



**STRATEGY  
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**TRANSFORMING ARMY LEADERSHIP – THE KEY TO  
OFFICER RETENTION**

**BY**

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**Transforming Army Leadership—The Key to Officer Retention**

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## ABSTRACT

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Army leaders of the twenty-first century will operate in a high OPTEMPO environment, with ever increasing military requirements and competing civilian demands for quality military officers. The new millennium will require numerous deployments involving a shrinking active duty force. These deployments and increased OPTEMPO requirements will continue to impact upon the Army's ability to retain high-quality junior officers. It is time to examine the role of the senior officer in solving the complex problem of officer retention. Personal leadership, which results in developing the leadership skills of junior officers while continuing to focus on time-honored traditions, is the key to retention. To insure success, transforming and updating leadership skills and senior officer command involvement in creating a positive command climate is a must.

Much has been written on the problems of junior officer retention, and this paper will summarize those issues. However, this paper will analyze the relationship between junior and senior officers as the key to officer retention, focus on the reasons why many officers continue to make the military a career, and finally address the question of senior officer accountability in regards to junior officer retention and development.



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## TRANSFORMING ARMY LEADERSHIP-THE KEY TO OFFICER RETENTION

If we as senior leaders do not take action now to turn this around, we may not be able to meet our future requirements.

— LTG Maude

The attrition rate of junior officers, captains in particular, now hovers around 11 percent, compared to the rate of 6 percent considered acceptable just a few years ago.<sup>1</sup> Unless some dramatic changes are undertaken at the Department of the Army, installation and unit levels, the Army will not be able to maintain required staffing levels and America's soldiers will be lacking the leadership that they deserve.

America's Army is currently involved in an unprecedented OPTEMPO environment that could not be envisioned during the Cold War. During the years of the Cold War, the Active Army Component numbered over 780 thousand soldiers and those soldiers were part of a force that was forward-based and focused on the Soviet threat. Since the demise of the Soviet Union, however, American forces are predominately CONUS based and are frequently deployed. In fact, deployments have increased exponentially since 1990, while the active forces have decreased to a current level of approximately 480 thousand soldiers.

While the sizes of the forces and missions have changed during the past few years, the Army's leadership has not changed with the times. Numerous Army leaders still employ the same type of leadership styles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that leaders were using during the days of conscription. These types of leadership styles must change in order for any organization, either military or civilian, to achieve success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The old top-down method of management fosters layers of bureaucracy that kill motivation. The old style of management often used fear as a motivator. The new vision takes a radically different view of human nature. It recognizes that most people have tremendous levels of enthusiasm and energy and naturally want to contribute to something they feel is important. To tap that incredible energy, leaders must give people the authority to eliminate the obstacles they face. The new leader must be able to persuade them to invest wholeheartedly in the mission, through his or her vision and actions.<sup>2</sup>

This paper examines the type of leadership styles that will be successful in the Army of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In order to accomplish this task, this paper will touch on some of the reasons behind the high levels of officer attrition facing today's Army. These reasons are grouped into those that are the result of higher Army policies and those that result from the policies and procedures at the local command level. The final objective of this paper is to inform battalion and brigade level commanders of the steps necessary to retain sufficient quality officers in spite of the factors which are continuing to increase the levels of attrition faced by the officer corps in the past three years.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **DEFINITIONS OF LEADERSHIP**

The purpose of examining the definitions of leadership terms and theories is to establish a framework for understanding the concept of leadership. The studies of the evolution of various definitions of leadership offer present day leaders insight into their roles as the organizational leader. Knowledge gained through this historical analysis of leadership enables the present day leaders the opportunities to learn from past leaders, both military and civilian.

The use of the word 'leader' appeared in some English dictionaries around the turn of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> This definition of leader remained almost unchanged until in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century when the term 'commander' was associated with the definition of leader. Samuel Johnson's 1755 dictionary defined lead as "to guide by the hand; to conduct to any place; to conduct as to the head or commander; to introduce by going first."<sup>4</sup> Most definitions of leadership during this time were similar to that of Johnson's definition.

Definitions of leadership continued to undergo a metamorphosis during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century to coincide with evolving theories of leadership. Most major dictionaries of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century now define leadership as "the office of a leader; guidance; control." These same publications also introduce the concepts of a position or status.<sup>5</sup> One of the most published definitions of leadership is that offered by John P. Kotter, a Harvard business professor. Kotter defines leadership as "the process of

moving a group or groups in some direction through mostly non-coercive means.”<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that Kotter includes in his definition the lack of coercion on the part of the leader toward those being led. This is in contrast to many of the earlier definitions of leadership that did not address the methods of motivation or coercion that could be used by the leader.

The problem with all of these various definitions of leadership is that we have found throughout our nation’s history leaders who have been highly successful and those leaders who have been unsuccessful. Kotter’s writings also note the successes and failures of leaders by further defining successful leadership.

It is leadership that can build support networks not only with subordinates and customers, but also with superiors and peers. It is a leadership that knows not only how to compete, but also how to cooperate. It is a leadership that, perhaps most of all, is *broad* in its vision and in its popular support. It is broad and general in a modern world that tends to create the narrow and the specialized.<sup>7</sup>

This definition of leadership touches on one of the most important of aspects of leadership required in all successful military leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century...Cooperation!

Another renowned authority on leadership is John C. Rost, Director of the University of San Diego’s doctoral program on leadership. In his book, Leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Professor Rost proposes “Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes.”<sup>8</sup> This definition of leadership, which takes into account the purposes of the leader and the followers, is very similar to the definition of leadership by cooperation proposed by Kotter. Rost also defines successful leadership in a manner similar to that of Kotter. “Successful leadership is great men and women with certain preferred traits influencing followers to do what the leaders want in order to achieve group/organizational goals that reflect excellence as some kind of higher-level effectiveness.”<sup>9</sup> While these definitions of leadership make no mention of military leaders as did earlier definitions, the success of both the military and civilian leaders are intertwined amongst their leadership abilities and their management skills.

## LEADERSHIP VERSUS MANAGEMENT

Much has been written on management versus leadership. Some military leaders think of themselves as only fulfilling a leadership role while others think of themselves

as managers of personnel. However, successful military leadership requires both the skills and influence of a leader as defined above and the managerial skills to implement the changes in the organization that result from a change in the organization's leadership. The terms of manager and leader are often used interchangeably, but they have significantly different functions within an organization. The following humorous statement clearly identifies both the leadership and managerial skills inherent in the same organizational leader. "When Noah heard the weather forecast he ordered the building of the ark, that was Leadership. Then when he looked around and said, 'Make sure the elephants don't see what the rabbits are up to,' that was Management."<sup>10</sup>

This humorous yet simple statement clearly defines the differences between leadership and management. The leader is the person within the organization who has the vision of where he or she wants to take the organization in the future. Furthermore, it is the leader's role to portray that vision to the other personnel within the organization in order to gain the synergistic effect of everyone working toward the common goal. The manager, on the other hand, should have the strategies, personnel skills, and mechanisms to implement the vision of the organization's leader.

The relationship between leaders and managers within an organization is complementary in nature. "Almost every great enterprise was founded by a leader, not a manager. But almost every great enterprise that lives past its founder is then taken over by a manager."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, with today's organizations becoming increasingly smaller due to downsizing, managers and leaders within successful organizations often assume the same role. The clear message is that both managerial skills and leadership skills are vital to a successful leader. The leader must assume the roles of both the manager and leader in order to achieve success in the competitive world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As previously mentioned, downsizing is having a major impact on both civilian and military organizations as they compete for quality personnel in the next century. In order to remain competitive, military leaders must personalize their leadership styles as they seek to retain the services of quality junior officers. Unless senior leaders make the necessary leadership changes required in the competitive economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many highly qualified junior officers will continue to depart the service in ever-increasing numbers.

## LEADERSHIP CHANGES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

The generation of young people entering the work force has many differing beliefs and desires from those of the Baby Boomer generation. Workers want to be involved and have their opinions heard as long as they are in the organization. The old paternalistic security must be replaced with a sense of control: "I now have control over my life because I am influential in the decisions that are made around me." This demand to participate will also grow as the new workforce grows increasingly diverse. The participation mandate is already exerting great pressure on authoritarian structures to open up access to governance and opportunity.<sup>12</sup>

In his published pamphlet, "Generations Apart: Xers and Boomers in the Officer Corps", Leonard Wong outlined the differences between the generation of senior officers (Boomers) and junior officers (Xers).

Xer captains, like their civilian counterparts, are yearning for balance in their lives. The job is still central, but they want family time and personal time too. They have watched their Boomer predecessors throw themselves into the profession, and they are now resetting the boundaries of what exactly it means to be in the Army.<sup>13</sup>

With this changing attitude toward work and increasing emphasis on family and personal values, senior leaders, both military and civilian, must use leadership techniques that differ significantly from those used on the Boomer generation. Present and future leaders, whether civilian or military, must remove themselves from the mindset of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and place emphasis on developing relationships with employees throughout the depth of the organization. According to leadership expert Patricia McLagan, "Leadership for the future is no longer a position located at the top of an organizational pyramid."<sup>14</sup>

### **Civilian Changes**

With this increasing emphasis on family and quality of life issues, senior leaders must possess the skills necessary to not only produce quality goods and services, but also retain employees, which allow the corporation to remain competitive in the economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Harvard leadership professor John Kotter outlined numerous qualities required of a successful leader in the competitive marketplace.

“Some of the requirements for effective leadership in senior management jobs in complex business settings: Strong interpersonal skills (ability to develop good working relationships quickly, empathy, ability to sell, sensitivity to people and human nature).”<sup>15</sup> This emphasis on interpersonal skills further emphasizes the necessity for the leader to possess both leadership skills and managerial skills.

Ross Perot, a successful business entrepreneur, believes that a lack of leadership is our nation’s biggest problem.<sup>16</sup> Without the interpersonal and communicative skills necessary to recruit, train, and retain quality young employees, many businesses will fail soon after opening their doors or web site. Another business leader, Mr. Wall, reiterated the comments of Mr. Perot and emphasized the need for communication skills in order to survive. “A leader with poor communication skills may have been able to survive in the top-down hierarchies of the past, but he or she will be an organizational albatross in the future.”<sup>17</sup> Some civilian firms, both of the new internet-based economy and of the 20<sup>th</sup> century economy, have realized the need for changes at the highest levels of their organization. These firms realize that leaders must be dependent on the lower ranking members of the organization in order to be successful. According to Stephen Covey, author of The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, “Dependent people need others to get what they want. Independent people can get what they want through their own effort. Interdependent people combine their own efforts with the efforts of others to achieve their greatest success.”<sup>18</sup>

## **Military Changes**

John Petersen, a noted futurist, predicts that,

The coming two decades hold exceptional opportunity and hazard. ... We will be able to take advantage of the opportunities and sidestep the minefields only if we understand, in broad terms, what this era is about, learn how to think differently, and become aware of the major forces that are driving the change.<sup>19</sup>

Just as civilian organizations must make change in order to remain profitable and competitive, military organizations must be willing to change as well. As previously mentioned, senior leaders must be aware that the junior officers and soldiers serving in the armed forces today may not be driven by the same motives to serve as the soldiers

in previous generations.<sup>20</sup> Senior military leaders must realize these generational differences in order to communicate effectively with the junior officer corps.

FM 22-100, dated August 1999, describes five types of leadership styles: direct, participating, delegating, transformational, and transactional.<sup>21</sup> These descriptions of leadership styles encompass most of the leader types present in the Army today. The manual also gives simplistic examples of appropriate application of the various leadership types. However, the manual fails to relate leadership styles to the section on command climate and culture. Leaders can create positive command climates by developing a more personal leadership style. Senior officers who remain removed from their subordinates will continue to have a communication problem with junior leaders.

## CURRENT LEADERSHIP SITUATION

Kotter described the current leadership climate of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as highly complex. "Simple conditions are not the norm any more. Complexity is the norm."<sup>22</sup> In this world of complexity, leaders can be overwhelmed as they attempt to run daily operations while simultaneously attempting to direct the organization toward the long-term goals established by the leader's vision. Leaders must take the time to develop their strategy and vision for the future. They must then take the time to persuade junior members of the organization to join them in their quest toward realizing the future of the organization. In this capacity, they must constantly communicate their vision to junior members of the organization using every available opportunity. This tireless effort on the part of the leader will be the greatest long-term benefit to the organization. As stated by McLagan,

It makes no sense to have a strategy that no one understands, commits to, or acts on. Interdependent communication has many benefits, including a strengthened connection between individual and organizational goals, a shared context for action throughout the organization, and increased confidence that leaders have really thought about and taken advice on the best direction for the company to follow. Confidence in leaders is an interesting by-product that occurs because people know that the company has a direction. They may not want to agree with it, but participative communication will enable them to understand what it is and why it exists.<sup>23</sup>

This description is that of a successful organization with a clear vision of the future. Unfortunately, many military senior leaders have failed to either develop a clear vision

for the future or have failed to communicate it effectively with their subordinates. Feelings of a "zero-defect" army are prevalent throughout the officer corps.<sup>24</sup>

## **Military Changes**

Many junior officers believe that the current leadership environment created by the senior leaders and trickled down to the lower ranks is one of micro-management and "zero-defects." Junior officers feel that the senior leaders of today's Army, those at the rank of LTC and above, have become a generation of micro-managers and leaders more concerned with their own careers than the needs of the service.<sup>25</sup>

In order to gain data for this report, I surveyed more than fifty junior officers, all of whom had departed the Army within the last two years. Their comments varied among individuals, but all respondents felt that there was a high degree of micro-management within their final assignments on active duty. One captain's comments summed up the comments of the entire group of officers when he wrote,

Senior leaders take too much responsibility and accountability from junior leaders. The trend is to declare and edict from above and then tell us 'how to do it.' Instead of just telling me what to do, senior leaders get involved in every detail. Edicts from higher disrupt life in the trenches because they neglect to take into account their effect on subordinate units and junior leader development. I still had a company to run while the only thing that staffs have to do is to think up more information requirements or more slides for a briefing.<sup>26</sup>

Another former company commander added, "Senior leaders just do not trust subordinate leaders to take care of daily business. I spend more time informing some staff officer on nebulous details than I spend commanding my company."<sup>27</sup>

Many civilian organizations face the identical leadership challenge identified above, the problem of micro-management or lack of junior manager development. While some firms continue to use the leadership hierarchy of the last century, some successful firms have seen the need to change their leadership style for the next century in order to remain competitive in employee retention. These successful firms have a clear vision of the future that cannot be realized without the synergistic effect of the entire organization working together toward a common goal.

## Civilian Changes

According to Robert Wall, "The new vision is based on communication, the free flow of ideas, and the reaching of full human potential. It puts people -- the employees and the customers -- first. In the new view, rigid organizational lines give way to flexible networks, and the questioning of old thinking is not only encouraged, it is expected."<sup>28</sup> This description of a profitable organization of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is void of the leadership pyramid that remains prevalent in many firms yet today. As firms continue to gain market share and compete on a global basis, senior executives are quickly learning that they will never realize the full potential of their company without the input from each and every member of their firm. Their vision of the future must become the vision of every member of the company. According to John Kotter,

The effective leadership of a project team located ten layers below the CEO in a large corporation and the effective leadership of the overall corporation by the CEO both seem to share some fundamentals in common: a good vision and strategy backed up by sufficient teamwork and motivation. At the CEO level, the vision and strategy will undoubtedly be much more complex, and the number of people from whom cooperation and motivation are needed may be orders of magnitude larger.<sup>29</sup>

Kotter continues to describe the current leadership situation of a successful organization.

The tendency to try to control everybody discourages the innovation and the motivation that seem to be so desperately needed in truly competitive environments. All of that eventually can lead to performance problems, which often only increase in size with the application of still more management. And under those circumstances, more and more management can even lead to unethical behavior on the part of people who are under great pressure to meet impossible financial objectives.<sup>30</sup>

Unless military organizations make the same transition toward participative leadership resulting in a positive command climate, junior officers will continue their exodus from the military in record numbers.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT SITUATION**

### **WHY OFFICERS DEPART THE SERVICE**

Numerous studies have been conducted on the reasons for junior officer attrition. While each of these studies varied in their population samples and specific target audiences, most of these surveys resulted in the same group of reasons given by junior leaders on their reasons for departing the service immediately following their first tour of duty, or upon completion of a company command assignment.<sup>31</sup> This paper will address each of the major reasons for officer attrition, and then focus on remedies at the Department of the Army, installation, and unit level to retain quality officers in spite of the numerous challenges existing today.

During my most recent tour of duty, I served as the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Inspector General. In that capacity, I had the unique opportunity to interview hundreds of junior officers as part of the command inspection program. During these sensing sessions, I asked each officer to express their visions of a future career, and expand on their reasons of dissatisfaction if their future plans included transition to a civilian career in the near future. The reasons that these approximately 225 junior officers gave for departing the service are summarized in Table 1.

### **Beyond the Unit Control**

The reason most frequently given for officer dissatisfaction was the level of operational tempo (OPTEMPO) or personnel tempo (PERSTEMPO) within various units. High OPTEMPO rates haven been addressed by senior Army officers and the Army has taken some steps toward solving this issue. However, OPTEMPO rates and PERSTEMPO rates often mask the real problem that lies within numerous units, that of predictability. During my interview of junior officers as part of command climate surveys, I learned that most officers understood that they would be asked to deploy to remote sites. Even though deployments increase their PERSTEMPO, junior officers feel the same sense of duty and responsibility that senior officers feel. However, they fail to understand why the Army's senior leadership cannot predict when deployments to these remote sites will occur. Compounding this problem was the frequent situation of

back-to-back deployments faced by officers arriving from short tours in Korea or deployments while serving in Europe. Even CONUS based units, with frequent Combat Training Center rotations that include months of preparation, are requiring officers to serve weeks and months away from their families. Finally, these same officers felt that commanders at the division, brigade and battalion level compounded the problem by adding various items to the training schedule when in home station. These "short notice" FTXs, training exercises, simulation exercises, and other events and taskings, resulted in extra time away from their families when these situations could have been avoided. In short, these officers understood the OPTEMPO requirements of real world missions, but they failed to understand the frequent short-notice changes to the training schedule caused by local commanders.

Another reason frequently listed by junior officers for early departure was the "zero defects" atmosphere created by the new officer evaluation reporting (OER) system. Under the old, albeit inflated, OER system, junior officers felt that one OER would not force a career decision upon them. Using their senior raters as examples, junior officers felt that the old system allowed all officers to remain competitive with their peer group throughout their careers. These officers realized that some officers were chosen over others for further promotion and higher levels of command, but they thought that the old system was both fair and successful in selecting their present battalion and brigade commanders. When asked about the new OER system, officers feel far less confident that the system will be fair to them throughout their careers. Numerous officers now think that a "Center of Mass" (COM) rating removes them from being competitive in future promotion and command selection boards. And if they sense that they are no longer competitive for promotion and/or command, they perceive that their careers will be limited. These feelings of mistrust toward the OER system were not predominate in every unit that I inspected, but each battalion had a number of officers who felt threatened by the OER system.

Finally, officers commented on the diminishing level of services available on Army posts on a worldwide basis. Most officers interviewed as part of the survey hypothesized that their families would suffer during periods of lengthy deployments. Junior officers believed that as the Army's budget continued to decrease, commanders

would be obligated to cut services in order to continue to train at a level acceptable to the senior leaders at the installation. Although willing to undergo personal hardships, many junior officers felt that services had already eroded to the point where the quality of their families' lives was negatively impacted by the lack of post support.

As an example, it is easy to point out the exponentially decreasing budgets of both the garrison commanders and the public works offices on any Army installation. On Fort Riley alone, the garrison budget has decreased by more than 50% over the last four years.<sup>32</sup> The age of military housing combined with the lack of proper and preventive maintenance has resulted in housing that is "substandard" when compared to housing occupied by counterparts of many junior officers upon departing the service. Officers are willing to make the personal sacrifices necessary to serve in the military, but as a whole they believe that the army is not prepared or willing to take proper care of their families in their absence.

### **Within the Unit Control**

The most significant reason that these officers gave for their dissatisfaction with the Army was the level of micro-management at the senior leader level. To these officers, senior leaders were those field grade officers, LTCs and above, located at the battalion and brigade levels. Their interaction with the division and installation staff was not an issue addressed by any interviewed officer. Many of these officers thought that field grade officers were so concerned with protection of their own careers, or so concerned with how their units "looked on paper," that they were unwilling to allow lieutenants and captains the freedom to lead their platoons or command their companies. The majority of officers perceived that they had little, if any, latitude in training their units. They felt that each item on the training schedule was a "graded" event, and that the leadership at battalion and brigade levels would not allow them the freedom to learn by making mistakes.<sup>33</sup> This level of micro-management not only included field operations, but recurring garrison operations as well. Junior officers felt that they were not given the latitude to exercise and develop their own unique leadership skills. This attitude was not prevalent in every unit, but existed in some form in almost every group of officers I interviewed as part of the command climate surveys.

Most lieutenants and captains believe that the senior leaders, those at the rank of LTC or above, are out of touch with the junior officers. While officers at the battalion and installation level foresaw the significant increase in junior officer attrition rates in the mid-1990s, officers at the Department of the Army level failed to see the significance of the increased attrition rates. One only has to note that even as late as 1998, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (DCSPER) failed to see the departure of junior officers from the Army as a reason for concern. According to the Washington Post, "ODCSPER analysts confirm that officer retention is down slightly for all grades except lieutenant and major. However, the downturn in retention is not significant, and rates remain within bounds of pre-drawdown rates.<sup>34</sup>" Junior officers throughout the army were leaving in record numbers as they felt their concerns were not only being ignored, but also that their departure had little if any effect on the Army. As far as junior officers were concerned, the Army did not care if they left the service or remained on active duty.

These same attitudes were prevalent among junior officers that I interviewed as the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Inspector General. From July 1999 to June 2000, 138 junior officers were asked a series of questions on the command climate within their units. The results of that survey are listed in the table below.

<b>QUESTION</b>	<b>Care Greatly</b>	<b>Like It</b>	<b>Borderline</b>	<b>Dislike It</b>
Overall, how do you feel about your unit's work?	80 58%	35 25%	11 8%	12 9%
	<b>Very Often</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Seldom</b>
Do the policies in your unit make sense?	23 17%	65 47%	39 28%	11 8%
	<b>Very Well</b>	<b>Well</b>	<b>Borderline</b>	<b>Poorly</b>
Overall, do you think your unit "gets the job done?"	51 37%	64 46%	19 14%	4 3%
	<b>Very Often</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Seldom</b>
Do you know what is expected of you as a leader in your unit?	59 43%	58 42%	17 12%	4 3%
	<b>Very Often</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Seldom</b>
How often do you think your chain of command backs you up when you make a decision?	55 40%	60 43%	18 13%	5 4%
	<b>Very Often</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Seldom</b>
Is your immediate leader willing to discuss your ideas and suggestions about the job?	57 41%	47 34%	32 23%	2 1%

TABLE 1. COMMAND CLIMATE SURVEY<sup>35</sup>

## WHY OFFICERS CONTINUE TO SERVE

Although junior officers are departing the military in record numbers, some officers have chosen to remain in the profession of arms. While placing more emphasis on family and personal values than do those officers of the Boomer Generation, junior officers have the same sense of duty possessed by the countless generations of officers who have served our country over the last 225 years.<sup>36</sup> As shown by the survey above, the vast majority of officers interviewed cared greatly about their work and the soldiers serving our nation. One junior officer, serving his second tour and stationed in Germany, offered these comments on reasons why officers continue to serve.

Besides defending our country as a reason to stay in the Army, good soldiers and officers keep me in. I see that there are soldiers that stay in and I want to help them or future soldiers like them. There are "bad apples" in every bunch, but the good ones make the difference. I see good Officers that stay in and it gives me hope. Belonging to an organization as adaptable as the Army is both rewarding and frustrating. The Army is a challenging job that keeps me coming back for more.<sup>37</sup>

This feeling of belonging to an organization that has a sense of dignity, respect, purpose and pride is as old as the military itself. If we as senior leaders are to be successful in retaining quality junior officers in today's military, we must take steps at the service, installation, and unit level to build upon this feeling of pride in one's unit and in the military way of life.

### **Beyond the Unit Control**

During a presentation to the Command and General Staff Class of 2000, a senior Army officer delivered a presentation to the students on numerous personnel matters, to include junior officer retention. The senior officer outlined Department of the Army policies initiated by DSCPER in order to "help" with the lieutenant retention problem. The new policy contained the following three actions by the DCSPER to reduce lieutenant attrition: Early pin-on point for the ranks of 1LT and CPT, Establishing CPT promotion rates at fully-qualified versus best-qualified (resulting in a 98% selection rate), and a voluntary recall of 200 captains to active duty.<sup>38</sup>

Only one year has passed since these Department initiatives took effect. Therefore, it is yet unclear as to the success of the DSCPER initiatives to retain quality

junior officers on active duty. I believe that if the information presented by DSCPER represents the thoughts of the Army on solutions to the junior officer retention problem, then flag officers have been misinformed and misguided on the proper approach to take in solving the problem. In all of my interviews, I never took one complaint from any officer regarding promotion times. Most officers felt that they needed the time as a lieutenant to gain experience prior to assuming command of a company. Accelerated promotions will only serve as a short-term solution to the shortage of captains in the army. The solutions to significantly reducing the departure rate of junior officers must be placed in the hands of the local commanders at the installation and unit level.

### **Within the Unit Control**

The presentation to the Command and General Staff Course in September 1999 also contained a slide that outlined guidance to field grade officers, as future commanders, on their role in officer retention. Department of the Army guidance to local commanders listed four points: Enforce service obligations of junior officers, allowing promotable lieutenants and junior captains to go to the advanced course as soon as possible, carefully analyze captain positions to determine where lieutenants can perform the job adequately, and mentor and counsel junior officers on Army careers.<sup>39</sup>

The first three points of this DCSPER guidance address the shortage of captains within individual units. This guidance only will serve as a short-term solution to the captain shortage; it does not provide long-term solutions to the problem of increased junior officer retention.

Battalion and brigade commanders must address the final point of the guidance, the counseling of junior officers on Army career opportunities, more frequently. It is this level of command that has the greatest impact upon junior officers and their decisions to serve. During my interviews with junior officers as the Inspector General, I found that over ninety-percent of the junior officers assigned to Fort Riley had been counseled by their commanders on Army career opportunities. The majority of the career counseling, however, occurred only during annual OER counseling sessions. The junior officer retention rates among all of the battalions on the installation varied widely, however.

According to the data collected on junior officers as part of the command inspection program, command climate was and continues to be the most significant variable in officer retention.<sup>40</sup> The most important part of a positive command climate is empowering junior officers to lead and challenge their soldiers. Commanders who created an environment that allowed officers to lead their soldiers at the platoon and company level were the most successful in retaining their junior leaders. Junior officers are educated, highly motivated and ready for the challenges of leadership immediately upon arrival at their first duty station. Battalion and brigade commanders must provide these highly qualified officers with guidance and allow them to lead their own units. The lieutenants and junior officers need only to be given guidance; they will be successful in the execution. As Wall notes in his writings, "More important to the long-term health of the organizations is that these challenging work environments act as a magnet that attracts and holds on to spirited employees, who are motivated and committed."<sup>41</sup> Kotter also noted the importance of challenging subordinates in order to keep them motivated.

Interviews at the fifteen 'Best Practices' firms are replete with references to the importance of 'challenging opportunities.' One gets the sense that challenging entry-level jobs help attract good people in the first place, and challenging promotion opportunities help firms hold onto people, because people with leadership potential love new challenges and hate old routines. The challenges, in turn, both stretch people and allow them, often early in their careers, to exercise some leadership. And that, of course, is the heart of development.<sup>42</sup>

Challenging opportunities are not limited to the execution of battalion and brigade training events. Junior officers should be involved in the development of training plans as well. Interviewed junior officers perceived that they were frequently asked to execute training events without any involvement in the planning phase. Wall notes again in his writings that participation by junior members of the organization is the key to retention and motivation.

But the solution to securing worker loyalty isn't to pay higher and higher salaries. As a visionary leader, your goal is to encourage employees to accept personal ownership of the company's mission. It is to build the type of cultural values and participative environment inside your organization that will attract them and keep them challenged and motivated.<sup>43</sup>

Senior officers do not always have the most current information as to the needs of their soldiers. Junior officers, on the other hand, are closely associated with soldiers on a daily basis. It is imperative that they are part of the decision making process in order

to operate the unit on a daily basis. One senior executive at The Dow Corporation noted that involvement in junior-level employees is necessary in order to keep any organization functioning smoothly. "We don't let the organizational structure constrain us. We always go right to the individual who has information we need. This puts us in contact with a lot of lower-level and more junior employees, and gives us a firsthand feeling for who they are and what they are good at."<sup>44</sup> This same type of participative leadership is necessary in today's Army.

## **METHODS OF IMPROVING JUNIOR OFFICER RETENTION**

### **IMPROVING SENIOR OFFICER COUNSELING SKILLS**

Every battalion and brigade commander has received many years of military education. Officer Basic Courses (OBC) and Officer Advanced Courses (OAC), now known as the Captain's Career Course, form the basis for our officer professional education. These courses offer countless hours on tactics, basic and advanced branch skills, and basic officer skills for company grade officers. However, each of these courses fails to teach officers on basic counseling skills so necessary in our Army.

As previously mentioned, DCSPER guidance includes counseling junior officers on Army career opportunities, yet during my interviews with junior officers, I found few who had been counseled by their senior rater other than during the mandatory counseling required as part of the OER. These counseling sessions tend to be impersonal and focused on duty performance rather than building a rapport with junior officers. Senior mentors must use every skill available to them in order to nurture their relationship with junior officers. John Rost says in Leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, "Persuasion involves the use of reputation, prestige, personality, purpose, status, content of the message, interpersonal and group skills, give-and-take behaviors, authority or lack of it, symbolic interaction, perception, motivation, gender, race, religion, and choices, among countless other things."<sup>45</sup>

Senior officers must create a command climate that makes the Army a fun place to both work and live. Leaders must take advantage of every opportunity to create a positive environment for both the junior officers and their families that will instill in them

a desire to remain on active duty. Officer calls, hail and farewells planned and executed by junior officers, officer physical fitness sessions, and activities which involve the families of junior officers are just a few examples of a positive command climate. During officer interviews, I learned that most officers serving in a command that fostered a positive social experience tended to stay in the military beyond their first assignment. The feeling of camaraderie created within these units fostered an open relationship between junior and senior officers within the unit. This is the type of environment addressed by Wall as necessary for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The new vision requires a dramatic letting go of the conventional values that ossified around the old top-down hierarchy. It will demand far more leadership qualities than ever before. It calls for full and daily communication between managers and workers in a work culture that fosters trust, learning, participation, and dignity, and it depends on leaders who are committed to it.<sup>46</sup>

## IMPROVING MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Both managerial and leadership skills are required of Army leaders of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Use of these skills will enable leaders to create positive command climates that will improve the retention rates of junior officers. In order to create this climate, leaders must develop a vision of the future and then use their managerial skills to make their vision a reality within their units. In order to achieve this lofty objective, old methods of managing and leading must be challenged and scrutinized. Methods that are counterproductive or not useful must be discarded. The chain of command will remain intact, but leaders must openly communicate with subordinates to identify problems within the unit. Once identified, problems can be dealt with using the synergy from all members of the team working toward a common solution.

Some senior leaders may fear that participative leadership, as described above, will lead to erosion of the chain of command. On the contrary, participation in the decision making process by junior officers not only allows them to become part of the solution to a problem, but also presents them with an opportunity to develop their own leadership and managerial skills. As in the past, the ultimate decisions and responsibility will remain with the commander. Professor Patricia McLagan, author of The Age of Participation, also addressed the issue of participative leadership.

The issue is an emotional one, because many managers fear that devolving of decision-making authority will lead to loss of control and anarchy. They interpret participation as meaning that all the people must be involved all the time. But participation does not imply reckless involvement. Everyone does not have to be involved in everything. Involvement must be purposeful. It must add value either by improving the quality of the decisions made or by enhancing commitment to them.<sup>47</sup>

## FEEDBACK ON OFFICER RETENTION

Army senior leaders at the battalion and brigade level are evaluated on an annual basis through the OER system. This report, however, makes no mention of the command climate created by the rated officer. Senior raters receive little, if any, feedback on the command climate of the rated officer and therefore, seldom make it part of the evaluation report. Instead, officers are frequently evaluated based upon other statistical categories such as readiness, qualification rates, etc.

In order to gain a complete picture of each rated officer, senior officers should receive comments from other officers on their rated officers. These comments could assist senior leaders in their evaluations. Using today's technology, internet-based 360-degree evaluations are possible. The United States Air Force Academy and companies such as General Electric are using 360-degree evaluations as part of their evaluation and reporting systems.

This system would allow rated officers, raters, and senior raters to have feedback on the performance of each officer within their command. Furthermore, senior officers would have a clearer picture of the command climate established by senior leaders within their command. This 360-degree evaluation system, using technology currently available, should become part of the evaluation system used by the Army of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## CONCLUSION

According to McLagan, "Leaders today are caught in a cusp, a state of transition between the old era and the new. Expectations are high; models are few and unproven."<sup>48</sup> While this statement is true of many organizations, the organization of the United States Army does contain many leaders who create the positive command

climate required of units in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The leadership challenge is to foster that type of leadership throughout the Army. Leadership in the new millenium, as it has for the last 225 years, will remain the bedrock principle of the Army. Successful senior Army leaders, who practice the art of participative leadership, are found at every installation. The course set by these successful and personable senior officers can lead to an Army-wide improvement in command climate that fosters participation by junior officers and transforms the Army culture.

Senior Army leaders must be poised to open communications with the next generation of officers, the future leaders of the Army. In order to communicate with and train this next generation of leadership, commanders must envision and establish a command climate that eliminates the perception of "zero defects", allows officers to lead their own units, establishes a family atmosphere throughout the unit, and addresses the needs and desires of the junior officers and soldiers. Commanders must make communication of this vision the top priority of their commands. In the words of Robert Wall,

The new vision is based on communication, the free flow of ideas, and the reaching of full human potential. It puts people first. In the new view, rigid organizational lines give way to flexible networks, and the questioning of old thinking is not only encouraged, it is expected. The new vision is based, in part, on our recent realization that everything in our environment is interconnected. No longer can you separate a person from his or her work.<sup>49</sup>

Army Chief of Staff General Eric Shinseki has established a vision to transform the Army into a military force manned and equipped to dominate in all operations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In order to accomplish that lofty goal, senior leaders at all levels of the Army must openly transform their leadership styles in order to meet the demands of leadership during the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Now is the time to begin the transformation.

WORD COUNT = 7431



## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Robert Suro, "Captains' Exodus Has Army Fearing for Future," Washington Post, 16 October 2000, sec. A, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Wall, Robert Solum, and Mark Sobol, The Visionary Leader (Rocklin, California: Prima Publishing, 1992), 20.

<sup>3</sup> Berndar M. Bass, Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership (New York: The Free Press, 1981), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph C. Rost, Leadership For The Twenty-first Century (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991), 37.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>6</sup> John P. Kotter, The Leadership Factor (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>8</sup> Rost, 102.

<sup>9</sup> Rost, 180.

<sup>10</sup> Raj Wall, "Leadership vs Management"; available from <<http://www.clarinet.com/rhf/jokes/89q2/noah.364.html>>; Internet; accessed 02 Nov 00.

<sup>11</sup> Rick Joyner, "Leadership, Management and the Five Essentials to Success"; available from <[http://www.forerunner.com/X0364\\_Leadership.html](http://www.forerunner.com/X0364_Leadership.html)>. Internet; accessed 28 October 00.

<sup>12</sup> Patricia McLagan and Nel Christo, The Age of Participation (San Francisco: Berrett-Hoehler Publishers, 1995), 16.

<sup>13</sup> Leonard Wong, Generations Apart: Xers and Boomers in the Officer Corps, (Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, October 2000), 14.

<sup>14</sup> McLagan, 93.

<sup>15</sup> Kotter, 30.

<sup>16</sup> Kotter, 1.

<sup>17</sup> Wall, 23.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen R. Covey, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (New York: Fireside Publishers, 1989), 49.

<sup>19</sup> John L. Petersen, The Road to 2015 (Corte Madera, California: Waite Group Press, 1994), 4.

<sup>20</sup> Wong, 14.

<sup>21</sup> Department of the Army. Army Leadership, Field Manual 22-100 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, August 1999), 3-16.

<sup>22</sup> Kotter, 28.

<sup>23</sup> McLagan, 107.

<sup>24</sup> Suro, 3.

<sup>25</sup> CGSC Student Perceptions on Army Retention and Leadership, E-mail, April 2000.

<sup>26</sup> Brent Tadsen <tadsenb@riley.army.mil>, "Reasons for Officers joining General Electric," electronic mail message to Lee Staab <fightin@earthlink.net> , 8 November 2000.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Wall, 19.

<sup>29</sup> Kotter, 19.

<sup>30</sup> Kotter, 23.

<sup>31</sup> CGSC Student Perceptions and Wong.

<sup>32</sup> LTC Raymond Midkiff, Fort Riley Director of Public Works, telephone interview by author, 12 June 2000.

<sup>33</sup> Office of the Inspector General, Command Climate Survey: Fort Riley Command Climate (Fort Riley, Kansas: Office of the Inspector General, January 2000), 32.

<sup>34</sup> Suro, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Office of the Inspector General, 25.

<sup>36</sup> Wong, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Andy Martin <martina@riley.army.mil>, "Reasons for Choosing an Army Career," electronic mail message to Lee Staab <fightin@earthlink.net>, 13 November 2000.

<sup>38</sup> Command and General Staff College Lecture Series AY 2000.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Office of the Inspector General, 42.

<sup>41</sup> Wall, 16.

<sup>42</sup> Kotter, 89.

<sup>43</sup> Wall, 11.

<sup>44</sup> Kotter, 91.

<sup>45</sup> Rost, 160.

<sup>46</sup> Wall, 20.

<sup>47</sup> McLagan, 111.

<sup>48</sup> McLagan, 100.

<sup>49</sup> Wall, 19.



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