

Leadership skills developed, honed with FLAGS training

By Erin O. Stattel, Army War College Public Affairs

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(October 26, 2010)—Have you ever been puzzled by the hours your spouse has spent exploring the communication styles and group dynamics of your household? You may be surprised to find out he or she is receiving leadership building skills courtesy of Facilitating Leadership and group Skills.

The FLAGS training seminars at Collins Hall have been training Army War College spouses for the January FLAGS sessions, an annual event since 1992. The FLAGS mission statement identifies the program as volunteer-based and strives to help senior military spouses become strategic thinkers and problem solvers, but the spouses who have been training for a facilitator spot say the program offers much more.

“This course is very insightful and now I can see things in group settings that I may not have seen before and now I know how to apply these skills to scenarios such as conflict resolution and beyond,” said Shelle Altieri, spouse.



FLAGS Program Director Lisa Towery reviews tools, such as the Johari Window, used during the training for program facilitators to better understand communication within groups and relationships. Photo by Erin O. Stattel, Army War College Public Affairs.

“The information is applicable to every facet of life, whether with friends, family, or peers-It is for the improvement of all those areas,” said Patricia Hanley, a fellow spouse.

“The setting is an experiential learning workshop and provides the opportunity for self-awareness and validation with further opportunities to learn more from those who are in the group,” explained Lisa Towery, who has been the program director since 2007. “Everyone learns group dynamics through the group experience and they learn a lot from what is presented, but they ultimately learn more through each other.”

A common feeling for many of the participants is the great value placed on the skills acquired during the workshops and their versatility.

“This is a unique program specific to the Army War College, but it is not just a military spouse training workshop,” Towery explained. “However, it provides the opportunity for more effective leadership abilities and skills in the roles that they may take on in the future.”

Towery explained that facilitators first learn about the individual and self-awareness which lends itself to understanding how individuals, when grouped, understand a given situation or information presented.

“They learn about the individual first and about whom they are as individuals and then they shift into a group setting, focusing on communication, assumptions, first impressions and our need for inclusion, our ability to choose a leadership style and ability to identify audiences,” she said. “These skills are applicable to any setting within a group, managing groups or resolving conflict with people.”

“I find this training to be very beneficial. We are not teaching or instructing anyone, we are facilitating. There is so much difference between groups and their settings but going through the course we are all building self-awareness. I can see myself using these lessons in a lot of different scenarios,” said Rita Spreu. “While I am an Army spouse, and I see it as being useful in a family readiness group setting or Army Family Action Plan groups, I also see it useful for private life with groups of friends. I now know how to handle certain situations because of certain characteristics of groups and people. Work-wise and business-wise, I am a former embassy employee and this kind of thing is absolutely great in embassy work.”

The training occurs through the use of video, small group and large group activities, personal reflection, partnerships and other multiple venues that provide insight into how strong leaders develop their skills.

Terry Drushal, presented a session on Friday, October 22, and said while she was front and center, she felt how important and challenging it was to try and convey meaning and understanding to a group with all different insights and perspectives to add to the presentation.

“My goal was to try to get them to understand the concept of feedback and how it is best used effectively and how it can be ineffective,” she said. “I think they did understand in the end, my goal was to get them to think a little bit differently about feedback. I think this was a confidence builder, I was more out of my comfort zone but I was able to apply what I have been learning.”

Drushal, a former Army officer, said she feels like she is better prepared to handle situations in Family Readiness Groups, for instance, but sees the value in applying the skills throughout the rest of her life as an Army Family member.

The first week of FLAGS seminars will be offered the week of Jan 25-29, 2011 from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. A second FLAGS session will be offered later in the year based on student spouse interest as well as space to conduct the training. FLAGS is open to all spouses of the Army War College, both student and faculty or staff, and consideration is given as well for attendance to war college staff employees based on space availability.

“FLAGS is a good fit for anyone who has a desire to be a more effective group member, both in groups currently affiliated with, as well as those [he or she may be] affiliated with in the future,” Towery said of the program.

For more information on how to sign up for FLAGS, contact Military Family Programming Coordinators Laura Kubica and Amy Manning at carl_mfp_coordinator@conus.army.mil or by phone at 245-4787.

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