

Leader development top among Army priorities

David Vergun, Army News Service

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- Soldiers, having experienced the “crucible” of the last 11 years of an Army at war, where “discipline, initiative, freedom of action, adaptability and decentralization” have been the norm, are today “professionally advanced (in leadership) way beyond their years in any grade — noncommissioned officer and officer,” said retired Army Gen. Frederick M. Franks Jr.

- “The challenge facing us today as we transition is how does the Army keep that goodness (in its leaders) as we deploy less and make do with less resources,” he said.

That question framed the discussion that followed, during the Association of the United States Army’s

Institute of Land Warfare's "Developing Leaders: The Key to Readiness, Sustaining the Profession, and Ensuring our Legacy" forum Oct. 24.

- Franks, who is chair of the Simon Center for the Professional Military Ethic at the U.S. Military Academy, was one of eight panelists.

Developing and nurturing good leaders is not just about sending them to leadership courses, Franks said. Though retired, the general has been listening to leaders throughout the Army.

"Roughly 80 percent of leaders — NCOs and officers — say they learn best by experience, even as they acknowledge the value of institutional and self-development approaches," Franks said.

- Brig. Gen. Gordon B. Davis Jr., deputy commandant of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and deputy commander, Leader Development and Education, U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, said Soldiers learn the art and science of war through education, training and experience, with the goal of preparing them for the next rank or position of responsibility.

Davis said leader development has many goals. Included among those goals is teaching Soldiers how to analyze and solve complex problems, how to better collaborate with other services and multinational partners, how to be better communicators and negotiators, and how to be better leaders and managers.

The general added that leadership development "allows us to inject the latest concepts, doctrines, policies, best practices, and emerging ideas into the graduates, who then take that new knowledge and

inject it back into the Army, thus allowing us to institutionalize and operationalize change.”

The Army invests heavily in military education, much more so than businesses and other government agencies, he said.

“Private-sector leaders I’ve spoken with are surprised (at) and envious (of) the Army’s time and effort (spent) in developing leaders for future responsibilities,” Davis said.

Leadership education and development outside the classroom is occurring all the time, according to Maj. Gen. Joseph Anderson, commander, 4th Infantry Division (mechanized).

He said such education takes place during physical fitness and battle skills training, in competitive team-building events, and in many other venues, which can take place even when troops are deployed.

He suggested too that Soldiers be rotated — given a variety of tasks and responsibilities — so they don’t become stale.

Maj. Gen. Anthony A. Cucolo III said there are two essential elements to leader development while in an operating force environment.

The first of those, Cucolo said, is identifying the sphere of influence — deciding who will develop the leader and have the discussion with him or her.

Secondly, he said, is articulating an end state. That means knowing ahead of time, before the officer leaves a command, what the leader wants that officer to know about, know how to do, or understand.

“In other words, you start with the end state, then build the program,” Cucolo said.

Cucolo, who is commandant of the U.S. Army War College, said that end state can’t just be driven by a list of events. He said the plan has to include “personalized development sessions” that are discussed one-on-one, not just top-down driven.

All in all, the Army is doing a pretty good job at developing its leaders, said retired Col. Joseph N.G. LeBoeuf, professor of the practice of management, Fuqua School of Business and Coach K Center on Leadership and Ethics, Duke University.

Many who are in charge of leadership development at the best business schools and Fortune 500 companies are former Soldiers, he said.

One of the reasons Soldiers do so well, he suggested, is that they practice transformational leadership as

well as transactional. He defined transactional leadership as simply using people to accomplish tasks and transformational as getting stuff done in the right way — using tasks as leadership development opportunities.

- These opportunities could be anything from providing constructive feedback and rewards to self-assessment and reflection.

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