

Trust bedrock of Army profession

By C. Todd Lopez December 13, 2016

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WASHINGTON (Army News Service) -- Trust, say Army leaders, is a key component of the Army profession and it is critical to everything Soldiers do.

Army leaders from across the force met last week in Fairfax, Virginia, during the Army Profession Forum, hosted by the Center for the Army Profession and Ethic, to discuss, among other things, the role trust plays in the Army profession.

Kicking off the day-long event, Secretary of the Army Eric Fanning addressed several hundred Army senior leaders regarding Soldiering as a profession.

"We must train on this, train on what we define as our profession, like we train on everything else, so that it's instinctual in a way that maybe isn't for other people, again, because of the incredible things we ask the Army to do, that we ask our Soldiers and civilians to do," Fanning said. "This needs to be ingrained in a way that we wouldn't expect for others outside this profession."

A key component of the Army profession is trust, said Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Milley, who outlined three areas where trust manifests itself inside the Army. First, he said, the Army must maintain trust with the American people.

"We are the people's Army, and we always have been," he said. "We come from the people and we defend the people. That's our purpose. That's the only reason we exist. And we have to maintain the trust of the American people. Right now you have it. We have it. But trust is a fragile thing. And every time somebody breaks the trust, you're chipping away at the trust, the bond, the cohesion, between the people, and the people's Army," said Milley.

Individual acts, or institutional acts can destroy that trust, he said. When high-ranking Army officers are in the news, or the public eye for misdeeds or misconduct, he said, that "breaks the trust with the American people, and we are diminishing this institution's esteem in the eyes of the people we serve."

Secretary Fanning's comments elaborated on these thoughts "In order to build and sustain trust across the force, we must promote understanding within the Total Force of the roles and unique capabilities of each of the three components -- Regular Army, Army National Guard, and Army Reserve, as well as U.S. Army Civilians."

Another facet of trust in the Army, said Milley, is trust that goes vertically up and down through the chain of command, as well as laterally amongst peers.

Trust for leadership, he said, means that Soldiers who have problems with their bosses must have the confidence to approach and confront their bosses, rather than "snipe" or undermine them amongst peers.

Amongst peers, said Milley, "destructive competitiveness" destroys trust.

"It's the guy who stabs you in the back in order to advance himself," he said. "Sometimes it's done in a subtle, snide, snipey ways. Sometimes it's done in open, gross, disgusting ways. Either way, whatever the technique of the guy sniping, it's wrong. It breaks down trust. So, if you are like that, cease fire. And if you see people around you like that, crush them. But don't put up with it. You have to be able to trust the person on your left and right."

Trust must also be earned down the chain of command. "Don't be that general, don't be that officer who is always looking upward and

outward, and looking for your next job," he said. "Take care of those Soldiers, and civilians and family members that you are in charge of. And take it to heart. You must love your Soldiers."

Finally, trust manifests itself in warfare, said Milley. And in the near future, that trust will become increasingly important, as enemy advancements in electronic warfare might mean that Army leaders in the field will have to carry out their missions even in the absence of direct lines of communication with or oversight by their superiors.

"Our purpose, in order to defend the Constitution and defend the American people, is to kill people who threaten our people, kill people who threaten that Constitution. Our purpose is to close with and destroy the enemies of our country," he said. "And for that it requires trust."

In the future, said Milley, that requirement for trust is going to be compounded exponentially.

"We're going to operate in a very compartmented, distributed battlefield," he said. "All these communications and all this network stuff may or may not work, and I would bet on the not-work."

In the absence of that communications capability, Soldiers will need to be trusted to know the mission objective -- what's expected, what the goal is -- and carry it out, even without direct supervision from their superior.

"You can take it to the bank you're not going to get directions right from the West Wing of the White House or the Pentagon," he said. "You might not even get direction from your next level of higher headquarters."

So how will Army officers of the future be able to execute their missions, even without being able to talk with their superiors for days, weeks or even months at a time?

"You achieve it through trust, you achieve it through mission command and intent-based tactics," said Milley. "Understanding the purpose of the higher headquarters operational design, understanding why you are doing the task, not just to do the task."

In the future, he said Soldiers will need to achieve their purpose in the absence of orders.

"That's the very essence of mission command, and it's all built upon that single word that's in the doctrine, the bedrock of the Army ethic: which is trust," he said. "I trust that you will achieve the purpose, and you will do it ethically and morally and legally correct. And that takes an immense and off-the-charts level of character. You'll have to have a spine of titanium steel to withstand some of the pressures of intense ground combat, and you'll always have to do the right thing when no one is looking."