Book Review: Military Culture Shift: The Impact of War, Money, and Generational Perspective on Morale, Retention, and Leadership

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How often have members of older generations compared themselves to the younger generations of today? With four generations of Americans serving across the Joint Force, a key challenge is understanding the “messy dynamic” of leading and caring for servicemembers regardless of age, experience, or beliefs. The presumption of impactful variation between generations has become a kind of folklore providing a pretext for rationalizing communication struggles between leaders and subordinates. In *Military Culture Shift*, Corie Weathers asks readers to consider how much more influential leaders might be if they ask instead of presume—bridging and even transcending generational differences by listening to what other generations think.

In this remarkably well-researched, rich, incisive book, Weathers argues the armed forces are at a cultural inflection point. A licensed professional counselor and military spouse who has counseled and advised elements across the military enterprise, she points out the “wicked” problems created by 20 years of war. Among her most insightful observations is the recognition that each generation imprints itself upon the institution in ways that reflect their life experiences. One of the “messy dynamics” leaders confront is synthesizing those various perspectives, ideals, and values and developing them for success. The generation that unlocks a door is not necessarily the same generation that walks through it.

Weathers shows the intergenerational dissonance associated with the pace of operations, inherent stress of the profession, and intricacy of military traditions. Although she recognizes dissonance creates complex leadership challenges that have compounded in the last two decades, Weathers’s book is rooted in a profound sense of hope based on inspirational stories from the self-aware leaders she has met throughout her 15 years of research. *Military Culture Shift* includes extraordinarily
useful tips for engaging with younger generations based on transparency, authenticity, and empathy. Military professionals pride themselves on nurturing, sincere relationships with partners; they should do the same with their troops.

Weathers also analyzes the challenges of cultural variation between servicemembers, for whom military service is a profession, and their families, for whom it becomes a lifestyle and identity. Military members and their families know better than most the rewards and costs of service to their country, and Weathers speaks with empathy and personal experience to the challenges military spouses face to persevere given the unique relationships they have with their servicemember spouses and with the service as an institution. Weathers celebrates their herculean efforts to improve the quality of life of military families and the pride and pain they share throughout their military journey.

Former General of the Army Omar Bradley once commented: “Leadership in a democratic army means firmness, not harshness; understanding, not weakness; generosity, not selfishness; pride, not egotism.” Weathers reminds readers of Bradley’s words on leadership and provides insights more relevant now than ever to senior defense community members. *Military Culture Shift* is an advantageous read for military leaders looking to connect at a deeper level with their multigenerational organizations and the support systems that keep them in the fight—their families. Weathers compels leaders to ask themselves if relationships are truly the priority within their formations and provides invaluable guidance on navigating those “messy dynamics of leading and caring for people.”

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