

Resilience

Equipping Soldiers with the tools they need to be mentally prepared and emotionally robust — despite high operational tempo and short dwell times — begins with properly trained leadership. Front-line supervisors must be educated in how to develop the skills and abilities their Soldiers require to be resilient when confronted with the stress and adversity inherent in the profession of arms.

As part of its development of the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program, the Army is now building lessons into its institutional courses that help train leaders to build resilience in their troops. One such lesson will soon replace “Junior Battlemind Principles” in the Warrior Leader Course, said Master Sgt. Patrick Ciferri, the WLC course chief at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas.

“This is just a refined version of the older lesson, one that gives leaders new ways to teach Soldiers to think about how to get themselves out of a difficult situation,” he said.

“Army leaders need to be aware of the tools available to aid and assist Soldiers,” said Carl Carlson, a WLC course developer. “They also need to be aware that what they say and do will affect the Soldiers subordinate to them.”

HOW COMBAT IMPACTS RESILIENCE: Multiple deployments, separation from one’s family, bad experiences in combat or financial difficulties can affect the 21st-century Soldier’s resilience in multiple ways. Indeed, the more times a Soldier deploys, the more likely he or she is to report anxiety, depression or post-traumatic stress disorder.

Unfortunately, leaders often notice only behavioral problems in their Sol-



U.S. Army photos

diers, missing the cognitive, emotional or physical symptoms that indicate a need for help. As such, leaders are tasked with keeping an eye out for tiny indications of larger problems and ensuring that their Soldiers know they will not have to deal with their problems alone, even if difficulties surface months after returning from downrange.

HOW LEADERSHIP AFFECTS RESILIENCE: As junior enlisted Soldiers mature into junior NCOs, they must adopt a leadership style that promotes healthy resilience skills. Effective leadership makes a big difference; one study found that when Soldiers reported having good leaders, they were less likely to have behavioral health problems.

Leaders can start by demonstrating resilient thinking skills like seeing things in a different light, maintaining a good sense of humor and practicing an optimistic attitude. Such skills can become

contagious, helping reduce negative thinking in the entire team or squad.

COMPREHENSIVE SOLDIER FITNESS: The CSF program is not a single course, event or requirement. Just as proper physical fitness requires numerous training sessions, good behavioral health requires leaders to learn, practice what they learn, see the results and then learn more. This is a continuous process throughout an individual’s career, not something the Army “does” only after a crisis.

Leaders at every level are responsible for their Soldiers’ mental fitness and well-being. Leaders can affect not only the tactical and technical success of their Soldiers, but also their health and morale.

With good resilience skills, leaders build more effective units while developing Soldiers who are able to bounce back no matter the stressors they experience.



COMPREHENSIVE SOLDIER FITNESS

Comprehensive Soldier Fitness is a long-term strategy for Soldiers, family members and Army civilians to better prepare them to thrive in the face of protracted warfare and the everyday challenges of life. It comprises four major pillars:

- ✓ **Global Assessment Tool:** This confidential online survey identifies areas in which individuals can build resilience. Completing the GAT is an annual requirement for Soldiers.
- ✓ **Comprehensive Resilience Modules:** These optional, online training modules are determined by GAT performance and focus on specific resilience skills in each of the four CSF dimensions: social, emotional, spiritual and family.
- ✓ **Master Resilience Trainer Course:** A 10-day train-the-trainer course offered at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia; at Fort Jackson, S.C.; or via mobile training teams. Local commanders typically select NCOs serving in platoon sergeant or brigade staff positions to attend, and upon graduation, these NCOs serve as the commander's primary resilience trainers for the unit.
- ✓ **Institutional Resilience Training:** Resilience training is being incorporated into every level of the NCO Education System, such as the resilience lesson of the Warrior Leader Course. Thus, resilience training will occur across a Soldier's entire career, at every major career milestone.

Resilience skills: What junior leaders can do



ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION

Assertive communication helps **build connections** with others and solve problems through **confident, clear** and **controlled** interaction. The goal is to **understand another individual's perspective** and **move together** toward a positive outcome — an attitude of “we can work it out.” Often, the **IDEAL** model can be helpful: **Identify** and understand the problem, **Describe** the problem objectively and accurately, **Express** your concerns and how you feel, **Ask** for the other person's perspective, and **List** the outcomes.



PUT IT INTO PERSPECTIVE

This skill helps **stop catastrophic thinking**, **reduces anxiety** and **improves problem solving** by focusing on the implications of an adversity; it identifies the **worst, best** and **most likely outcomes** of a situation. Catastrophic thinking can waste critical energy when Soldiers ruminate about the irrational worst-case outcome of a situation. Putting things into perspective helps Soldiers and leaders **avoid going in circles**, **move beyond ruminating**, **assess the problem** and **look for viable solutions**.



ACTIVE CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONDING AND PRAISE

Responding **actively and constructively** to others' positive experiences can **strengthen relationships**. When a person makes a mistake, effective criticism names the **process, strategy** and **behavior that led to the problem** and pinpoints how to correct the problem. Effective praise identifies **what the person did to bring about the positive outcome** and sets up “**winning streaks**,” when positive outcomes follow one another.