

Leadership building done FLAGS style

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(October 22, 2009)--Inspiring and instilling leadership skills in others can be challenging, but it is the outcome of the annual Facilitating Leadership and Group Skills training seminars taking place over the next few weeks in Collins Hall.

The peer to peer seminars, geared towards developing the leadership skills in senior leaders' spouses, will be held in January and February, said Lisa Towery, the program's lead facilitator, but the lead facilitators are receiving their training right now.

"At this time, we have the trainers in and they have been in for over two weeks now," Towery said. "Right now, we are concentrating on training the trainer and then they will take a team approach to developing leadership skills in other spouses in January and February when we hold the FLAG program."

The FLAGS mission statement identifies the program as volunteer-based and strives to help senior military spouses become strategic thinkers and problem solvers.

According to some of the spouses, some of the skills acquired are aimed at improving communication skills, managing stress and identifying how others learn.

"Part of good communication is knowing when to help and when to step back," said Army spouse Cheryl Sikes. "I know that I will be less stressed out in the future because I have learned how to communicate effectively and how to deal with stressors."

Through self-evaluation and a little bit of group reaction and reflection after presentations, facilitators learn how to successfully reach community members to build productive teams and organizations.

"FLAGS is only done at the U.S. Army War College and it has been done now for the last 17 years," Towery said. "I first went through in 2005 when my husband was a student here and I really discovered how to respect differences in others and that really made me a more confident leader."

All spouses agreed that the lessons learned in FLAGS are not specific to the military.

"This is not a military course and is not about learning how to be a better senior leader's wife," Towery cautioned. "But rather it is a place to become more self-aware and a place to become strategic communicators and strategic leaders ourselves."

Army spouse Dawn Pullar said that self-awareness allows an individual to see others a little more clearly.

"Through a greater self-awareness, you allow yourself to see how other people learn and that makes you more effective in your leadership role," Pullar said.

Self-awareness is what Towery hopes the FLAGS facilitators will learn and then teach participants early next year.

"My hope is that they will become more aware of themselves and the people around them," she said. "This kind of training and knowledge helps transitions and helps leaders to move groups forward to be more efficient and more effective."

It seems as if Towery's hope is playing out already because through fulfilling assignments and completing rotations as session instructors, the FLAGS facilitators are becoming more and more confident with their newly possessed skills.

"I am using these skills with my family; I am using these skills when I go to meetings for different organizations," said Army spouse Sally McGinnis. "I know that when meetings get away from the leader, I have the skills necessary to get the meeting back on track and working productively again."

Many of the spouses have already noticed improved communication within their families and said being a better individual leads to being a more productive team member.

"This seminar teaches you how to become a better member of a group and a better member of a team which can help with Family Readiness or any other advisory positions," said Army spouse Leslie Love. "I am really seeing the skills show in my communication with my husband and with my children. This course is making me a better wife, a better mother, a better daughter and a better sister."

McGinnis called the training "a gift."

"I feel like this is a gift," she said. "Often times, senior leaders' spouses are drawn into situations where they are expected to do some of the leading and this course offers spouses so many skill sets to handle those challenges."