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Professional Discourse Is Shaping the Force

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The Army is transforming. While today’s senior leaders have set the service on a modernization path, future problems belong to the next generation—and we must own them. Professional writing is a way to do so, a tool enabling leaders of any rank to influence change at the macro level by contributing meaningfully to Department of Defense (DoD) conversations. Those embarking on this challenging adventure are not alone; writing is a team sport. The journey is as important as the destination, and most who take up this charge find participation in professional dialogue highly rewarding.

A Call to Professional Discourse

Army leaders promote the revitalization of professional discourse within the service, mainly through the service’s 16 trade journals. In September 2023, Chief of Staff of the Army General Randy A. George, Training and Doctrine Commander General Gary M. Brito, and Sergeant Major of the Army Michael R. Weimer highlighted the service’s complex and uncertain environment. To help the Army navigate this environment, these senior Army leaders challenged soldiers to share “innovative tactics, techniques, and procedures more widely than just within your unit or group of colleagues.”

They outlined an initial plan for institutional changes to enable this desired dialogue and steward the journals, subsequently refining and codifying it as a four-point platform managed by the Harding Project:

1. Modernizing venues and emphasizing a web-first and mobile-friendly format.
2. Updating archives to make historical journal articles more accessible.
3. Increasing staffing for the journals, including creating competitively manned editor assignments for uniformed personnel.
4. Incorporating professional journals into established Army education requirements, like adding a military journal citation requirement for writing assignments.
The movement, however, depends on the force’s bottom-up work. So, the Harding Project team is developing a Military Review “How To” special edition to help inexperienced writers, and the Army Chief of Staff publicly recognizes three articles per month in the Army University Press, in addition to sending authors a coin and a personal note congratulating them on their work. Moreover, the Army’s most senior leaders issued an unambiguous call to action: “Write for your branch magazines and professional bulletins. Look for opportunities to volunteer as an editor. Spread the word. And join us as we commit to renewing one of our Army’s greatest assets, our culture of professional military writing.” Still, many potential authors will hesitate to answer this call, and first-time authors may need a mentor’s push to begin the process.

**Professional Writing Is a Team Sport**

I would never have begun my professional writing journey without the encouragement of those around me. In 2015, I expressed concern to my boss that the artillery community’s liaison teams were undermanned. My leadership agreed and challenged me to craft an argument for the community, offering support as I wrote and published my first article. My career would likely have taken a drastically different path without that invaluable mentorship and encouragement. Because of this first experience and others since, writing has become a defining characteristic of who I am, personally and professionally.

I experienced something similar while completing the Art of War Scholars program at the Command and General Staff College. Near graduation, the director informed students of a long-standing informal graduation requirement to submit out our research for publication to share our findings with the broader DoD community. He proudly displayed a tracker highlighting each article’s submission and publication status and shared that information with previous graduates. This process incentivized professional discourse at the individual level and created a cultural shift for our small group. Many officers were surprised at their success.

Professional writing mentorship can come in many forms—from basic encouragement and support to broad, structured programs incentivizing leaders to write. For a more personal approach, mentorship can simply involve writing an article together. One of my most rewarding writing experiences was coauthoring an article with my first sergeant about our leadership philosophy. The project forced some difficult conversations as we codified our exact goal for the unit. Writing together also created a unique bond, and the program we developed was something we both believed in, not just an initiative the other supported.
Regardless of one’s role, coauthoring is an educational experience. I have been in the lead, coached through the process, and on a team of peers. Group writing shaped me as a writer, and I am proud I helped others cross the finish line with their first publications. Each project was rewarding and changed my relationships with the other authors, regardless of whether they were superiors, subordinates, or peers. Some articles were read more than others, but we took the conversation beyond our little circle every time, and the accomplishment of joining an important DoD discussion has intrinsic value.

**Conclusion**

Publishing articles has opened doors for me professionally, made me a confident writer, and helped me grow as a subject matter expert in niche areas. Professional writing has become a part of my identity as a military officer, and I strongly encourage everyone to take up the Army Chief of Staff’s charge. Beyond the personal satisfaction of doing one’s part, the DoD community needs to know what military leaders of all ranks think. Our Army leaders recently stated, “... [W]e cannot solely depend on the thoughts and voices of senior leaders in high command, as we can assure you: we do not have all the answers.” Professional discourse will shape the direction the Army is headed, even if it is only a minor adjustment. More soldiers must look to mentors or teammates to gain the courage to take a stance and add to the conversation. Publishing your ideas now will help shape the future environment the next generation will lead; future leaders must contribute to this vital dialogue.

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Endnotes


