



Engage Your Three to Six

Prior to taking this job, I had been told that success is impossible to measure in this business of safety because we know how many Soldiers we lose, but never how many lives we save. While this is true, we have much work yet to do in order to reduce our senseless and needless losses. But it's not all bad news. We've seen some successes and we will continue to see more if we apply proactive and engaged leadership.

From my foxhole, there are a couple of areas where I think we've made the greatest strides over the past two years that will help you enhance your existing practices as you move forward.

Communication. Over the last two years, I believe our greatest success was to open lines of communication with the field. As an Army field operating agency located at Fort Rucker, Ala., it has been easy for your Safety Center to become not only isolated from the force, but the rigors that face the force. Through engaged Leaders and Soldiers interacting with those here at the center, we have seen measurable success in opening a constructive dialog with those units in the field. While communication existed in the past, it was often limited within the command of post camps and stations. As a result, our success was often local and rarely was proliferated across our Army. The investment in the Battle Command Knowledge System (BCKS) and similar forums has greatly changed our ability to exchange ideas and share tactics, techniques and procedures in a real-time environment, which has enabled our team to learn at an incredible rate. However, let us not forget that many in our force still have no or limited connectivity and, therefore, we must ensure that these Soldiers are not forgotten.

Accidental loss reduction. We have seen a reduction in accidental fatalities across the force over the last couple of years. Our greatest success has been on duty where Leaders are present, and we are working to leverage Families and peers to make a difference off duty. There is a long list of programs produced by this center and other Army agencies that have been effective in reducing Army accidents, but none compare to effective leadership. The single most effective tool against accidents, suicides and indiscipline is still a trained and competent first-line supervisor. Allow me to explain, because this is one of the most misunderstood tasks in our Army. At last count, there were more than 130 tasks a Soldier must certify in before going downrange; none teach you how to understand Soldiers. Understanding the human dimension is nothing new to Leaders in our Army, but it seems, at times, that many units don't have time for it. If you're not investing in the development of our future Leaders, through officer professional development, noncommissioned officer professional development or some type of unit certification program, you are doing a grave injustice to the future of our Army.

The way ahead. Before the Global War on Terrorism started and we thought we were busy, our Army spent a significant amount of time mentoring and certifying Leaders. During this process, Leaders at all levels mentored two levels down and first-line Leaders spent time getting to know the three to six Soldiers under their charge. They then held those individuals responsible for the standards they set forth. I believe it is time to return to some of those same practices if we are to create a culture in which we can reduce suicides and accidents. Do you train as hard to develop and protect Soldiers in garrison as you do in combat? If not, you should reconsider it because in November 2008, we had lost more Soldiers to accidents than we had in combat operations. So where is the risk to your formation? Every Leader from the most junior specialist to the chief of staff of the Army is a first-line supervisor of at least three to six people. When was the last time you sat down and engaged in meaningful conversation with your three to six? Maybe it's time you get reacquainted.

I would like to thank the safety community, especially those at the brigade combat team level who have deployed repeatedly and continue to work to keep our Soldiers safe.

It has been a pleasure to serve our Army as the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center command sergeant major over the last two years. Although as a noncommissioned officer I had spent years enforcing standards and discipline in the name of safety, I found that I knew little of safety at the Department of the Army level. The last two years has been a learning experience to say the least, but I believe it has been a two-way street. Yes, I have learned a lot from this experience, both from the professionals here at the center and from those professionals serving our nation. I cannot begin to thank all of those who provided input over the last two years in an effort to make our Army a safer place. Thank you all.

Safety – it's not about keeping you from doing something; it's about preserving your combat power while defeating those forces that threaten our way of life.

Tod L. Glidewell

Command Sergeant Major

U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center