



■ Other countries, such as China and India, are graduating *three to five* times as many engineers per capita as we are in the United States.

Many of you have heard me talk about the walnuts and rice jar, walnuts being the big priorities.<sup>2</sup> Well, improving our technical competency is a walnut. Our increased workload gives us a limited window of time—three to four years—to turn the trends around and build the force. See *Built to Last*, another book by Jim Collins.<sup>3</sup>

We have already begun a number of initiatives. We recently held a

**W**hen do you transform the Army? When you are at war and have the resources and real-world classrooms to test things.

When do you build the bench and needed competencies in the Engineer Regiment? When you have the largest workload since World War II (maybe in our history) and the resources and real-world classrooms to train the next generation and test things.

**T**o move from good to great (delivering superior performance in all missions; setting the standards for our profession; having a unique, positive impact on our nation and other nations; and building a Regiment to last), we need Level 5 leaders<sup>1</sup> (those who put the organization's success above their personal success) and the right people, disciplined people, on the Regiment's bus and in the right seat on the bus.

We need to be "Army Strong" at all levels, from entry level to the most experienced, with a good balance of diversity—age, ethnicity, gender, and education. We need leaders in their field, certified as professional engineers and project management professionals, and licensed to professionally practice their craft.

Here is the context in which we work:

- Largest workload.
- Aging infrastructure.
- Aging workforce, with thousands of baby boomers eligible to retire in the coming years.
- A shortage of college graduates with degrees in science, technology, engineering, and math.

National Technical Competency Workshop at Headquarters, USACE, in which representatives from academia, private industry, contract partners, customers, and professional societies, as well as teammates from each division and senior leaders from headquarters, tackled the major challenges we face on this issue. It was also the focus at this year's ENFORCE at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, in May.

Some of the initiatives we're considering address training and equipping our current workforce; recruiting at the national, regional, and local levels; and motivating students to study math and science.

Regarding the current workforce, we want to ensure that the Regiment's employees are challenged and growing the skills they have by giving them the right amount of technical work. We also want to help our teammates achieve the technical certification in their career field. We'll be considering a "beefed-up" training-with-industry program and looking for opportunities to bring the trainers into the Regiment. That may include more frequent use of virtual training programs, where appropriate.

We could use a more structured mentoring plan to make sure our employees are getting the guidance, support, and training they need throughout their career life cycle. I hope to foster an environment where the staff is part of a lifetime of learning and teaching. And we need to be diligent with exit interviews—when our teammates leave the organization, gather that anecdotal information about how to better retain our quality staff members.

Looking to the future, we have to become the employer of choice for new graduates, or even for established professionals who are looking for that midterm career change. We have

to make sure people know what we do and what opportunities exist within the Regiment. The USACE New Orleans District is leading the way and setting a high bar in this arena. In fact, we are using some innovative ways to build the bench in the “Big Easy,” such as networking and building relationships with faculty at universities, deans of engineering schools, and professors who are tapped into the skills and strengths of particular students. Of course, this will supplement—not replace—our traditional recruiting at career fairs and other direct-to-student efforts.

We are going to target our recruiting more appropriately to the specific competencies we will need in the future, as a result of our “gap” analysis. So we’ll seek out specific skills, such as geotechnical or geographic information systems (GIS), and reach out to students and institutions with those strengths. To be *Built to Last*, we need people who are masters in their trade, as well as all-round skilled “pentathletes.”

This is the beginning of getting the *Good to Great* “flywheel” in motion. We are just getting it started and, as we continue to focus on improving our technical competency and building a bench of disciplined people, we will gain momentum.

Thanks for joining in this critical “walnut.” When we look back four or five years from now and see a Regiment *Built to Last*, you will have left an indelible print on our profession and our nation!



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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *Good to Great* by Jim C. Collins, Harper Business: New York, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> I actually do have a jar full of walnuts and rice. The walnuts represent priorities, and the rice represents all the other stuff—the ankle-biters that get in the way all the time. If you dump out the jar, and try to put everything back in, you have to put the walnuts in first; if you put the rice in, and then try to add the walnuts, they won’t fit and you’ll end up breaking some walnuts when you try to close the jar. If you put the walnuts in first, then add the rice, the rice will work itself around all the walnuts and fit in where it can. The message being—tackle the priorities first, and then fit all the other stuff in as you can.

<sup>3</sup> *Built to Last* by Jim C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras, Harper Business: New York, 1994, 1997.