted the same thing and seemed to be on one accord. I was encouraged and felt empowered to get lead this effort to completion. It was the quiet before the storm and in those final moments that I began to recognize the hidden agendas.

It wasn't long before I realized that I was about to undertake the most challenging management task of my military career based on a plan and a need that all parties agreed on. This paper will discuss the four challenges I encountered during my effort to bring this plan from concept to fruition and the valuable lessons I learned during this experience. My first challenge was to get the concept off the drafting board and onto the battlefield. My second challenge was to remain flexible while managing the variables. My third challenge was to understand and alter perceptions that were counterintuitive to the cause. But ultimately, the final and most enduring challenge was to see it through.

While my plan resided on the drawing board it was both supportable and acceptable. Subordinate leaders would request minor changes and offer additional

considerations, but nothing that would resemble direct contrast in the least. Planning doesn't cost anyone anything and everyone was comfortable with that. But when I began passing the hat around asking for investments, leaders began listing all the reasons why not. It seemed as if everyone to get something new, but no one wanted to change in order to get it. I realized that there would never be a 100% solution. I was going to have to test my theories and make improvements to the plan during the execution. Flags began to surface. Leaders were beginning to say that they didn't agree to all of the terms, but there was no way to get everyone to agree to everything. I began creating my own measures to ensure compliance and making controversial decisions to grant the control I needed to truly manage the field. I was not making friends; I was making progress.

I maintained a firm grip on the process, but I knew that I had to remain flexible than firm so that I could anticipate and compensate for variables. Based on timing, people/personalities and situational factors, I would either push harder or pull back on the implementation of the plan. Subordinate leaders interpreted my awareness of these factors and willingness to compromise as fairness. Firm, but fair was an enabling strategy that proved noteworthy and paid dividends at times when I needed it most.

At times, the advantage of being seen as fair helped me to get on the other side of the opposition. But in most cases, I simply had to listen. No matter how many times I heard the same complaint or concern, I always listened for what my adversaries valued most. Such insight allowed me to stay ahead of their arguments, anticipate their needs, and offer valid solutions to problems that had yet to discover or address. This act gave

subordinate leaders the impression that I was working for them and that wasn't far from the truth, for as long as they weren't solely working for themselves.

At the end of the day, my most enduring challenge was simply seeing the plan through. There were so many occasions where the plan would have been sidetracked or laid stagnant had not I been vigilant and resolved to press onward. I endured several setbacks and was often called back to the drawing board to make revisions, but with every turn, I continually pressed forward. I achieved my goal, but the process of attaining that goal was just as rewarding. I learned how to conduct fact-finding research and present ideas with the audience in mind. I learned the importance of involving subordinate leaders in your development of COAs that will require or involve their resources or support. I learned the necessity of documenting everything as both a defensive and offensive strategy. Most importantly, I learned that you can never afford to sacrifice opportunity or momentum for change when you have it.

In conclusion, I was able to overcome adversity and implement a change to the hiring, development, and retention strategies and processes for my CMF that will endure and continue to benefit my organization long after I am gone. I got the concept off the drafting board, was flexible while managing the variables, did my best to understand the needs and perceptions of others and saw it through. But if I have given this effort a measure of the benefit that it has given me, then I have truly done my job as a leader.