

BUILDING RESILIENT UNITS

Helping Soldiers overcome any obstacle

By Lt. Col. R. Wendell Stevens &
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What do drill sergeants, the Bible, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Yoda from *Star Wars* and the U.S. Army have in common? They all describe human nature as a combination of emotional, mental, spiritual, physical and social dimensions that guide us in our thoughts, feelings and actions.

Drill sergeants develop Soldiers who are emotionally, mentally, spiritually and physically ready and proud members of a team. The Bible directs people to love God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength, and to love their neighbor as themselves. Roosevelt, in his 1941 State of the Union speech, addressed America's four freedoms: freedom from fear, freedom of expression, freedom to worship and freedom from want. Yoda, the fictional Jedi master, covered the transition from emotions to physical consequences when he said, "Fear is the path to the Dark Side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering."

The Army's Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program identifies five dimensions of strength related to the above examples: emotional, family, social, spiritual and physical. We see these various human dimensions at work in our daily lives and in the lives of those around us. Often, they work in harmony as we act to accomplish a task and react to information and events. Yet, when one or more dimensions are weak, damaged or neglected, we become less capable of dealing with the major to even the most mundane incidents and stressors.

If not addressed, our weakened dimensions can cause a downward spiral of performance and quality of life that can affect

even the readiness of one's unit. To prevent this plunge in performance, we must intentionally address the fitness and resilience of all our human dimensions just as we do in daily Physical Readiness Training.

Resilience, the ability to bounce back from stress and trauma, has been a hallmark of the American Soldier for more than two centuries. Comprehensive fitness has been named one of the nine critical core competencies for the 21st century by the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command. To achieve greater resilience and fitness, the Army's leadership recently established the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program for Soldiers, families and Department of Army civilians.

CSF is a structured, long-term assessment and development program designed to build resilience and enhance performance. It is intended to be preventative versus reactive in nature, as Gen. George W. Casey wrote in a January article for *American Psychologist* magazine, "so our Soldiers can *be* better before deploying to combat so they will not have to *get* better after they return."

CSF focuses on each of the emotional, spiritual, physical and social dimensions, and also adds a family dimension to highlight loved ones' importance to the successful accomplishment of the Army's mission. These dimensions interact, influence and impact one another, ultimately affecting our state of mind. CSF, its website states, serves

as a "first step toward training members of the Army community to understand how and why they think in a certain way. Once people begin to understand this, they are best postured to change their thoughts and actions to strategies that are positive, adaptive and desirable for both the person and the Army."

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To develop comprehensive resilience, CSF offers four pillars, or tools, to units and individuals:

- **Pillar 1: The Global Assessment Tool** — The CSF program offers the online GAT for individual Soldiers, family members and Department of Army civilians to assess their fitness in four of the five CSF dimensions: emotional, family, spiritual and social. The tool, available at the Soldier Fitness Tracker website at <https://www.sft.army.mil/>, takes about 15 minutes to complete and provides a score for each dimension with recommended follow-up training for each. While aggregate data is collected by the Army, specific results are confidential for individuals to see and use privately.
- **Pillar 2: Comprehensive Resilience Modules** — The GAT is linked to Comprehensive Resilience Modules — five online training modules aligned with the four GAT areas that Soldiers can use to improve any or all of their dimensions. Like physical training, the modules provide simple exercises Soldiers can use to strengthen their emotional, family, spiritual and social skills. Each module takes about 15 minutes to complete. Individual completion of a module is tracked in the Soldier Fitness Tracker and the Army's Digital Training Management System, allowing commanders to track unit use of CSF training material.

Soldiers weave through an obstacle course March 23, 2010, at Camp Taji, Iraq. The Soldiers, assigned to Company F, 3rd Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, worked together to complete the challenges during eight events.

Photo by Sgt. Travis Zielinski

- **Pillar 3: Master Resilience Trainers** — To assist in training CSF, the Army now trains mid-level NCOs and officers to be Master Resilience Trainers for every company- through brigade-level unit. They are commanders' advisors regarding total fitness and resilience training-related issues. They can be used to teach resiliency skills and help refer Soldiers to professional counseling.
- **Pillar 4: Institutional resilience training** — Institutional resilience training is now being taught in all professional military education, from Initial Military Training to the Sergeants Major Academy for enlisted members and from pre-commissioning training to the U.S. Army War College for officers. The CSF website, <http://csf.army.mil/resilience/lifecycle.cfm>, has downloadable training products for all levels and leader groups.
 Since CSF is an Army-level program, it can be difficult for squad-, company- and even battalion-level organizations to wrap their arms around it, whether in-garrison or in a deployed

environment. In an attempt to simplify the training challenge, we offer several recommendations to integrate these CSF pillars into your training plan.

FOR SERGEANTS MAJOR AND FIRST SERGEANTS

First, assess and improve your command climate. That sets the tone for all Soldiers, leaders and families in your unit and will greatly influence their motivation, thoughts, values, physical performance and teamwork.

As AR 600-20, *Army Command Policy*, states, “Commanders and other leaders committed to the professional Army ethic promote a positive environment. If leaders show loyalty to their Soldiers, the Army and the nation, they earn the loyalty of their Soldiers. If leaders consider their Soldiers’ needs and care for their well-being, and if they demonstrate genuine concern, these leaders build a positive command climate.”

Second, plan CSF training. Commanders should develop training plans and unit standard operating systems that deliberately and proactively build resilience in all five human dimensions:

➤ **Emotional & family fitness:** Look at the quality of your

sponsorship programs, Family Readiness Groups (inclusive of single Soldiers), Soldier recognition programs (awards, boards and promotion system), unit BOSS program, command climate surveys, use of social media (such as Facebook) and equal opportunity system. Set a positive example to the unit by caring for your own family.

- **Spiritual fitness:** Use group discussions and case studies to emphasize the importance of Army values, the Warrior Ethos and professional oaths and creeds. Focus leader development on matters of character and ethical decision-making. Offer the opportunity for all to worship in their faith and maximize use of your unit ministry team in all training. Create and reinforce a sense of purpose in each individual and your unit.
- **Physical fitness:** Build a training program that includes diet, nutrition (or fueling) and job-focused Physical Readiness Training that builds Soldier-athletes and warriors. Embrace the fundamentals of the new Army Physical Readiness Training program and start using it now rather than later.
- **Social fitness:** Practice routine counseling using the five human dimensions as a template. Execute training that empha-

Unit:	Name:	Date:
<p><u>EMOTIONAL DIMENSION:</u> Approaching life’s challenges in a positive, optimistic way by demonstrating self-control, stamina and good character with your choices and actions.</p> <p>Strengths and areas of improvement:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. <p>Areas to Develop and plan of action for this month:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 	<p><u>FAMILY DIMENSION:</u> Being part of a family unit that is safe, supportive and loving, and provides the resources needed for all members to live in a healthy and secure environment.</p> <p>Strengths and areas of improvement:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. <p>Areas to Develop and plan of action for this month:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 	
<p><u>SOCIAL DIMENSION:</u> Developing and maintaining trusted, valued relationships and friendships that are personally fulfilling and foster good communication including a comfortable exchange of ideas, views, and experiences.</p> <p>Strengths and areas of improvement:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. <p>Areas to Develop and plan of action for this month:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 		
<p><u>PHYSICAL DIMENSION:</u> Performing and excelling in physical activities that require aerobic fitness, endurance, strength, healthy body composition and flexibility derived through exercise, nutrition and training.</p> <p>Strengths and areas of improvement:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. <p>Areas to Develop and plan of action for this month:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 	<p><u>SPIRITUAL DIMENSION:</u> Strengthening a set of beliefs, principles or values that sustain a person beyond family, institutional, and societal sources of strength.</p> <p>Strengths and areas of improvement:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. <p>Areas to Develop and plan of action for this month:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 	

A sheet like this one can be used during routine counseling to ensure you remember to address each of the five dimensions of strength.

sizes teamwork. Conduct newcomer briefings and schedule unit events to build esprit de corps and morale (like fun runs, formals and organizational days). Social fitness builds and fosters lasting and effective relationships that will reinforce the other four human dimensions.

Third, use MRTs to train all leaders in the fundamentals of CSF to build unit resilience. Make MRTs part of battalion training meetings and have a means to track events and progress in relation to CSF training. Take the initiative to develop a program that best fits your unit.

Fourth, understand the contents of the online Comprehensive Resilience Modules. Create opportunities for your subordinates to train that material in small groups and as part of your leader development program.

Fifth, look to your garrison setup to better promote comprehensive resilience. While deployed, we often work and live in an environment that promotes daily communication and teamwork. In-garrison, however, we return to a compartmentalized environment that makes it difficult to recognize problems in a timely manner. Also, you can help your leaders understand unit SOPs and installation programs that can help strengthen resilience and reinforce the CSF program.

Sixth, maintain systems to identify and help high-risk Soldiers. As Brig. Gen. Rhonda Cornum, the director of the Army's Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program, recently stated, "Waiting for illness or injury to occur is not the way commanders in the U.S. Army approach high-risk actions, and it is not the way we should approach high psychological-risk activities."

FOR FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS

First, be an engaged leader. While Soldiers are responsible for themselves, everyone from private to the battalion commander still needs a first-line supervisor. Good leaders take the time to know their Soldiers so they understand which dimensions are causing them to struggle. They then work with their Soldiers to help them grow so they are a more complete warrior and member of the team.

Second, practice routine counseling. We are traditionally good at assessing the job and physical performance of individuals. But, we often avoid discussing the emotional, family, spiritual and social fitness of the Soldier. To supplement and focus your monthly counseling, use a sheet like the one at left listing all five dimensions of strength so you remember to address them. Have your Soldiers take the GAT, ask them what areas they want to work on first and create an individual development plan to be assessed at subsequent counseling sessions. Work on building professional relationships with each of your subordinates so there is an established, open dialog to address issues in the future.

Third, use the online Comprehensive Resilience Modules (or the principles they espouse) during collective training at the team-, squad- or leader-development program levels. While the modules are meant for individual use, reviewing them together

promotes open discussion of each dimension so that team members can work together to improve resilience while breaking down stigmas that may exist. This will also reinforce the training provided by your unit MRTs.

FOR INDIVIDUALS

First, take the GAT and work through the Comprehensive Resilience Modules. Even if you are (or believe you are) already fit in all dimensions, the modules can enable you to help others.

Second, seek assistance if you or a battle buddy are struggling in any of the dimensions — emotional, family, spiritual, physical or social. Weaker dimensions make everything else you do harder, including reacting to additional stress.

Third, look for areas of growth that can result from problems and trauma. We tend to overly focus on what is wrong and weak in our lives when, in fact, we also gain great strength and resiliency from challenges such as deployments, losses, trauma and disappointments.

We need to actively look for post-traumatic growth instead of solely focusing on post-traumatic stress disorders. After significant events, write down what you have learned and how you grew stronger from them. This technique will ultimately foster a positive personal outlook that can lift up your unit's command climate from the bottom up.

Our nation and its warriors have always required strong minds and strong bodies. Through the past decade of conflict, we have again identified that strong hearts, strong spirits and strong teams are extremely important, just as ancient writers and previous wartime presidents did for both Soldiers and their families.

Fitness in all five strength dimensions provides greater resilience to endure and react positively in times of hardship while improving our lives each day. Since the CSF program is also essential to our combat readiness, commanders, leaders and Soldiers each have a role, responsibility and opportunity to make the CSF program work.

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