

Lead The Way

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I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all the great Soldiers, past and present, who have helped me get to where I am today. Working and fighting alongside our brothers in maneuver, fires, intel, and sustainment units has given me an appreciation of the challenges we face on today's battlefield and emphasized the importance of the engineer role.

My focus has always been on the mission, the Soldier, and the commander. As a noncommissioned officer (NCO), I believe we're the conduit that turns the commander's vision into reality. Mission command is more than just a doctrinal term you spout when nothing else comes to mind. No commander can be everywhere on the battlefield at all times. But wherever you find Soldiers, you're sure to find an NCO, and the commander has placed his trust and confidence in us and the junior officers to execute the missions within his intent. There are no better Soldiers on the battlefield, who know how to execute the wide variety of tasks required in a counterinsurgency (COIN), than today's young NCOs and officers. I have devoted myself to doing everything in my power to make them successful.

There are certain skills (beyond the basic combat skills) in which every Soldier should be proficient in today's COIN environment, regardless of their rank, branch, or expertise. Those skill sets are—

- Negotiations
- Cultural Understanding
- Language
- Counter-IED, Counter-Sniper
- Economy of Force (EOF), Rules of Engagement (ROE)
- Search, Detain, Prosecute
- Tactical Questioning
- Every Soldier a Sensor and Ambassador

We've been at this fight for almost seven years, yet our Soldiers are still having a hard time using the Army's basic commands in Arabic, Dari, or Pashtun. The Iraqi Security Force (ISF) and Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) are taking the lead more and more each day. Our interaction with them and the civilian population grows exponentially just before we hand off each traffic control point (TCP), joint security station (JSS), or police station to the ISF/ANSF.



The lieutenant isn't the only Soldier in the platoon that uses the interpreter. Building a good rapport with your "terp" and setting down some ground rules for negotiations or key leader engagements are always good practices. I believe there are some baseline standards to operating on the battlefield. Everyone in the patrol should know their part in the 5, 25, and 200 Drill. Standing on the shoulder of the road (where the IEDs are normally placed) and waiting for your sergeant to tell you where to go is not a healthy practice. Counter-sniper drills must be well thought out and rehearsed inside the combat outpost (COP). I can tell you that "SniperBoy" doesn't like us to be alongside or behind him, nor does he like us to use available cover.

When in doubt, don't shoot. You don't want an Iraqi or Afghan father to walk up to your platoon leader or platoon sergeant and say, "You killed my son." Positive identification (PID) is just that, and quickly recognizing a threat is another drill that can be taught while we're back in the rear training for the next deployment.

Identify the "bully" in the platoon after a catastrophic event. He's the one who can't wait to get back outside the wire and indiscriminately make things right. Finding the right bad guy is usually a long and tedious intel-driven process, but well worth the effort. It'll prevent the creation of new enemies and will bring the civilian population over to our side.

To be a good sensor, a Soldier must recognize normal activity. We can start by using a long-practiced Cavalry Scout technique of maintaining a journal. We should document who lives across the road from our COP, what vehicles they use to travel, daily habits and routines, vehicle or dismounted traffic. It'll build a great picture for the Soldier of what normal activity looks like, and then those odd vehicles, people, or events will stand out from the daily routine. We're under observation as soon as we leave the wire, why not them?

Proficiency in these skills is as important as our technical expertise. These competencies get us from the COP/forward operations base (FOB)/JSS to the objective and carry us through the completion of our mission.

With the large turnover of Soldiers after a deployment, and the build-up of the formation for the next deployment, a lot of hard lessons are lost. We can set our units up for success if we solidify the unit tactical standing operating procedures (TACSOP) before R+90 and the team PCSs to the four winds. At least the new guys will know what right looks like. They can take it from there.

It's a great time to be a Soldier, and especially an engineer. "Praise the Lord, now pass the bullets."