Building Constructive Interpersonal Communication Skills in Military Professionals: Generating a Culture of Trust

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BUILDING CONSTRUCTIVE INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN MILITARY PROFESSIONALS: GENERATING A CULTURE OF TRUST

by

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ABSTRACT

Trust and open communication are interdependent and as a post 9/11 career Army leader, I have witnessed what appears to be the erosion of both within the military ranks. Military quality of life and mental health issues are on the rise, with compliance and prevention programs appearing to be less than impactful solutions. The resulting effects of which is a loss of trust and confidence in leadership. The research and findings presented within this synthesis strongly indicate that targeted training on interpersonal communication skills and counseling would simultaneously foster leader development and underpin a culture of trust and open communication. Through discussion on the Army Counseling Program and related curriculum, I demonstrate that the current apprentice style method of teaching counseling, which directly links to the utilization of interpersonal communication skills, is largely ineffective. Using Action Research as a guiding framework for training development, this synthesis examines the potential organizational benefits of implementing a routine and targeted training approach to interpersonal communication skills in military professionals. This synthesis paper serves as the culmination of my inquiry within the Critical and Creative Thinking Program at the University of Massachusetts Boston and as such outlines the critical and creative thinking skills utilized throughout this exploration. Finally, as a concerned leader passionate about generating dialogue and creating a culture of trust, I offer potential course materials for interpersonal communications skills training for leaders interested in developing these skills through their leader development programs.

Keywords: interpersonal communication, trust, Army Counseling Program, empathy, dialogue, military culture, leader development
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Introduction

“I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles; but today it means getting along with people.”
-Mahatma Gandhi

Imagine you are on an esprit de corps (morale boosting) run with your unit when you begin to have a difficult time breathing. Not a this-run-is-hard type of difficult breathing, but something-doesn’t-feel-right kind of difficult breathing. But, because you are one of the commanders in charge, you know it wouldn’t look right if you fell out, so, you continue to run. You continue to run until it becomes too difficult causing you to stop in your tracks, not even leaving yourself enough time to get out of the formation's way. One of the medics running nearby knows it is the second time this has happened to you in as many weeks so calls an ambulance. The ambulance takes you to the hospital where they perform some tests and ultimately decide you have allergy induced asthma. The four plus hours you are at the hospital not one senior member of your chain of command calls or stops by to check on you.

When you finally return to your unit, you immediately go to speak to your commanding officer, because you know you should. Only, when you walk into his office, he doesn’t ask you if you are ok, he doesn’t ask you what was wrong, he asks you if you fell out because you are pregnant. He cuts you off after you say “no” and pushes an already completed Army Developmental Counseling Form (DA Form 4856, 2014.) in front of you that speaks to how you are failing as a company commander because you are not setting the proper physical fitness example. He “explains” to you that this behavior will not be tolerated, and it could result in your removal as a company commander. He then pushes the form across the table and directs you to sign it. No dialogue, no empathy, nothing but dismissal. You return to your company only to find that the rumor that you are falling out because you are pregnant has spread to your Soldiers. So,
you address them in mass to let them know the truth, as if, even if you were pregnant, it was some awful punishable thing. Then you finish your workday painfully embarrassed, ashamed, and angry. Not angry at your leadership, not angry at the situation, angry at yourself. I know this feeling, because four years into my military career, I was the person in this scenario.

Ultimately, once the self-shame dissipated, I was left with an overwhelming sense that my leadership didn’t care about me as a person and probably never would. I knew physical fitness was important. The self-aware person I was/am knows my physical fitness had begun to wane a bit over the previous six months, but I also knew I was still fit, just not at my best. The resilient person in me also recognized that this situation wasn’t entirely about my physical fitness, there were also dimensions of unknown health effects. Regardless, my leadership's lack of caring in this ultimately left me feeling like I couldn’t trust them and that they didn’t care. If I’m being honest, I already felt that way for a myriad of reasons, but this solidified it for me.

While my example above is unique in its sequence and events, the overarching theme of leaders not caring enough to even listen to the Soldiers perspective, is sadly, not unique. In fact, in the 246 years of the Army’s existence, numerous Soldiers accounts of leadership failing to show they cared by taking the time to discuss or even just listen to the “why” before passing judgment or establishing consequences can be found in Soldier’s journals, letters home to family and historical testimonials. Bringing that thought into the 21st century, those same stories of concerns can be found across blogs, social media sites and military centric online forums. While not every comment left on those sites is negative or citing a negative example, the vast majority are. Why? Why is this a continued concern? I assert, through this paper, that at the core, the issue is the result of a deficit in the understanding and employment of constructive interpersonal communication skills. In short, we don’t know how to talk to people in a way that shows our
concern without seeming judgmental in order to preserve (or build) the relationship and promote mutual understanding and trust.

The Bigger Picture

In 2001, just after the events of September 11th rocked the United States (U.S.) to its core, the Department of Defense (DoD) began statistically tracking the suicide rates of U.S. service members. The Department for Veteran’s Affairs (V.A.) began tracking veteran suicide rates shortly thereafter in 2005. In June 2021, a Brown University Study conducted by Thomas Howard Suitt, III showed that U.S. military suicide rates (per 100,000) are significantly higher than the U.S. public suicide rates. Even more alarming is Suitt’s estimate that “30,177 active duty personnel and veterans of the post 9/11 wars have died by suicide, significantly more than the 7,057 service members killed in post-9/11 war operations” (p. 1). In Suitt’s conclusions and recommendations he asserts that there is a need to hold the government, military, and V.A. leadership accountable for their resource management (p. 33). He further supports his conclusion with the following:

The DoD and V.A. have invested in and developed tremendous resources to help service members and veterans. However, these are not nearly enough. For instance, a recent New York Times article revealed findings from a 2017 U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) suicide report disclosing firsthand reports of service members viewing suicide prevention classes as merely obligatory but not serious. Worse, commanders appeared insincere when tasking service members with seeking mental health resources, while others reported the military institution treated those who sought help like criminals. If the report is representative of other branches of service, then no manner of additional funds or programs could be effective without taking other preventative measures
The VA is not without similar problems. A report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office in 2018 found the V.A. failed to spend millions of dollars set aside for suicide prevention outreach. Worse, 31 percent of “denied or rejected non-VA emergency care claims were inappropriately processed” in 2017, meaning veterans had to take on the financial burden of health care for an incredible sum of $716 million.

A 2021 RAND Research Report using available data from 2006 to 2018 found that most military sexual assaults and sexual harassment continue to go unreported due to barriers such as “concern about career implications, fear or retaliation” (Acosta et al., 2021, p. 9) or—potentially even worse— are reported at the lowest level but not actioned or documented. It is estimated that one in 16 women and one in 143 men are sexual assault victims and one in four women and one in 16 men experience sexual harassment. These estimates coupled with official reports show rates of both have significantly increased. The RAND study conclusions and recommendations mirror those of Suitt’s.

DoD had invested a considerable amount of time and money to prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment, research the root causes of those behaviors, and develop robust response systems. Yet despite DoD’s efforts, close Congressional oversight, hundreds of new policies and initiatives and attention from multiple DoD leaders over time, sexual assault and sexual harassment are persistent problems in the services. Reversing this trend will require significant changes across the DoD enterprise. (Acosta, et al, p. 13)

Since 1999, the DoD has had a statutory requirement to report data relating to domestic abuse. Despite the DoD’s failure to meet all requirements of that statute, the U.S. Government Accountability Office published a report showing that between 2015-2019 there were 40,000
incidents that met the statutes domestic abuse criteria (GAO-21-298,2021). In addition to the data collection, the report discussed results from interviewing 68 domestic violence survivors. The results of those interviews are captured as follows:

 [...] 28 of the 68 survivors we interviewed stated they tried to report the abuse—meaning they told a cognizant official about the abuse—but perceived that no action was taken. For example, survivors described feeling ignored or not taken seriously or that the official to whom they reported tried to defend the actions of their abuser. In some cases, survivors described negative actions that resulted from these attempts to report, such as being given a letter of reprimand or being ridiculed by members of their abuser’s command or unit. Similarly, when we asked 55 survivors who stated they had reported abuse to the chain of command what actions they perceived that the commander had taken, 20 survivors perceived no action was taken. (p. 147)

The point of highlighting these three, trauma related “epidemics”¹, as they are often referred to, is not to negatively portray the military but is instead to highlight that despite dedicating resources and reporting efforts for the past 20 plus years, the DoD is no closer to successful prevention of these mental health related concerns. Why is that the case? I assert that it is not because leaders do not care, but that the military culture², to this point, has not evolved to enable the necessary changes. All three of the reports used to substantiate the claims on


² Culture is defined as the knowledge, ways of thinking, shared understandings of behavior, and physical objects that characterize people’s way of life.
suicide, sexual assault, and domestic violence mention the need for a cultural change. Implementing policies, conducting mandatory training, and throwing resources at the “problems” is not enough to generate the culture shift that is needed within the military. Cultural change does not occur by mandate, nor can frameworks intended to shift a culture be successfully implemented without ensuring understanding or knowledge of how to enable and implement the foundational elements of the framework. Yet, over the last 20 years, I would argue that is exactly what the military has attempted to do—shift culture through mandates and poorly educated frameworks.

Organizational cultures are complex. Military cultures, given the nature of their mission (to fight and win the nation's wars), are arguably even more nuanced. Regardless, research has shown that there is a significant positive correlation between leadership behavior/communication and organizational culture and job satisfaction. Furthermore, it was found that interactions with coworkers also influence organizational culture and job satisfaction (Tsai, 2011).

Through communicating and promoting the organizational vision to subordinates, and in getting their acknowledgement of the vision, it is possible to influence their work behavior and attitudes. When there is good interaction between the leader and subordinates, there will be contributions to team communication and collaboration, and encouragement of subordinates to accomplish the mission and objectives assigned by the organization, which in turn enhances job satisfaction. (Tsai, 2011, p. 9)

Communication and leadership behavior play significant roles in organizational culture. Communication skills are also one of the key tenets of a good leader in military doctrine. At the heart of suicide, sexual assault, and domestic violence prevention and intervention (and the
numerous frameworks/programs that have been emplaced within) is human connection and relationships—both of which require interpersonal communication skills (Tsai, 2011).

Interpersonal communication not only plays a significant role in organizational culture, but also in organizational effectiveness. Singh (2014) declares that nearly every function of an organization depends on some form of communication, whether direct or indirect:

Whether planning, organizing, leading and monitoring, managers communicate with and through other people. This implies that every person’s communication skills affect both personal and organizational effectiveness. It looks reasonable to determine that one of the most impeding forces to organizational effectiveness is a privation of effective communication. (p. 36)

Despite interpersonal communication skills being fundamental to the desired skills and outcomes of the human-centered aspects of the military, organizational culture, organizational effectiveness and job satisfaction, inadequate time is spent deliberately training and developing those fundamental skills in military professionals. One of the greatest basketball coaches and trainers of all time, John Wooden, in response to what is needed to be a good coach, stated “A knowledge of and the ability to properly and quickly execute the fundamentals. Be prepared and cover every detail”. Throughout this paper, I will demonstrate that dedicating time to teaching and utilizing constructive interpersonal communication skills to military personnel could positively shift the military culture in the way needed to make noticeable positive impacts on relationships and building trusted connections. That change will not occur quickly but given proper emphasis and leadership modeling/implementation it has promise and utilization.

**Personal Background/Credentials**
In 2005, following completion of both the Army Reserve Officers’ Training Corps Program and my degree program (B.S Psychology with a minor in Leadership Psychology), I commissioned into the United States Army (herein just referred to as Army) as an active duty officer. I have spent the following 17 years in a variety of leadership roles and positions within differing echelons of Army logistics units, both in deployed and continental United States environments. Almost four years of my career were dedicated to training newly commissioned Army officers. Two years of my career involved doctrine development. I am also a trained and certified Army Training Developer and Master Resilience Trainer. My career experiences, while not typical of the average Army career, have given me the unique opportunity to experience the Army Profession through the lenses of a student, training and doctrine developer, military instructor/trainer, and the operational Army– experiences that I believe have broadened and informed my point of view in relation to the cause-and-effect relationship across the three training domains (institutional, operational, and self-development)³.

My Journey to this Exploration

In an earlier paper researched during the Dialogue Processes course in the Critical and Creative Thinking (CCT) Graduate Program at the University of Massachusetts Boston, I wrote about why and how the Army Counseling Program does not generate dialogue. The premise of that paper was that if the Army desires a culture of leaders capable of effectively counseling their subordinates on a variety of issues, to include performance and professional development, they must take measures to enhance Soldiers ability to communicate. A principal proposition drawn from that exploration was that if the Army improved individual communication skills, they

³ AR 350-1 change 2, Army Training and Leader Development
would enable leaders and Soldiers to open lines of communication between each other, in turn, improving the Army Counseling Program.

My continued research into this topic has further solidified my recommendation as well as connected the idea to the benefits and leverage building interpersonal skills can provide to driving organizational change, culture, and effectiveness for the better. I maintain that poor interpersonal communication skills are at the heart of ineffective or non-existent counseling and that increased and more deliberately targeted, consistent training on communication skills, coupled with proven methods would drive positive dialogue, a shared understanding, and an increased feeling of trust. I focus on the Army Counseling Program in my discussions on the benefits of building interpersonal communication skills as it is the one program or primary time in which interpersonal communication versus directive communication is the intended type of communication to be used.

While my focus is on the Army Counseling Program, the discussion captured within this paper is relevant to military sister services (Marines, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard) as well as interactions between leaders and subordinates outside the scope of the Army Counseling Program. All conversations and communications are opportunities to develop trust and confidence—just as much as they are opportunities to destroy previously established trust and confidence—and should be viewed as such, but counseling sessions are a great starting point for leaders to demonstrate and implement the skills. Additionally, there is great potential for the training and application of the skills to extend into personal relationships.

**Defining the Problem**

“If you define a problem correctly, you almost have the solution.” – Steve Jobs
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This section outlines my exploration into the root cause of mental health related concerns (suicide, sexual harassment/assault, domestic violence, and toxic/unproductive leadership) and the connection to the Army Counseling program. Next, I outline the Army Counseling Program and current Army counseling and communications related training. Following those experience and research-backed explorations, I promote interpersonal communications training as a solution to positively improving leader to led relationships. Additionally, I discuss aspects of military culture that are necessary to consider in regard to training design, implementation, and utilization. Lastly, I discuss the necessity of leadership modeling and implementation and its correlation with the Army Leadership Requirements Model in respect to the Army Counseling Program, interpersonal communication and building a culture of trust.

The Root Cause: Macro Level

“For every effect there is a root cause. Find and address the root cause rather than try to fix the effect, as there is no end to the latter.” -Unknown Author

With the understanding that the issues (suicide, sexual harassment/assault, and domestic violence) presented in “The Bigger Picture” section of this paper are really symptoms of a larger problem, the first step became clarifying the problem by identifying the root cause(s). While there are several problem-solving methods available, I chose the 5 Whys Technique.

The 5 Whys Technique is a simple problem-solving method meant to quickly assist in uncovering the root or true cause of a problem (Serrat, 2017). Identifying the root cause of the problem ensures that efforts and resources are applied to solve the real problem and not just symptoms of the problem. The 5 Whys technique was developed in the 1930s by Toyota Industries inventor Sakichi Toyoda. With the 5 Whys technique, once a problem statement is developed, the next step is to ask the question why five times (more or less) until the question
can no longer be answered. The final useful “why” of the question sequence should expose the root cause and a countermeasure or process change to address the root cause.

To get a more holistic perspective and understanding of the root cause(s), I approached each macro level symptom individually using the 5 Whys technique. First, I asked myself why Soldiers do not ask their leadership (or others) for help when they are suicidal (see Figure 1). With the first iteration of why, I identified six potential branches for further inquiry. By the third why, I found the six branches converging. Ultimately, the final why led me to the answers of a lack of trust and open communication.

Figure 1. 5 Why’s Root Cause Analysis for Suicide
Next, using the 5 Why’s Technique with the question, why do Soldiers not report sexual harassment/assault, the initial inquiry resulted in five potential branches (see Figure 2). Within this inquiry, convergence of answers began to occur within the second iteration of why and ultimately led to very similar responses to the suicide inquiry. By the fifth iteration, I discovered the same ending root causes of a lack of trust and open communication. Figure 3 shows the 5 Whys results for inquiry into domestic violence reporting, which also concluded with a lack of trust and open communication as root causes.
Trust and open communication are very linked and interdependent with research as early as the 1950s showing that communication is a key element of developing and maintaining trust (Thomas et al., 2009). As such, it was not surprising that the two would be linked or coappear as root causes. Thomas et al. continues to point out that “Trust is based on beliefs about the other party, which are shaped through information. Consequently, providing information gives an employee the opportunity to develop trust, and lack of information can reduce trust” (p. 290). When an organization (or relationship) allows open communication, it means the employee or relationship feels comfortable voicing their opinions, thoughts, or suggestions despite the potential their thoughts may not be those of the majority. Comfort with open communication reveals that there is interpersonal trust within the organization. The presence of both of those elements (open communication and trust) can result in a reliable prediction of increased employee involvement in organizational goals (Thomas et al., 2009, p 306).

**Root Cause: Macro to Micro Connection**
“Macro insights define the “problems worth solving.” Micro insights will tell you if you’re “solving the problem right.” – Georgia Patera

The significance of open communication and trust does not end with their correlation nor identification as root causes of the larger problem, but instead extends into understanding an actionable insight at the micro level perspective. Following reflection on the identified root causes of open communication and trust in which I asked myself where those two areas would be engaged most, I came to two conclusions: leadership and the Army Counseling Program. Further consideration led to the decision to focus on the Army Counseling Program only, as leadership seemed to be more of a nuanced macro consideration. On the other hand, the Army Counseling Program was another known area of concern that centered more on one-on-one relationships. Using the same methodology presented in identifying the macro level root causes, I analyzed the negative perceptions of the Army Counseling Program (see Figure 4). The end results of that root cause analysis were three concerns: lack of trust, lack of communication, and lack of training. The root cause analysis of both the macro and micro level issues seemed to confirm my original proposition from the Dialogue Processes course in the CCT Graduate Program, that The Army Counseling Program does not generate dialogue (open communication) which effects trust and would benefit from routine targeted interpersonal skills training.
Figure 4. 5 Why’s Root Cause Negative Perceptions of Army Counseling Program

The Army Counseling Program

The Army relies on the Army Counseling Program to both ensure and gauge whether leaders adequately know their Soldiers. Specifically, managing individual talent (both from an individual and organizational perspective), identifying potential personal or professional issues that affect work performance or general health and welfare, and performing performance driven feedback. The Army loosely defines counseling as “the process used by leaders to review with a subordinate the subordinate’s demonstrated performance and potential … to help Soldiers and Army Civilians become more capable, resilient, satisfied, and better prepared for current and future responsibilities” (ATP 6-22.1, 2014). These counseling sessions are meant to be a leadership tool and are not meant to be a replacement for family life, mental health, or trained religious/domestic/financial counselors. That said, within a counseling session, the subordinate
may present many verbal or non-verbal indicators that those resources are needed/necessary. Those indicators can be easily missed by improperly trained personnel. (See Appendix A for more in-depth information and background on the Army Counseling Program).

The effectiveness of Army counseling has been a contentious topic for years. Sit in any sensing session (a forum designed to allow Soldiers to air grievances to senior leadership), or peruse any military centric online forum such as RallyPoint (www.rallypoint.com) and you’ll be inundated with personal stories and grievances with counseling, be it the effectiveness, use, or quality. While not all personnel have purely negative experiences, most have more negative personal stories than they do positive. Even more disturbing, a significant number of people, particularly officers, report never being formally counseled at all. As Joe Byerly writes in his article, *Performance Counseling Doesn’t Have to Be a Wasted Experience*, “Unfortunately, counseling is hit or miss across the Army. I would argue that the majority of officers and noncommissioned officers receive formal performance counseling only a handful of times over the course of their careers, leaving inflated officer and NCO evaluation reports as their only source or professional feedback.”

Throughout my 17-year Army tenure, the most common reason I have heard for either failing to conduct counseling or for inferior quality counseling is the lack of time. The Army asks a lot of its leaders; the operations pace continues to increase, while resources remain constrained for a variety of reasons. Due to the operational mission requirements, administrative tasks such as counseling, often, fall to the wayside or are rushed and therefore of poorer quality.\(^4\)

“Many are guilty of powering through monthly counseling. Along with the ever-increasing operations tempo today’s Army faces, as leaders, we’re responsible for ensuring several tasks get accomplished in a short amount of time. However, short-changing developmental counselings is not the best leadership approach for making your session effective. This will result in failing to develop your subordinates, which then fails to develop the larger Army” (Signore, 2018).

Many others attribute poor counseling to poor counseling skills in general. Many understand the procedural (or science) requirements of counseling, in that they understand the need, the general process, and how to complete the DA Form 4856 (See Appendix A for more information). What they seem to lack is an ability to effectively communicate with others. They lack the artful skill of truly being able to connect with another, read their body language or entice the unsaid or unwilling to say from their commentary or actions, they lack empathy and are too headstrong in their method, or they simply avoid confrontation.

[...] they don’t know how to positively influence the behavior of other people. They struggle with how to talk with their employees, their bosses, and their peers about difficult subjects— or perhaps they have tried airing their grievances and gotten nowhere—so instead, they gripe to others and feel powerless. They don’t realize that the right kind of honest and authentic communication, delivered in a nonthreatening way, could actually change many of these situations for the better. (Gallagher, 2009, p. xi)

While not all leaders are bad counselors, there certainly seems to be an impression that there are much fewer good ones than there are bad. Just like you can’t forget a good leader, Soldiers can’t forget the feedback, even negative, they received from good counselors.
I personally witnessed the power of counseling as I watched a young officer transform from an unproductive and poor leader into a highly effective one in just a few short months. All it took was a commander who was willing to take the time and sit down with him to have an open and honest dialogue. The commander’s commitment to that individual helped him become a stronger platoon leader, and in turn, improved the performance of the platoon and the company. (Byerly, 2014).

In my informed view, all of these factors— failure to/inadequately conduct counseling’s, time/operations tempo, unfamiliarity/inability to effectively employ interpersonal communication skills— tie into or are a direct result of the military culture. In this case, I am defining military culture as the knowledge, ways of thinking, shared understandings of behavior, and physical objects that characterize the military experience.

Military culture prioritizes the mission first, meaning military professionals are focused on accomplishing their primary mission, followed by the secondary missions. Each unit has a tailored mission they are relentlessly training, preparing for, conducting, or measured against on the daily. Regardless of what other tasks and requirements may fall on them, that mission focus is never abandoned. That focus is what makes the military, especially the Army, one of the greatest in the world⁵. But it does not come without sacrifices to other skills due to time, resources, or priorities. This issue will be discussed more in a follow-on section.

Existing Programs and Curriculum

Currently, the Army relies heavily on on-the-job training for developing leaders-as-counselors. On-the-job training refers to experience gained, in a non-academic setting, while actively serving in a military role. Leaders-as-counselors refers to Soldiers serving in leadership

⁵ https://www.businessinsider.in/defense/ranked-the-worlds-20-strongest-militaries/slidelist/51930339.cms
positions (i.e., with subordinate Soldiers) who, based on leading Soldiers, have the requirement
to counsel their subordinates. The hierarchical structure of the Army means those same leaders
are also the subordinate of another leader, and as such, should receive counseling from their
leadership.

Leaders do not receive routine targeted and specific training on how to counsel, or
development of counseling skills. Most of their “training” is acquired through observing how
their leaders counsel them or others in the unit. They most typically subconsciously (or
consciously) collect counseling techniques and methods through their experiences, whether
positive or negative, and observations of what does or does not seem to work. Leaders may
receive periodic leader development sessions focused on counseling from their unit leadership.
There are no Army established guidelines or lesson plans for leader development sessions, those
sessions are guided at the discretion of the unit commander or their designated representative.
Some commanders may coordinate for outside agencies, centered on counseling, to serve as
trainers for the class, while others may choose to use a leader they consider to be an example of a
good counselor to lead the discussion/training. As with any topic or professional skill, Soldiers
are encouraged to seek self-development opportunities through professional readings, continued
education, and professional forums.

Leaders, at all levels, do receive short classes on counseling during their institutional (or
academic) professional military leader development training, which they generally attend prior to
or following a promotion to a more senior rank (applicable to ranks of sergeant and above only).
That said, the training plan is generally no more than two hours in duration and focuses mainly
on the information or framework outlined in Army doctrine manual, ATP 6-22.1. Good
instructors will aim to enhance the lesson plan’s depth by providing real world personal
examples of counseling(s), facilitating role playing scenarios, or inviting guests of varying ranks for panel discussions. Even still, those instructors are providing training based on their experiences and have not received specialized training on the topic.

Additionally, training sessions assume that Soldiers enter the Army with, and knowledge of, healthy communication skills, which is often not the case. Many of the Soldiers enter the military as high school graduates, from less than healthy environments\(^6\) where skills such as empathy, receiving/giving constructive criticism, active listening etc. were not learned or demonstrated. Yet, the training sessions and doctrine list these skills as necessary attributes of a leader-as-counselor but give little explanation as to what those things are or how to develop those skills.

Further, an interview I conducted in 2021 with Mrs. Judi Price\(^7\), editor and doctrine writer at the Center for Army Profession and Leadership (CAPL), the proponent for Army Leadership and Counseling Doctrine and Training relayed that while there are several working initiatives within CAPL, most are focused on leadership skills directly. While those are transferrable and relevant to counseling and communication skills, that may not be immediately realized to a junior or novice leader-as-counselor. Those items that are directly related to counseling are tools rather than training sources. While the tools, such as a more interactive DA Form 4856, now referred to as the Counseling Enhancement Tool (CET)\(^8\) are helpful in tailoring or preparing the counseling forms themselves, they are limited by the leader-as-counselors’

\(^6\) As Julie Bergeron et al writes “Not all adolescents [transitioning to adulthood] have the same opportunity to develop social skills. This can be due to a number of reasons, most typically the result of environmental causes (Smangs, 2010).” Bergeron, J. L., Nolan, R. F., Dai, Y., & White, B. (2013, March). Interpersonal Skills Training With At-Risk High School Students. In National Forum of Applied Educational Research Journal (Vol. 26, No. 3).

\(^7\) J. Price (personal communication, 2021)

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abilities and understanding and do not inherently affect the delivery of the counseling. Other tools include smart cards or pocket cards with tips. These too, while helpful, are limited by the counselors understanding of the tips and ability to execute them in real-time, in their intended manner. Further, those tools are not readily known or distributed. Currently, CAPL relies on word-of-mouth or their website for distributing this information. Accessibility to the tools is an issue, but not one I will not focus on within the scope of this paper.

After reviewing the results of the 2018 Army Research Institute study published in January of 2022 that was focused on Army non-commissioned officers’ perceptions of interpersonal communication and counseling skills (results of which are discussed in the follow-on section), I contacted the author, Dr. April Sanders, via email to discuss what if any additional initiatives she knew her research may have generated. She informed me that the Army Research Institute in conjunction with the CAPL began piloting what they are calling “Talk Like a Leader” (TLaL) in late summer of 2021. The program focuses on motivational interviewing or the “collaborative, goal-oriented style of communication designed to strengthen personal motivation for, and commitment to, a specific goal by eliciting and exploring the person’s own reasons for change” (Sanders, 2021, p1). TLaL targets non-commissioned officers and presents communications training through six training labs. The results of the pilot were not releasable at the time I spoke to Dr. Sanders. A review of the pilot program schedule revealed the program focuses on many of the skills I have recommended for training implementation. At present, based on my knowledge of the TLaL program, the biggest difference between the current TLaL program proposal and mine is the target audience. The TLaL program appears to target non-commissioned officers only, leaving enlisted soldiers, warrant officers, officers, and Department

9 A. Sanders (personal communication, 2022)
of the Army Civilians untrained. While I understand based on my experience with training and doctrine development that it can take 2-5 years to implement changes in Army doctrine and training and that by decreasing your target audience you can decrease that time, I remain cautious and concerned with whether it will be influential enough. Furthermore, it is designed to be a one-shot training session, which may not be sufficient for long-term learning transfer.

**Why target the training domain**

The Army Counseling Program is essentially a compliance program. A compliance program is a formal program that specifies an organization's internal policies and procedures that ensure they comply with applicable laws, regulations, and private policies or procedures. Generally, effective compliance programs can be attributed to synergy in four different areas: education, experience, leadership support coupled with buy-in, and enforcement (Andreisová, 2016; Wulf, 2012). A detailed look at those four areas illustrates that throughout the establishment of the Army Counseling program, training has been the domain that has received the least amount of emphasis yet has strong potential to be the most influential. I would further assert that in the military the four general areas of compliance programs are further complicated by the impacts of military culture.

Examining the domain of experience shows that the apprentice type, on-the-job training currently used to impart counseling skills from one generation to another is severely lacking. Relying heavily on on-the-job training, otherwise known as experience, largely and arguably wrongly assumes that the employer, or leader in this case, 1) knows what “right” looks like, 2) is practicing what “right” looks like, and 3) can effectively teach what “right” looks like. Even a leader with the best intentions, if routinely exposed to less effective, misleading, or misdirected processes/practices, will or can be influenced by those experiences and even more so, their
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reactions to those experiences. That subtle, or not so subtle, influence will affect their own bias, lens(es) and inherently their practice of the learned behavior which will then affect the bias, lens(es) and practice of their apprentice(s). While that trickle-down effect cannot be avoided, it can be more purposefully guided and nurtured through the initial and routine development of fundamental skills proven to aide counselors.

Looking next at leadership support and buy-in shows that while most leaders will tout the party line that counseling is important, few back that with their actions or intent. What I mean by that is leaders don’t provide adequate time for proper counseling, nor do they demonstrate that it’s important to them through their own actions. I can say with assertion—through experience, discussions with all levels of military personnel, and the personal stories and vignettes provided throughout this paper—that a significant number of senior leaders are not counseling their Soldiers and therefore are not practicing their own priorities. Furthermore, leaders do not provide adequate time. This can be shown in two ways. One, they pack the schedule so full of requirements (training, daily operations, etc.) that there is no time remaining or dedicated to counseling, whether that’s the preparation for, conduct of, or follow-up of a previous counseling. Secondly, they expect counseling to occur immediately following an event. For instance, say a Soldier fails to be at their place of duty and did not notify or receive an excused absence in advance. This can be an event that is captured in an event-oriented counseling (failure to be at your appointed place of duty) or it could just be a dialogue between the leader and Soldier. Oftentimes what happens is the First Sergeant immediately looks at the Platoon Sergeant and says, “I want that counseling statement on my desk within the hour”. So, not only does the platoon sergeant now need to locate the Soldier to ensure they are ok, but they also need to type the counseling, give the counseling, and provide a copy to the First Sergeant all within the hour.
COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN MILITARY PROFESSIONALS

Those requirements don’t include or eliminate what the platoon sergeant already has planned for that hour. This eliminates the ability to properly talk the Soldier through the event, understand the reasoning (e.g., they got a flat tire), or discuss the consequences. Therefore, resulting in the Soldier believing the leadership doesn’t care about them as a person and further solidifies the belief that counseling’s are negatively focused. All of the points and examples provided in this paragraph work against lower leadership understanding the importance of and buying into the central idea and benefit of counseling.

Leadership support and buy-in directly correlates to enforcement. The Army counseling program has been enforced for decades through policy and regulation, yet again, military professionals’ perspective on the Army Counseling Program’s effectiveness, or lack thereof, have not changed in decades. Policy and regulations require that counseling be conducted for specific reasons and events, but most often are only enforced for negative reflected events such as a non-recommendation for promotion or violations of the Uniform Code of Military Justice in which administrative or judicial consequences are implemented. More routine events, such as annual evaluations, merely require a block to be checked that states counseling did occur, although there is no checks and balance system to ensure counseling is actually occurring.

That leaves the last domain of education, also referred to as training. Very little has changed reference counseling doctrine and training within the Army since the 1970s. If anything, doctrine has become less descriptive over the years, with many of the examples, role-playing and training scenarios that were present in the 1970 version of the manual being removed completely. While I am not arguing that those examples should be added back to doctrine, they are of value and should be inserted somewhere. While these items are not forever lost to the archives, they are difficult to find, lost in the depths of Army websites, unit share points and
other unadvertised and difficult to locate sites. The knowledge management of the material is seemingly nonexistent, so much so that even a simple Google search on Army Counseling turns up little usable material (you must Google Army Leadership to locate some and understand the connection). It’s not unless you’re familiar with the organizations directly or most influential to the counseling doctrine that you happen upon the material by searching their website. The novice, newly promoted noncommissioned officer, or Soldier counseling for the first time or desiring to learn counseling skills, is not going to be innately aware of these sites. The fact that the information is no longer readily available, and that Soldiers and leaders are craving and desire that information can be directly seen through leaders-as-counselors purchasing books or outside resources that claim to teach them Army counseling skills.

Soldiers desiring interpersonal skills training to enhance counseling is further solidified in recently published (2022) research findings from an Army Research Institute (ARI) Study. In that 2018 study that interviewed 64 current or soon-to-be noncommissioned officers (NCOs) with leaders-as-counselor roles researchers determined “the vast majority reported a desire for training in ICCS [Interpersonal Communication Counseling Skills] to improve counseling outcomes” (Sanders, p. 21). The report further stated, “No respondents denied the need for training although a couple noted the realities of implementing the training” (p. 21).

Overall, the surveys and interviews conducted as part of the ARI study showed that the participants generally associated counseling with the administrative and procedural requirements rather than the discussion or interpersonal communication intent of counseling. Further it was shown that many described counseling as one-way authoritative communication. Less than 5% mentioned counseling as a two-way communication process utilizing interpersonal communication skills. Sanders research findings also agreed with my assertions that our Army
doctrine is lacking clear guidance on “(a) emotion management (for NCOs to manage their own emotions and their Soldier’s), (b) the use of effective feedback, and (c) how these factors are related (e.g. the impact of emotions on feedback)” as well as “insufficient or non-existent” training (p. v).

Adding additional focused training would not only fulfill the leader desires outlined in the ARI study, but also potentially mitigate some of the negative effects of the other domains. Through more training, you could generate more confidence in abilities, resulting in more positive experiences and buy-in. A 2011 study from the United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences proved that point directly (Johnson et al, 2011). In that study, company and field grade officers received targeted training on performing retention counseling. While the training was focused on retention counseling only for Army officers, it still demonstrated the basic premise of my point. Targeted in-depth training on counseling focused communication skills 1) works, 2) is desired/ thought to be necessary and 3) is sustainable. The training, provided in small classes over several weeks, focused on the importance of conducting informal counseling in addition to formal counseling, as well as improving the quality of counseling the senior/field grade officers were able to provide. Training included equipping trainees (field grade senior officers) with counseling techniques and strategies (both effective and ineffective), how to apply the discussed techniques and strategies. Training also targeted improving the trainee’s intrinsic motivation to provide quality counseling to their subordinates. Researchers within that study found the training was positively received from the trainees, in fact most of them recommended the implementation of this training across the Army. Further, in exit surveys many of the trainees said they would appreciate or believe it necessary to receive more training on counseling. Real-life recipients of the counseling following
trainee’s completion of the program, also noted they felt as though the counseling they received was of higher quality than in the past. Despite the seemingly successful pilot of that program, it does not seem to have been formally implemented past this 2011 study. Once again, a need and desire to receive interpersonal communication skills training to assist in improving counseling appears to have gone unactioned.

In addition to the demonstrated desire and need by Soldiers for constructive interpersonal communications skills training to enhance counseling abilities, there is a large potential for learning transfer and skill utilization in other areas. Interpersonal communication skills will not only improve counseling (if used in that forum), but also general leadership dialogue and personal relationships. It will also translate well to coaching, negotiating, and mentoring/teaching as may be necessary in other areas of military employment.10

Military Culture Consideration with Respect to Communication

“They [military] tend to think that they need to be strong and need to handle issues on their own.” – Colonel Rebecca I. Porter11

The military is a culture of subcultures. It brings together people from varying cultural, racial, educational, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds and demands they work together as a team to accomplish a myriad of differing missions in support of the nation. In some cases, the Soldier member may not even be a U.S. citizen. While this is certainly a positive aspect of the military, it does not come without its own set of challenges. Those challenges include language barriers, cognitive or learning differences, ethical understanding, or values and so forth.

Yet, from the minute they enter the military we expect them to uphold the same values, learn via the same structured program of instruction and be able to execute tasks at the same level. The study of any pedagogical approach will show that is nearly impossible to do.

Another consideration is the military culture itself. Many of the aspects that make a military culture great and militarily effective, such as others before self, are also what makes a Soldier less prone to discuss personal issues or ask for help. These aspects of military culture can be a double-edged sword. They can negatively affect communication, preventing the necessary buy-in and limiting open dialogue, things critical to the effectiveness of the organization. Additionally, they further perpetuate stigmas that prevent Soldiers from seeking the help they may need. Emotional control and discipline are other qualities military professionals are known for and a cornerstone to the way leaders are taught or expected to maintain the good order and discipline of a unit. “Wearing your heart on your sleeve” or other similar idioms is viewed as a negative trait, but often interpreted to the extreme, with many believing it means you should never show emotion, rather than using them judiciously, controlled, or in an empathetic manner — ways that would benefit interpersonal communications such as counseling. “One of my commanders once told me during my initial counseling that I should “not wear your emotions on your sleeve.” What he didn’t mean in that statement was not to show my emotions period, but he meant that my emotions can and often do have a very big impact on the organization as a whole.” (Parson, 2013, p 80).

Counterproductive leadership, more commonly referred to as toxic leadership is another military culture related consideration. It is important to note that while many still refer/utilize the term toxic leadership, the Army is trying to move away from that label and instead use the term counterproductive leadership. This is in an effort to focus on the inappropriate behavior rather
than the person. The Army defines counterproductive leadership as “the demonstration of leader behaviors that violate one or more of the Army's core leader competencies or Army Values, preventing a climate conducive to mission accomplishment” (ADP 6-22,2019, p. 8-7). Counterproductive leadership behaviors include abusive behaviors, self-serving behaviors, erratic behaviors, leadership incompetence, and corrupt behaviors. In short, it’s using or preventing the use of positive behaviors in the influence of others. This ties directly to both my opening personal example and earlier example of the leader's actions preventing adequate compliance with the program. Many leaders who demonstrate these counterproductive qualities limit, prevent, or negatively focus the counseling program in a way it was not designed to be.

The above considerations, coupled with limited resources further complicates the battle. While resources are always a major constraint for an organization, it seems to be an even bigger factor within the military—time being the most constrained resource of them all.

These aspects of military culture are prevalent and deeply rooted, but they are necessary considerations when designing the training. Just like the 2011 Army Research Institute study discussed earlier targeted intrinsic motivation, any training sessions built for the purpose of improving communication and counseling skills must consider the negative aspects and friction points of military culture. This realization has become more prevalent in the mental health field as well. Numerous articles, similar to Tracey Carter and Thomas Watson’s 2018 article, *Infusing Military Culture into Counselor Education*, or the APAs *Understanding Military Culture*, can be located. Both articles touch on the importance of a health professional (mental health provider in this case) understanding the military culture and the counter effects it can produce on counseling reception.
Necessity of Leadership Modeling and Implementation - A Call to Action

“Exemplary leaders know that if they want to gain commitment and achieve the highest standards, they must be models of the behavior they expect of others.” – James M. Kouzes

The Army profession is guided by the Army ethic—“the set of enduring moral principles, values, beliefs, and laws that guide the Army profession and create the culture of trust essential to Army professionals in the conduct of missions, performance of duty, and all aspects of life” (ADP 6-22, p. 1-6). Leadership is the process Army professionals use to reinforce the Army ethic. An effective Army leader embodies the attributes and competencies outlined in the Army leadership requirements model (See Figure 5).

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12 ADP 6-22 defines leadership as the activity of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish a mission and improve the organization.
If leadership is defined by the Army leadership requirements model and is used to reinforce the Army ethic, which in turn creates a culture of trust, then one may deduce that the Army leadership requirements model holds insights to fostering a culture of trust. As such, a synthesis of the critical elements and tasks associated with each of the attributes and competencies seemed beneficial (see Appendix B). After compiling the critical elements and tasks associated with each of the elements of the Army leadership requirements model, I compared each against a list of interpersonal communication skills coupled with the Army specified skills and qualities of an effective counselor (see Table 1). The resulting comparison
revealed that of the 80 critical elements and tasks, 66 or 83% linked to a skill or quality of interpersonal communication and effective counseling. Therefore, suggesting that targeted training on interpersonal communication skills and counseling would simultaneously foster leader development and underpin a culture of trust and open communication.

Table 1. List of interpersonal communication skills & qualities and skills of an effective counselor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respect*</th>
<th>Self-Awareness*</th>
<th>Cultural Awareness*</th>
<th>Empathy*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility*</td>
<td>Active Listening*</td>
<td>Appropriate Questioning*</td>
<td>Responding*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgment*</td>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>Shared Understanding</td>
<td>Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>Openness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Many of the skills attributed to being an effective communicator correspond to those attributes and skills attributed to an effective counselor listed in ATP 6-22.1 (annotated with a *)

Leader development is a fundamental priority within the Army. FM 6-22 defines leader development at “the deliberate, continuous, sequential, and progressive process — founded in Army values — that grows Soldiers and Army Civilians into competent and confident leaders capable of decisive action” (2015, p. 1-1). FM 6-22 continues to describe leader development as a holistic, comprehensive approach that requires the synthesis of the knowledge, skills, and experience personnel gain throughout their institutional, operational, and self-development training and education. Modeling, or setting an example, is an essential element of leader development. “Leaders who model […] leader actions encourage effective development in others
and signal that leader development is valued” (FM 6-22, p. 3-3). According to research, behavior modeling has also been shown to be the most effective method to teach interpersonal communication skills (Medsker & Fry, 1997). Uhlemann, et al. (1976) add that modeling alone is not enough, but that exposure to both detailed training and behavioral modeling is necessary to increase empathic communication in personnel with low levels of communication abilities. An awareness of these concepts presents a solid argument that leadership implementation and behavior modeling of the desired skills is a necessary element of skill development.

**Training Development Overview**

Research shows that many of the skills necessary and attributed to a good leader correlate to attributes and skills of a good counselor, coach, mentor, facilitator, or negotiator. While those are certainly separate and distinct roles, the essence of the positive qualities of each of those roles is being able to effectively communicate with another individual or group. That understanding led me to research and develop a list of communication skills that are commonly suggested or deemed necessary for individuals across those roles. Coupled with my experience, I selected those skills that were highlighted in all or most of the roles (leader, counselor, coach, mentor, facilitator, or negotiator). I then compared the selected skills from those roles (leader, counselor, coach, mentor, facilitator, or negotiator) to those skills that assist in generating dialogue, many of which were the same.

Following skill selection, I looked at teaching/training methods that led to retention and ultimately real-time usage of trained skills. While there was virtually no research dedicated to the Army in this respect, there was enough research in other high-paced, high-risk professions—such as the medical field—teaching communication skills, that could translate to a military training environment. Additionally, because many of our Soldiers enter immediately following
high school graduation, I looked at communication and peer-counseling programs targeted at secondary education.

Next, I looked at ways to increase learning retention through the way training materials are presented. A large majority of formal institutional military training occurs via an initial PowerPoint presentation. There’s a lot of interest and understanding that can get lost as a result. Therefore, I looked at methods research has proven to increase skill usage and understanding through practical usage, such as improv or role-playing. All of those factors were consistent considerations to developing an easily accessible, usable, and understood training session.

Further research was focused on positive training techniques which show transference from training to real-life application and growth. Those techniques include, but are not limited to:

- Improving intrinsic motivation and understanding of the skills usage and benefits.
- Using role-playing, improv, or other scenario based on-the-spot training.
- Skill introduction including the ability to identify the specific skill used, demonstration of the skill and use of the skill.
- Mentorship and feedback on the use or implementation of the skills.
- Computer simulated training use or eLearning development
- Microlearning: Using small, frequently enforced, or given courses.
- Holistic and transformative education techniques
- Authentic Assessments

Finally, I reflected on my Critical and Creative Thinking (CCT) Graduate Program at the University of Massachusetts Boston and the habits of mind discussed throughout the course. I wrote earlier about the influence the Dialogue Process course had on this exploration (see My
Journey to this Exploration); in addition, several other CCT courses have influenced or informed the lens to which I viewed this curriculum development.

The Critical Thinking course offered insight into the needs and benefits of developing habits of mind and metacognition to challenging one's own perspective, as well as taking on the perspective of others through question asking and tools such as Peter Elbow’s doubting and believing games. The Creative Thinking course and a Seminar on Creative Thinking Blocks brought forth the importance of problem-solving methods such as the 5 Whys Technique and the minds unconscious role in relation to performance blocks, further developing the narrative of the benefits of looking at issues from multiple perspectives. My biggest takeaway from the Foundations in Philosophy course was the underlying thread that it can be difficult for an individual to neatly “bin” their perspectives by intentions or motivations (whether intrinsic or extrinsic), particularly in regard to moral or ethical subjects, and as such may not be able to adequately identify their biases. The philosophy course was a great segue into the Anti-Racist/Multicultural Education class which offered insight into the ways education and learning can facilitate or hinder ant-racist/multicultural practices. The Holistic and Transformative Teaching Course provided an opportunity to consider ways education can be programmed to appeal to many different learning interests while achieving the same learning outcomes as well as the benefits of incorporating reflection into educational practices. The CCT research courses — Process of Research and Engagement, Action Research for Educational, Professional, and Personal Change, and Synthesis of Theory and Practice — helped crystallize the findings and recommendations presented in this paper as well as the Action Research approach of this training.

implementation. Finally, an instructional design course in eLearning helped arm me with the considerations and skills necessary to successfully build eLearning training materials.

**Constructive Interpersonal Communications Skills**

My synthesis of the research and problem set suggest, a logical starting point for building focused interpersonal communication classes is to center training around the development of ten skills in particular: empathy, suspending judgment, active listening, responsibility, how to give feedback, language/questioning, mindfulness/awareness, responsibility, summarizing and reflecting, building rapport, and realizing limitations. The curriculum will also include an overview of dialogical concepts. The following sections will provide a brief overview of the skills and the considerations given when developing each course. The course materials themselves can be found in the corresponding appendixes.

**Dialogical Concepts that Could Assist Leaders as Counselors**

Organizational effectiveness stems from an environment where individuals are able to develop more complete understandings of issues so that they may arrive at the best possible solution. The best organizations can reach shared understanding through dialogue. “At its essence, dialogue involves a collective shift of attention from politeness to conflict, from conflict to inquiry, and from inquiry to generative flow” (Scharmer, 2009, p. 91). Currently, if Soldiers were shown Otto Scharmer’s Four fields of conversation, (shown in Figure 6) they would argue their counseling sessions are primarily in field I and II for all the reasons discussed above and more.
While generative dialogue would be difficult to reach in a single counseling session, the ability to reach reflective dialogue is probably more immediately achievable. Reflective dialogue would stop pitting leader against Soldier, create situational awareness and help develop the core competencies the Army desires of its leaders (See Army Leader Requirements Model in Appendix B). There are numerous case studies and reviews that show leaders, coaches, and facilitators are most effective when they embody certain skill sets. The following is a listing of those dialogue concepts and skills that would be most useful and applicable to fostering reflective dialogue and increasing dialogical concepts in the Army and its counseling program.

**Dialogic Leadership and Kantor’s Four-Player Model**
Dialogic Leadership is a term William Issacs refers to when a leader “consistently uncovers, through conversation, the hidden creative potential in any situation” (Issacs, 1999, p. 2). In his article *Dialogic Leadership*, Issacs identifies four distinct qualities or abilities that leaders utilize to discover the hidden potential. They are the ability to evoke a person’s authentic voice, the ability to genuinely listen, the ability to suspend judgment and understand another’s perspective and the ability or willingness to broaden their own or others point of view or understanding (p. 2).

Issacs uses David Kantor’s Four-Player model (See Figure 7) to describe conversational actions dialogic leaders use. “Kantor suggests that some people move— they initiate ideas and offer direction. Other people follow— they complete what is said, help others clarify their thoughts, and support what is happening. Still others oppose— they challenge what is being said and question its validity. And others bystand— they actively notice what is going on and provide perspective on what is happening” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 3). In a good conversation, people will naturally assume one of these four roles, switching between roles as needed. Sometimes, however, people or an individual become stuck in one role causing dialogical friction.

A person stuck in the opposed position will argue or neutralize points until the other person either gives up because they feel like their point of view is not going to be heard or they become combative in return. “Most people upshift when they want to get through to other people. They persuade. They encourage. They argue. They push. And in the process, they create resistance” (Goulston, 2015, p. 4). A stuck mover will disrupt focus and attention by presenting new ideas in such a rapid manner that no one is able to adequately digest or action the thoughts or ideas.
Figure 7. Kantor’s Four Player Model as displayed in William Isaacs Dialogic Leadership Article

Dialogic leaders are able to identify the role that may be missing in a conversation and fill that role in order to provide balance or they may assist in freeing another player stuck in their role. Isaacs identifies four ways, which he refers to as practices, the dialogic leader uses to bring balance to dialogue. The four practices are listening, voicing, suspending, and respecting. The four practices correspond to the four positions: listening to following, respecting to opposing, suspending to bystander and voicing to moving (Issacs, 1999, p. 4).

To be a good follower, you must be a good listener. Listening deeply allows you to truly understand the other person’s point of view so you can accurately interpret, translate, and assist as needed. When an opponent applies respect, they are looking for the “rightness” in the other
person’s views. Respect does not mean that they move to agree with the person, but what it does do is open space to show the other person that you have considered their point of view holistically. “Suspension means that we neither suppress what we think nor advocate it with unilateral conviction, rather we display our thinking in a way that lets us and others see we understand it … To suspend is to bystand with awareness.” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 5). Movers move a conversation by voicing authentically, their points or by helping others find their authentic voice (see Figure 8).

Isaacs brings attention to the fact that simply being able to fill a role or utilize a practice is insufficient. There must be quality and genuineness behind each. Dialogic leaders are able to focus on both the roles and practices while ensuring quality is present (Isaacs, 1999, p. 5).
Figure 8. Four Practices for Dialogic Leadership as Explained in Isaacs Dialogical Leadership Article

**Empathy**

“Empathy is about being concerned about the human being and not just about their output.”

– Simon Sinek

Webster’s Dictionary defines empathy as the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner. The Army defines empathy similarly and discusses empathy in relative detail in several of its doctrinal manuals. While ATP 6-22.1, *The Counseling Process*, mentions empathy as necessary, it does not describe it.

Generally, researchers agree that there are three types of empathy (see Figure 9): cognitive, emotional/affective, and compassionate empathy. Cognitive empathy means you understand on an intellectual level why the person may be feeling or thinking what they are, but you really can’t connect to the situation. Emotional/affective empathy is the type of empathy that most people think of when they hear the word empathy. Emotional/affective empathy means you are having an emotional or physical response to what another person/group is feeling or experiencing. The middle ground between cognitive empathy and emotional empathy is compassionate empathy. Compassionate empathy is not only understanding (intellectually) and connecting (emotionally) but also being able to appropriately respond and take the supportive actions necessary to assist the person through the experience. Compassionate empathy is the ideal response for fostering leader and subordinate relationships.
Empathy is specifically mentioned here as a principle that should be discussed because many confuse empathy with sympathy. Many believe that they must feel the same as someone else or spend their time arguing to convince someone to change their point of view. That is wasted energy and leads to frustration. People should strive to understand the others point of view and be respectful, but not argue to change it. “In order to help people grow and develop, it is essential that you understand the people you are coaching or mentoring, their interests, and attitudes, and how to reach them. The more you know about them, the better able you will be to deliver the messages you want them to receive. This takes empathy” (Dubrin, 2005, p. 12). While arguing or defensiveness (field II) may eventually lead to reflective dialogue (field III), because of military personalities, it usually does not. “Research suggests that as people rise through the ranks, their ability to maintain personal connections suffers” (Goleman, 2017, Ch 1, para 10).
Directly tied to empathy is empathetic listening also known as reflective or active listening. For the purposes of this discussion, active listening is examined separately and later in this discussion, but very much entails and requires empathy to be successful.

**Suspending Judgment**

Suspending judgment is an integral and necessary part of empathetic dialogue. If done right, it can foster trust and create a safe environment in which the counseled feels comfortable discussing issues or differences. “If two people can recognize that they are operating with different paradigms, the chances for agreement are improved. When you demonstrate an understanding of the other person’s paradigm, you are communicating with empathy” (Dubrin, 2005, p. 18). Many leaders as counselors are guilty of pre-judging a Soldier based on the initial information they receive. If they are unable to push past that initial judgment to truly listen, inquire, and understand then they will fail to connect to the other individual in a way that will foster trust and shared understanding. Furthermore, when more morally centric or controversial issues, such as abortion or adultery arise, leaders-as-counselors can let their personal views and bias cloud and limit their communication effectiveness. A leader's job is to assist the Soldier with objectively making the decision that best suits them (within legal and ethical guidelines).

**Staying Focused/Active Listening**

Active listening is one of the few skills listed in ATP 6-22.1 that is explained. That said, it is still crucial to engaging and displaying empathy. Many believe they are actively listening, when really all they are doing is hearing. Active listening includes observing body language and non-verbal communication to interpret what the person is meaning. It is identifying the emotions that are tied to the individual's comments in order to relay to them that you understand how that
situation made them feel (display empathy). “Often, these people don’t have a clue about what makes each other tick. As a result, they mistake insecurity for arrogance, fear for stubbornness, and legitimate anger for “he’s just a jerk.” And they talk over, around, above, and against each other, without ever talking to each other – when all they need is to see what’s really right in front of them” (Goulston, 2015, p. 41). Most importantly, active listeners listen without distraction. They do not allow themselves to be distracted by technology, their calendar of events, nor their own thoughts— they remain fully focused on the individual(s) they are talking to.

Active listening has many benefits as outlined by Richard Salem in his article Empathic Listening. “Among its benefits, empathetic [active] listening 1. Builds trust and respect 2. Enables the disputants to release their emotions 3. Reduces tensions 4. Encourages the surfaced information and 5. Creates a safe environment that is conducive to collaborative problem solving” (p. 1). Listening skills can be taught, but like most skills are perishable and should be engaged as often as possible.

Asset Versus Deficit Based Feedback

Asset based feedback is an approach that focuses on a person’s strength. In asset based feedback, feedback is presented in a way that is worded positively but constructively. An example of this would be to say, “I think you made some great points in your article that if supported correctly can be very persuasive and engaging” compared to “Your paper lacks depth and is poorly structured”. Most people will cut to the chase when presenting feedback and focus on the negative, which can immediately place the other on the defense. Focusing on the positive boosts the others confidence and allows openness and space for listening. “While our natural reaction is often to lash out at people who disappoint us, criticism and punishment are almost always the least effective way to change performance. If you want things like sullen compliance,
resentment, turnover, and sabotage, negative feedback will certainly get you there.” (Gallagher, 2009, p. xv)

**Language/Questioning**

Communicators who understand that words have power and meaning, and that word choice and phrasing can significantly alter another’s perception and thus their reaction, will inherently generate more trust. Asking questions that promote discovery and insight allow you to draw out additional and relevant information; it allows you to be empathetic. Language use and questioning are at the heart of Isaacs discussion on dialogic leadership.

“When people are mentoring, they tend to look reflectively at their own experiences and offer counsel that starts with phrases such as “When I was your age” or “Here’s how I would do it.” Resist that inclination when working with those around you. Though sharing a bit about your own experiences can certainly help others create new behaviors, the real gift of an empathic leader can impart to someone else is a perspective on his or her own challenges so that the person being mentored can learn to see things in fresh new ways” (Ventura, 2018, p. 209).

While sharing personal experiences and thoughts can help another feel as though they are not the only one who has experienced a situation or similar thoughts as well as help place them in an empathetic mindset, it can also be distracting. Too much “I” conversation can disconnect the other individual and potentially result in them not seeing the empathetic intentions behind the comments.

**Mindfulness/Awareness**
“… one of the most powerful things you’ll learn is how to be in control of your own thoughts and emotions—because most of the time, that’s where successful communicating starts. Mastering the art of controlling yourself will change your life, because it’ll keep you from being your own worst enemy when it comes to reaching other people in stressful situations.” (Goulston, 2015, p. 28-29)

Mindfulness is paying attention to our own thought processes, emotions, and reactions to gain awareness on how they affect our ability to dialogue. Awareness extends to understanding how it affects the other individual and how an individual's awareness is affecting their thinking. When speaking mindfully you are employing the skills of language/questioning, suspending judgement, empathy, and active listening.

**Responsibility**

An individual must take ownership of their own issues and resolution in order to achieve the best results. That is not to say that they cannot be coached through the process but getting them to reach the answer on their own will create good habits of thought. A novice Army leader's tendency, because of the hierarchical nature of the Army, is to produce the plan of action for the Soldier. They want to tell them how to fix the problem because they ‘know how’. The issue with always solving someone else’s problems for them is 1) it wrongly assumes you understand what the issue is or what will work best for them and 2) it doesn’t create buy-in or understanding. “When we [help] fix a problem, we should also deliver to the client enough
tools, lessons, and empowerment that they can begin to own their own future” (Ventura, 2018, p. 223).

It is the leader counselors’ job to help model healthy problem-solving techniques through proper questioning techniques. Proper questioning will allow the person to answer critical questions and see missed points of views or angles that can result in the generation of a range of options. Additionally, calling attention to things such as faulty logic or cognitive distortions are also useful tools and can help an individual move from the victim loop to the accountable loop15 as shown in the Personal Accountability Model (see Figure 10). In order for leaders to assist the individual in transitioning from the victim loop to the accountability loop, it is important to identify where in the victim loop they are (such as blaming, resisting, or denying). Identifying where they are in the victim loop allows you to identify what accountability behavior would best counter the victim loop behavior.

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15 Samuel, 2010, p. 152
Summarizing and Reflecting

“People need to feel valuable. We need this almost as we need food, air, and water. It’s not good enough for us to know in our own hearts that we’re valuable; we need to see our worth reflected in the eyes of the people around us” (Goulston, 2015, p. 64). If counselors understand
they are effectively translators whose job is to discover who the individual they are talking to is and why they are reacting the way they are in order to assist the individual in understanding their reaction and feelings. When a counselor gets an individual to understand that they, the counselor, understand why the individual may be responding or reacting the way they are, they build a trusted environment. The counselor does that by summarizing out loud, the speaker's thoughts, nonverbal communication, and interpreted emotions (discovered through active listening) to the person. Reflecting, or mirroring, is a way of outwardly displaying empathy and active listening skills. Reflecting is when a listener repeats almost exactly what the speaker said as a way of acknowledging the speaker’s perception.

**Building Rapport (Creating Shared Understanding & Trust)**

Everything discussed in this section on interpersonal communication skills will assist in building a rapport; a reputation of trust and understanding. “When you listen, ask, mirror, and reflect back to people what you’ve heard. When you do, they will feel seen, understood, and felt—and that unexpected downshift will draw them to you.” (Goulston, 2015, p. 4). Building rapport allows a leader to show that they care for the individual and their wellbeing more than they care for their production. While production levels and quality are important, what drives a person to be productive is the sense of belonging to the organization.

**Realizing Your Limitations**

The desire to help others can sometimes cloud perspective. It is important that a leader or counselor understands what they are capable and comfortable of handling. If they try to broach subjects that are outside their expertise or comfort level, it will be evident and could cause additional or unforeseen consequences and reactions. Leaders should not be afraid to refer others
to subject matter experts or outside resources when this occurs. Sometimes, people cannot be helped, no matter how much a leader tries. While that can be a difficult thing to accept, it is necessary. However, using the skills that have been discussed, can make the transition easier and more mutual. The sanity of the counselor is just as important as the counselee. “On rare occasions you will meet people who are stuck in their reptile or mammal brains and can’t think logically no matter how much you try to help them. … And you’ll meet some people who don’t give a damn if you mirror their feelings or not, because they’re sociopaths or narcissists who only care about you doing what they want …” (Goulston, 2015, pp. 22-23)

Training Execution and Evolution: An Action Research Approach

“Trust is not built in big, sweeping moments. It’s built in tiny movements every day”

-Brené Brown

Action Research is a philosophy that was introduced by Kurt Lewin in 1944 that has been expanded by other researchers in various forms over time. At its core, Action Research is a systematic inquiry in which research is conducted through action or real-world experience to solve real problems. Some defining characteristics of Action Research are that it’s a collaborative process between the researcher and participants; it’s reflective and dynamic, meaning adjustments to processes are made based on the results of the actions and then tested until the desired result is achieved; and the research results in implementation of findings versus just knowledge. Action Research is noted by many for its suitability in education for improving teaching methodology/training and organizational change, making it the logical research methodology for assessing the effectiveness of the proposed training reform and progress from theory to practice.
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In general, the Action Research process includes four stages: planning, acting, developing, and reflecting. In his book, *Action research: Teachers as researchers in the classroom*, Mertler merges different models of action research with proposed steps (see Figure 11). Using Mertler’s framework, I am currently in stage 1, Planning Stage, ready to progress into stage 2 (step 5). Originally, the plan was to complete all 4 stages and 9 steps before the completion of the CCT program, the results of which would be captured within this paper.

The initial proposed research plan was to execute a 5–7-day workshop with a varying demographic of Soldiers centered on the research question: Does teaching constructive interpersonal communication skills increase the perception of a shared understanding and trust between both the leader-as-counselor and the counseled Soldier? The workshop would cover classes, in class exercises for skill development and strategy modeling, and a daily reflective journal on the interpersonal skills covered in the Training Development Overview section. Pre- and post-surveys, as well as a follow-up survey would be administered in order to measure the perceived effect of the training. The results of those surveys would then be analyzed and used to support any modifications and/or implementation.

Due to conflicting priorities, that workshop remains unscheduled; however, I have successfully scheduled an introductory brief of the concept to my command and colleagues as a scheduled leader professional development session to occur within weeks of the anticipated publication of this paper. If well received, that leader professional session could 1) generate interest and a constituency of support and 2) result in future development sessions that can be used to gather analytical data. Additionally, with the recent (Jan 2022) announcement of the intended implementation of the Talk Like a Leader Program (see Existing Programs and Curriculum) which has strong similarities to the skillsets and ideology I am proposing—
empirically supported from pilot sessions—there appears to be a decreased need to validate the value in teaching interpersonal skills to military professionals. That is not to say that the efforts and points articulated within this paper become a casualty of the current ‘roadblock’.

Figure 11. Mertler’s Integration of Two Organizational Schemes for the Step-by-Step Process of Action Research

*NOTE: Taken from Mertler’s Action research: Teachers as researchers in the classroom.*

As described earlier, the Action Research process is dynamic and driven by the critical component of reflection. As such, my focus has turned to continuing to champion and advocate for interpersonal communication skills training in a way that garners support and increases
stakeholder motivation to support the TLàL program or similar formats. With that in mind, my next guiding question became: *How can I bridge the gap in interpersonal skill development and champion the need while waiting for training reform?*

**Bridging the Gap While Waiting for Training Reform**

“For any movement to gain momentum, it must start with a small action. This action becomes multiplied by the masses, and is made tangible when leadership changes course due to the weight of the movement’s voice” – Adam Braun

The main purpose and goal of this project has been to indicate a path to positively shift the military culture through noticeable positive impacts on relationships and the development of trusted connections. My studies and experiences have only strengthened my viewpoint that the promotion of constructive interpersonal communication skills can be the foundational change agent towards that organizational impact, as well as the perception of an increased quality of military life. If I can help military professionals and leaders understand and leverage research-based skills and techniques on interpersonal communication to communicate more effectively and improve relationships through my training, I want to do so as quickly as possible. Reflection on how I can provide (and advocate for) military professionals with constructive interpersonal skills training during the interim wait for current Army training reform (revolving around the need for interpersonal communication skills) resulted in my desire to start an online forum in which I will share the course products and supporting documents I developed. As such, I began developing an online blog titled Leaders Listen Too (www.leaderslistentoo.com) in which I will post all course products, useful videos, podcasts and reading material relating to building interpersonal communication skills and habits. The blog will be public and therefore open to all leaders or future leaders with an interest in honing their own skills or building skills in others. An
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outlet for feedback to the site and its contents will be critical in the continued Active Research context of this implementation. Additionally, I will continue to advocate for and build a constituency of support in this effort.

Areas for future consideration

At present, the currently developed training was designed with learning objectives focused on basic concepts and entry level understanding and application (think first three levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy\textsuperscript{16}). In future expansion of the training, I hope to target more middle manager, or executive level considerations, by skill, in order to broaden the audience and support habits and skill proficiency.

Additionally, expanding classes to other skills or interpersonal communication components such as, but not limited to, leadership style, team building, clarifying expectations, goal setting, empowering, technology and interpersonal communication, and nonverbal communication. Finally, expansion and development of more exercises or best practices for self-paced or large group setting training on these skills.

Conclusion

“You needed to show your people that you meant it when you said that … more and more I saw that by putting people first- not just saying we did, but by proving that we did by the actions we took – we were protecting the culture.” – Ed Catmull

The Army’s current apprenticeship style training for counseling has proven largely ineffective, mainly because large assumptions that the masters, or leaders in this case, are

properly trained and equipped to pass effective traits to their apprentices, or subordinates, is the standard rather than the exception. Without targeted and routine training to improve interpersonal communication skills, at all levels, many Soldiers will continue to leave counseling sessions feeling the conversation was shallow or confrontational. Those negative interactions are not limited to counseling sessions and additionally are counterproductive to organizational effectiveness, trust, and understanding.

It is not enough to discuss interpersonal communication techniques and skills in a two-hour block of instruction. Efforts must be made to train on and engage the proper skills routinely, so they become habitual. Instilling habits and rituals are not foreign concepts to the Army. Much of the Army’s processes and tactics are standardized in a way that is conductive to implementation against a large array of problem sets. The standardization is flexible or utilitarian enough to allow for modification as situations require, but also so Soldiers can rehearse the process habitually until it becomes second nature. The Army understands the benefits of having transferable skills and processes that allow a Soldier to react as quickly and naturally as possible. Additionally, similar to the military’s view on leadership development, interpersonal communication skills are perishable and continued development is a life-long journey. With that in mind, the Army must view constructive interpersonal communication skill development as symbiotic with leader development.

If the Army is dedicated to putting people first and generating a culture of trust, then they must adopt a targeted, career long, educational approach to developing good counselors and effective communicators. The research findings presented in this paper illustrate that open communication and trust correlate. This paper further asserts that macro level problems such as increased suicide, sexual harassment/assault, domestic violence, and toxic (counterproductive)
leadership are symptoms of deficiencies in trust and open communication. In order to be more proactive versus reactive to Soldier quality of life issues, leaders must model and hone constructive interpersonal communication skills that facilitate open communication. Improving interpersonal communications skills will not only generate better dialogue and trust, but also improve leadership attributes and competencies.

Army Research Institute studies have shown that Soldiers of all rank acknowledge the need for and demonstrate the intrinsic motivation to learn both the art and science of interpersonal communication. A need that at present has gone largely unmet. The research backed training presented here demonstrates the potential organizational change that can be driven if implemented on a larger scale, with the proper resourcing, emphasis, and leadership modeling/implementation.
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History of the Army Counseling Program

Counseling is the process used by leaders to review with a subordinate the subordinate’s demonstrated performance and potential. Counseling, one of the most important leadership and professional development responsibilities, enables Army leaders to help Soldiers and Army Civilians become more capable, resilient, satisfied, and better prepared for current and future responsibilities. Counseling is required of leaders and occurs at prescribed times. The related developmental processes of coaching and mentoring are done voluntarily. The Army’s future and the legacy of today’s Army leaders rests on the shoulders of those they help prepare for greater responsibility. (ATP 6-22.1, 2014, p. 1-1)

The importance of counseling and the leaders' roles and responsibilities in counseling their subordinates is not a new Army concept, it has been a central philosophy of the Army for decades. The Army has used doctrinal publications to generally regulate and assist Army leaders with counseling techniques. The Army defines Army doctrine as “fundamental principles, with supporting tactics, techniques, procedures, and terms and symbols, used for the conduct of operations and as a guide for actions of operating forces, and elements of the institutional force that directly support operations in support of national objectives.” (ADP 1-01, 2019, p 1-2) That said, counseling doctrine has arguably focused on administrative requirements—particularly if counseling statements are to be used to warrant judicial or non-judicial punishment or reinforce a negative evaluation—and counseling from a leader perspective. As doctrine has evolved over the years, much of the “how-to” guiding principles of counseling have been removed.
Published in 1974, FM 22-101, *Leadership Counseling*, was a comprehensive manual on counseling designed to arm leaders with professional counseling techniques to improve Soldier performance, with acknowledgement that leaders were not professional counselors. It discussed counseling techniques, preparation for counseling, training subordinates to properly counsel, as well as connected those principles to skills and principles of military leadership at the time. Tied to the counseling framework FM 22-101 presented, the manual also provided several role-playing and practical exercises to aid leaders in building and developing counseling skills. FM 22-101 underwent minor revisions and was republished June 3, 1985. For reference, FM 22-101 was 136 pages in total.

In 1999, the Army published and made, *Army Leadership*, FM 22-100, the proponent (primary manual) for Army counseling, superseding FM 22-101. FM 22-100 focused on what a leader should be, know, and do and dedicated one 23-page appendix to the Army counseling framework. It removed all practical exercises, role playing scenarios, and training strategies that were covered in FM 22-101. The counseling framework itself did not change, but the intensity of the discussion decreased and any mention or allusion to training methodology(ies) were eliminated.

In October 2006, FM 6-22 superseded FM 22-100. FM 6-22 kept the counseling appendix formally in FM 22-100; however, further truncated the information to 20 pages. FM 6-22 would be updated in June 2015, moving the appendix covering counseling to Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 6-22.1. While counseling was removed from FM 6-22 and placed in Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 6-22.1, FM 6-22 continues/ed to discuss topics such as providing developmental feedback to subordinates, coaching and mentoring roles and responsibilities, and guided discovery learning techniques— all of which are useful and relevant
topics/techniques for counseling. Additionally, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22, *Army Leadership*, which takes hierarchical precedence over Field Manuals and Army Technique Publications has a small section on counseling, coaching and mentoring that remained the same from the 2012 to current 2019 version. Page 6-10 of ADP 6-22 contains one paragraph on counseling that states:

Counseling is central to leader development. Counseling is the process used by leaders to guide subordinates to improve performance and develop their potential. Subordinates are active participants in the counseling process. During counseling, leaders help subordinates to identify strengths and weaknesses and create plans of action. To make the plans work, leaders actively support their subordinates throughout the implementation and assessment processes. Subordinates invest themselves in the process by being forthright in their willingness to improve and being candid in their assessment and goal setting. Counseling is an integral part of a comprehensive program to develop subordinates. With effective counseling, no evaluation report—positive or negative—should be a surprise. A counseling program includes all subordinates, not just those thought to have the most potential.

*ATP 6-22.1, The Counseling Process*, published in July 2014 remains the current Army doctrine on counseling. It continues to outline the counseling framework and fundamentals that have remained relatively unchanged since 1974. That said, the information has continued to be condensed as evident in the manual containing only about 14 pages of information. While length does not equate to the quality of the information, it does serve as a quick qualitative measure of how much material is available to the novice leader/Soldier to learn about counseling fundamentals. The publication does not cover information with any depth, nor does it discuss
counseling techniques or how leaders as counselors can improve their counseling methodologies. It references very baseline skills necessary to be a counselor, such as active listening, but does little to elaborate on those skills outside of what would be considered by many as common knowledge or understood English definitions.

**Overview of Current Army Counseling Program**

As discussed in the prior section, the Army Counseling Program has not fundamentally changed since 1974. The doctrine has continued to maintain the same general discussion and guidance. What has changed is the amount of material or examples available to leaders and Soldiers on how to develop good counseling skills and what a good counseling looks like. While many of these materials can be located on external websites (some requiring payment), social media sites/forums, or books, there are few Army sanctioned resources available. Additionally, institutional training is brief and primarily focused on the material covered in the ATP 6-22.1. The Army relies heavily on on-the-job training or experience for development of counseling skills. The following sub-sections will discuss the current Army doctrine and available training to support the Army Counseling Program. As a reminder, this paper focuses on counseling at the leader level, not professional counseling sources (e.g. behavioral health specialists, family life counselors, chaplains or financial counselors).

**Current Army Counseling Doctrine**

Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 6-22.1 begins by outlining the three major categories of developmental counseling, as it pertains to the Army. Those three categories are
event-oriented counseling, performance counseling, and professional growth counseling. Event-oriented is a counseling that is driven by the occurrence of, or that precedes a certain event or situation. Events or situations that could trigger an event-oriented counseling are documentation of superior or poor performance, arrival to a new unit, a significant life event or crisis that may or may not require referrals to outside agencies for assistance, or promotion board attendance. Performance counseling is similar to an annual review, as it focuses on the persons performance over a set period of time. The time period or review varies depending on the individual or position and is governed by Army Regulation; however, typically, all personnel are to receive at least one performance counseling every 30-90 days. Professional growth counseling focuses less on current performance—although it does open discussion on strengths and weaknesses—and more on potential, goal development and creation/modification of an individual development plan.

Chapter 2 of ATP 6-22.1 moves the discussion into counseling fundamentals to include the desired qualities of a counselor, counseling skills, practices, and the Army counseling process. Page 2-1 of ATP 6-22.1 lists the following five key characteristics of a leader counselor.

- **Purpose**: Clearly define the purpose of the counseling.
- **Flexibility**: Adapt the counseling approach to each subordinate, situation, and relationship
- **Respect**: View subordinates as unique, complex individuals with distinct values, beliefs and attitudes.
- **Communication**: Establish open, two-way communication with subordinates using verbal and nonverbal actions (such as body language or gestures). Effective counselors listen more than they speak.
● Support: Encourage subordinates through direction, guidance, and supportive actions.

Similar to the key characteristics, respect for subordinates is also listed as a quality of an effective counselor. Other listed qualities are self and cultural awareness, empathy and credibility. The few paragraphs that follow the listing of those qualities do not elaborate or directly coincide to that list. Instead, they focus on discussing that effective counselors must be able to tailor their approach to best match the needs of their individual subordinates.

Following the discussion on counselor qualities, the chapter leads directly to counseling skills. The sections begins on page 2-1 by stating, “Military leaders are trained to analyze missions, identify required tasks, and take appropriate actions. Some of these skills apply to counseling as leaders use problem-solving and decision-making skills to identify and apply the proper counseling techniques to specific counseling situations” (ATP 6-22.1). That opening statement is proceeded by a list of three basic counseling skills effective counselors should possess—active listening, responding, and appropriate questioning. A little over a standard page size is dedicated to describing active listening, only one paragraph each is used to discuss responding and appropriate questioning.

The discussion on counseling practices is a list of eleven guidelines that is introduced by stating that if leaders follow the list of general guidelines, they will improve their counseling skills and become more effective counselors. The list includes items such as “Display empathy when discussing the issue,” “avoid interrupting,” and “draw conclusions based on all available information, not just the subordinate’s statement.” The list is not elaborated further within the publication. The list of guidelines is followed by a brief discussion on knowing when your limitations and capabilities as a leader counselor and how to address subordinate resistance during counseling.
The chapter concludes with outlining the Army counseling process. There are four stages in the Army counseling process: identifying the need for counseling, preparing for counseling, conducting the counseling, and follow-up. The main sub-steps of each stage can be summarized as follows:

*Table 1. The four stages of the Army Counseling Process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1: Identify the need for Counseling</th>
<th>Stage 2: Prepare for Counseling</th>
<th>Stage 3: Conduct the counseling</th>
<th>Stage 4: Follow-up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observe the subordinate’s performance</td>
<td>Select a Suitable Place</td>
<td>Open the session</td>
<td>Support plan of action implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare performance to established standards</td>
<td>Schedule the Time</td>
<td>Discuss the issue</td>
<td>Assess the plan of action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notify the subordinate well in advance</td>
<td>Develop a plan of action (to include the leader’s responsibilities)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organize information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify possible outcomes</td>
<td>Record and close the Session</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outline the components of the counseling session</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plan counseling strategy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establish the right atmosphere</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Army Developmental Counseling Form- DA FORM 4856

While counseling is not required to always be documented in writing, it is considered good practice to document at least the main points of the session so it can easily be referred to later for follow-up. Some counseling’s, particularly those documenting personnel action requirements (usually negative in nature) are required by Army regulation to be captured in written form. The Army uses standardized Department of the Army (DA) Form 4856, Developmental Counseling Form dated July 2014 as the record of counseling sessions. Figure 1 shows DA Form 4856 which is broken into four parts—administrative, background information (or purpose of the counseling) and a summary of the counseling (key points, plan of action, counseled Soldier comments, and leader responsibilities), and the assessment of the plan of action.

All the individual sub steps identified in the above chart are expanded on with at least one paragraphs worth of information within the chapter. There is also one example of a counseling outline and one short summary of a counseling session.

With the exception of the session closing section, parts I, II and III of the DA Form 4856 can be filled out by the counselor in advance, completed during the session, or captured at the end of the session. The preference is up to the counselor. The session closing section allows space for the counseled individual to write, in their own words, any additional information that may be relevant to maintain record of. An example of this would be a Soldier who does not agree with the counseling plan of action, such as a recommended punishment or mandatory referral, and wishes to document why they do not agree. Both the individual counseled and the counselor sign and date the DA Form 4856 to indicate the counseling occurred as indicated. Part IV of the form is to be completed at a later date and time, preferably agreed upon in advance and directly
linked to the plan of action. It is designed to capture the results, whether positive or negative, of the plan of action formulated during the original counseling session.

Figure 1. DA Form 4856, Developmental Counseling Form
### Appendix B: Interpersonal Communication Skills Connection to Army Leader and Counselor Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Army Leadership Requirements Model</th>
<th>Connection to Interpersonal Communication &amp; Counseling Skills &amp; Qualities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Character</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army Values</td>
<td>Army Values: Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Ability to identify with and enter into another person’s feeling and emotions, enabling clearer communications and better guidance</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Precept: to experience something from another person’s point of view</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to care for and take care of Soldiers and others</td>
<td>Desires and actions consistent with the Army Values</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Martial Ethos and Service Ethos</strong></td>
<td>Internalizes attitudes and beliefs that embody the spirit of the Army professor</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discipline</strong></td>
<td>Willing obedience to lawful orders</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Humility</strong></td>
<td>Willing to subordinate the self to the needs of the mission</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Willing to subordinate the self to the needs of the mission</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Willing to subordinate the self to the needs of the mission</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Military &amp; Professional Bearing</strong></td>
<td>Demonstrating character competence, and commitment</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Setting the example and upholding standards</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Projecting a professional image of authority</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fitness</strong></td>
<td>Having sound health, strength, and endurance that support one’s emotional health and conceptual abilities under prolonged stress</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presence</strong></td>
<td>Sense of ability to make right decisions and take right action, tempered with humility and sense of human limitations</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Projecting self-confidence and certitude in the unit’s ability to succeed</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstrating composure and outward calm through control over one’s emotions</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confidence</strong></td>
<td>Tendency to recover quickly from setback, shock, injuries, adversity, and stress while maintaining a mission and organizational focus</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resilience</strong></td>
<td>Tendency to recover quickly from setback, shock, injuries, adversity, and stress while maintaining a mission and organizational focus</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mental Agility</strong></td>
<td>Flexibility of mind the ability to break habitual thought patterns</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anticipating or adapting to uncertain or changing situations; thinking through outcomes when current decisions or actions are not producing desired effects</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to apply multiple perspectives and approaches</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sound Judgement</strong></td>
<td>Capacity to assess situations and draw sound, ethical conclusions</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tendency to form sound options, make sensible decisions, and reliable guesses</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to assess strengths and weaknesses of subordinates, peers, and enemies to create appropriate solutions and actions</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Innovation</strong></td>
<td>Ability to introduce new ideas based on opportunities or challenging circumstance</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creativity in producing ideas and objects that both novel and appropriate</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interpersonal Tact</strong></td>
<td>Being aware of others’ perceptions and capacity to understand interactions with others</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Awareness of character, motives, and reactions of self and others and their effect on interpersonal interactions</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recognizing diversity and displaying self-control, balance, and stability</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expertise</strong></td>
<td>Possessing a high level of domain knowledge and competence in an area and the ability to draw and apply accurate, logical conclusions</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competencies</td>
<td>Achieves</td>
<td>Gen. Results</td>
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NOTE: This outline can be easily adapted into a PowerPoint or other media presentation for instruction and supported by the presenter’s own knowledge, the information provided in the training development overview and outside supporting research.

I. Dialogue and the Dialogic Leader

II. Dialogue be definition is a conversation between two or more people; to take part in a conversation or discussion to resolve a problem.

III. Dialogue vs Discussion:

- Dialogue: comes from Greek ("dia logos") and means "through the world" understood as a flow of meaning
  - Inquiry, differing perceptions, new understanding.
- Discussion: roots mean “to break apart”
  - Conversations where defending of opinions, views, and differences is often the central focus.

IV. Otto Scharmer’s Four fields of conversation:

- Also known as his Theory of Generative Dialogue
- Highlights conversational patterns that individuals generally navigate
- Four fields:
  - Field I: talking nice
    - When instead of really listening, we are just “downloading”, reconfirming old habits, assumptions, opinions and judgment, nothing new will really happen in this conversation. We could call this level of conversation the level of politeness and small talk.
  - Field II: talking tough
    - Once we start opening our mind and listening with curiosity, we start noticing differences and disconfirming or new data. This is the level where a good debate can take place, a conversation where we present to each other our opinions, grounded on facts and data.
  - Field III: reflective dialogue
    - Establish an emotional connection to another person and listen with compassion. This is where dialogue becomes possible, and we can learn to see a situation or topic through another person’s eyes.
  - Field IV: Generative dialogue
    - Emerges in a group that has established a trust and the capacity to hold different perspectives. This level of conversation manifests when the conversation starts to emerge from the collective intelligence of
the group. It’s those moments when the source of creativity opens, when things just seem to be building on each other by themselves, or when somebody else in the room says what I just wanted to say. The conversation seems to be coming more from the collective rather than from one or several individuals.

V. Obstacles the Prevent movement through the fields

- Judgement: closed to other perspectives
  - Overcome by curiosity
- Cynicism: Cynical to other’s intentions; unable to emotional connect
  - Overcome by compassion
- Fear: far of the unknown
  - Overcome by courage

VI. William N. Isaacs Dialogic Leadership

- Both a philosophy of leadership and a way of thinking
- A way of leading that “consistently uncovers, through conversation, the hidden potential in any situation”

VII. Dialogic Leaders:

- Embody four distinct qualities:
  - Evoke people’s genuine voices
  - Listen deeply
  - Hold space for and respect other people’s views
  - Suspend judgment in order to broaden awareness and perspective
- Are able to adapt their approach & style in dialogue
- Create conditions for dialogue in their organizations
- Understand they can’t make dialogue happen

VIII. David Kantor’s Four Player Model

- Focuses on the dynamics of a team and its interactions
- 4- players
  - Movers: They move the team along; they initiate ideas and offer direction
    - Without movers there is no direction
  - Followers: Support the initiative; they complete what is said, help others clarify their thoughts, and support what is happening
    - Without followers, nothing gets completed
  - Opponents: They provide critical feedback; they challenge what is being said and question its validity
    - Without opponents, nothing is corrected
  - Bystanders: Often observe the team and its processes from the sidelines; they actively notice what is going on and provide perspective on what is happening
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- Without bystanders, there is no perspective
- People will naturally assume one of these four roles, switching between roles as needed. Sometimes, however, people or an individual become stuck in one role causing dialogical friction.
  - If movers and opponents butt heads, they may prevent the team from making progress
  - A stuck mover will disrupt focus and attention by presenting new ideas in such a rapid manner that no one is able to adequately digest or action the thoughts or ideas.
- 4-player model and Conflict Resolution
  - ADOPT A BYSTANDER’S PERSPECTIVE
    - Summarize the positions of A and B.
    - What are the consequences of the actions taking place?
    - What seems to be the problem?
    - Visualizing the conflict line(s).
  - MOTIVATE SUPPORTERS TO EXPRESS
    - Which position do you support?
    - To which extent do you support the position?
    - What information is lacking for your positioning?
  - INDUCING EMPATHY
    - In which point(s) is your opponent right?
    - Please repeat in your words, what B said.
    - Is this what you wanted to say?
  - FAIR COMMUNICATION RULES
    - Equal verbal and non-verbal treatment of both persons
    - Everybody has the same amount of time to speak
    - Describe, do not evaluate.
    - Talk about you, not about the others.

IX. Isaacs 4 practices for Dialogic Leadership

- The four practices are:
  - Listening: corresponds to following
  - Voicing: corresponds to moving
  - Suspending: corresponds to bystander
  - Respecting: corresponds to opposing
- The dialogic leader moves between these roles or encourages others to shift roles in order to bring balance to dialogue, but not at the sake of quality and genuineness

X. When to apply dialogical leadership

- When counterproductive patterns emerge in conversations
- Unprecedented problems or problems with few known solutions
  - Use dialogue as a process to answer the right questions
XI. Reflection questions on Dialogic Leadership

- What’s the action/player position you use/fill most?
- Does the action/player position you use most vary based on the group or situation? Are there patterns to those usages?
- When might you overuse an action?
- Are you possibly stuck in an action? If so, what might be the underlying cause?
- Think of a time in which you felt like the conversation was not progressing. What’s one different action you could bring to the situation that might result in a shift/progression?
NOTE: This outline can be easily adapted into a PowerPoint or other media presentation for instruction and supported by the presenter’s own knowledge, the information provided in the training development overview and outside supporting research.

I. Empathy is defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.
   - It is fundamental to building trusting and effective relationships
   - It is not agreement

II. Empathy vs Sympathy
   - Empathy involves putting yourself in the other person’s shoes (perspective) in order to understand WHY they may have the particular feelings/reactions they do
   - Sympathy is an acknowledgement that someone is feeling something, but only understanding from your own perspective.

III. Three types of empathy:
   - Cognitive empathy: you understand on an intellectual level why the person may be feeling or thinking what they are, but you really can’t connect to the situation.
   - Emotional/affective empathy: you are having an emotional or physical response to what another person/group is feeling or experiencing.
   - Compassionate empathy: you not only understand (intellectually) and connect (emotionally) but can also appropriately respond and take the supportive actions necessary to assist the person through the experience.
   - Emotional Empathy is the type of empathy that most people think of when they hear the word empathy.
   - Compassionate empathy is the ideal response for fostering leader and subordinate relationships.

IV. Ways to show empathy:
   - Active Listening
   - Stay Focused
   - Acknowledge their emotions from their perspective, not yours
   - Suspend Judgement
   - Ask questions

V. Benefits of Empathy:
   - Builds social connections/relationships
   - Helps you regulate your own emotions
   - Promotes mental wellbeing.
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- Improves leadership and communication skills.
- Promotes helping behaviors & anticipation of needs
- Promotes open communication & feedback (trust)

VI. Barriers to Empathy

- Fear
- Cognitive Biases
- Poor listening
- Not having a solution
- Premature Judgment/ Jumping to Conclusions
- Unhealthy Competition
- Ego

VII: Demonstrating empathy in everyday actions- Habits of Mind:

- Accept people as they are: Dwelling on a person’s shortcomings without being willing to develop them isn’t productive.
- Be Authentic: You’re a real person with successes, failures, and shortcomings. You are a real person with a life of your own, give people insight into that life.
- Ask Questions: It shows you’re interested in the person and their perspective, even if you don’t agree with it.
- Listen: Prioritize listening. Listening to understand, not to respond or share. Don’t assume you know what they are going to say. Listen with your eyes as well as your ears; there’s a lot that can be determined through the observation of body language.
- Understand it’s not all about you: Don’t internalize and assume that someone’s reactions are directed at you. Also, don’t dominate relationships and conversations.
- Be a team player: Nothing shows you care more than understanding that very few organizations are successful acting as individuals. Furthermore, people are more than their output/results, demonstrate you understand that.

VIII: Empathy Exercises:

- Cultivate Curiosity: Visit new places, talk & listen to people of different backgrounds, spend time with people you don’t know well and get to know them better.
- Practice giving yourself grace. When you are struggling with something, take some time to imagine you are telling a friend about the struggle. How would your friend respond to you? Would they respond to you in the same way you are responding to yourself? Would you respond to them in the same way if they were in your situation? Chances are no.
- Share your story versus your stance. Next time you have a conversation with someone on a topic you disagree with, instead of voicing your opinion, share the story of how you came to form that opinion.
- Empathy shout outs. Take the time to thank or praise those moments of kindness or empathy you see in others.
• Turn spent into spend. When you’re stressed or tired, take a small break/moment to spend (time, energy, money, whatever) effort on someone in your life. Send a text message, buy them a coffee.
• Community Service. Join a community project or group that supports different backgrounds than yours.

IX. Reflection questions on Empathy

• How do you comfort others? What about you most comforts others?
• Do you use silence during your conversations? If so, when?
• What should others understand about you?
• What do you understand about yourself, your biases?
• How do you deal with negative emotions?
• When are you most present?
• What types of questions/subjects make you most uncomfortable? Why?
• When are you most observant?
• How do you deal with negative emotions?
NOTE: This outline can be easily adapted into a PowerPoint or other media presentation for instruction and supported by the presenter’s own knowledge, the information provided in the training development overview and outside supporting research.

I. Suspending Judgment is defined as delaying a decision about something until you know more about it.

II. Importance of:

- Enables active listening & empathy
- Allows you the space to accurately understand a perspective/situation
- Improves:
  - Communication
  - Critical Thinking
  - Leadership

III. How to suspend judgment:

- Leave your ego at the door
- Be present/ Practice mindfulness
- Be aware of your biases
- Approach conversations as opportunities to learn
- Ask open-ended questions
- Take pause
- Take notes on objections rather than stating them immediately
- Look for shared beliefs, ideologies, and experiences

IV: Suspending Judgment Exercises:

- Switching perspectives: Look at problems as opportunities. Analyze a problem from the perspective of how it can result in something beneficial.
- Multi-Perspective artwork.
- Peter Elbow’s Believing and Doubting Game: A way in which you try to believe a point of view and then doubt it in order to uncover a deeper understanding.
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NOTE: This was developed as a self-paced eLearning course but could be easily adapted for in-person. eLearning Course can be found at www.leaderslistentoo.com
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**The Listening Process**

**Stage 1: Receiving**
This stage involves hearing and attending. In the receiving stage, the listener is intentionally focusing on the message they are hearing by filtering out other incoming stimuli in order to identify the sound. The sounds will not have meaning until stage 2.

**Stage 2: Understanding**
Stage 2 is where the listener attempts to understand the meaning of the message. This is the first stage in which listeners move from hearing to listening. During the understanding step, listeners are determining the context and meaning of the message they are hearing.

**Stage 3: Remembering**
In stage 3, the listener is categorizing and retaining the information they are receiving. This stage happens both during and after the message is received, as the remembering stage allows the person to record information about the events for later recall. Memory is critical for listening; it is what allows the listener to follow along with the speaker or message. If stage 2, understanding, was inaccurate, recollection of the message will also be inaccurate.

**Stage 4: Evaluating**
In stage 4, the listener evaluates or judges the value of the message. Evaluating allows the listener to form an opinion or response to the message. During the evaluation stage, the listener uses all of their knowledge and experience, as well as their bias when formulating their evaluation of the message.

**Stage 5: Feedback**
Stage 5 is the listener's response, or feedback to the message. Feedback can be in the form of a verbal or nonverbal reaction.

---

**General Listening Types**

**Discriminative Listening**
- distinguishing the difference between sounds
- first form of hearing humans develop
- distinguishing between subtleties in tone and frequency to determine mood
- more about vibrations and sounds

**Comprehensive Listening**
- understanding the meaning of words
- understanding non-verbal cues and their connection to the message
- understanding the purpose of the message
- aka: total hearing
## Specific Listening Types Best for Effective Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informational Listening (Listening to learn)</th>
<th>Critical Listening (Listening to evaluate and analyze)</th>
<th>Empathetic Listening (Listening to understand emotions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening to learn, receive instructions, etc.</td>
<td>Also known as evaluative, interpretative, or judgmental listening. Critical listening the listener is evaluating, analyzing, or judging what is being said or read. The listener is comparing what the message is to what they know and forming an opinion. It is important when listening to remain open-minded and not biased.</td>
<td>The purpose of empathetic listening is to listen to the other person’s words through the lens of their point of view. Empathetic listening does not mean that the listener does not still evaluate or judge the message content. It simply means that the listener withhold judgment or critically until they understand the why or how of the speaker in order to assist them. Empathetic listening also does not mean that the listener has to agree with the speaker. Empathetic listening is a very important skill for leaders.</td>
</tr>
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### Other Listening Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appreciative Listening (Listening for enjoyment)</th>
<th>Rapport Listening (Listening to establish trust)</th>
<th>Selective Listening (Listening for what you want to hear)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appreciative listening is listening for enjoyment. A good example is listening to music, especially as a way to relax.</td>
<td>When trying to build rapport with others, we can engage in a type of listening that encourages the other person to trust and like us. A salesperson, for example, may make an effort to listen similarly to what you are saying as a way to promote trust and potentially make a sale. This type of listening is common in situations of negotiation, sales pitches, and the like.</td>
<td>A form of biased listening. Listening only to a few things that you think you need to or are required to and ignoring the rest of the message or not considering the interaction the rest of the message has with the part you listened to.</td>
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### Pseudo/Partial Listening (Listening for appearances)

- Pretending to listen, but in fact, you are thinking about something else or are distracted from the process of listening because of your previous knowledge of the speaker or message. You may nod their head and smile or give other verbal or nonverbal cues that make it seem as though they are listening, but in reality, are not.

### Check on Learning

Type in the answers to the question below. Select the submit button once complete.

**What are the 5 stages of the listening process?**

- **STAGE 1**: type your text here
- **STAGE 2**: type your text here
- **STAGE 3**: type your text here
- **STAGE 4**: type your text here
- **STAGE 5**: type your text here

### Lesson 1 Summary:

- There is a difference between hearing and listening.
- Listening is an active, intentional process that requires cognitive effort.
- The listening process is a 5-stage process.
- There are two main types of listening.
- There are many different sub-types of listening, but the most helpful to being an effective listener and building relationships are:
  - Informational Listening
  - Empathetic Listening
  - Critical Listening
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Lesson 2: Active Listening

After completing this lesson, you will be able to:

- Define active listening and its key components
- Identify verbal and nonverbal ways to become a better listener
- Apply active listening skills

Active Listening in Action

Click on PLAY VIDEO to see Active Listening in Action

Active Listening Skills

- Pay Attention
- Withhold Judgement
- Ask Questions
- Reflect
- Paraphrase
- Summarize
- Empathize

"Active listing communicates, I hear what you're feeling," neither agreement nor disagreement, no judgment whether the feelings are right or wrong."

Dr. Thomas Gordon

Active Listening is a way of listening and responding to another person or group that improves mutual understanding.

Involves:
- Both verbal and non-verbal communication
- Attentive listening
- Being non-judgmental
- Understanding the person/group's point of view
- Reflecting
- Responding
- Giving feedback

Active Listening Skills

Concentrate fully on what is being said. Listen with all your senses and give your undivided attention to the speaker. Put away your phone, ignore distractions, avoid daydreaming, and shut down your internal dialogue.

To show you're truly tuned in, look at them and be mindful of nonverbal behaviors. Use open, non-threatening body language. Avoid fiddling with your arms. Smile (as appropriate), lean in, and nod at key junctures. Consciously control your facial expressions, avoiding any that convey negative impressions. Additionally avoid expressing the listener into thinking your body language is indicating you agree or disagree versus that you are understanding their point of view or paying attention.

Making eye contact is especially important. In general, aim to maintain it for 60% to 70% of the time you spend listening.

Remain neutral and non-judgmental in your responses so that the person feels safe enough to continue sharing their thoughts. Make the conversation a safe zone where the person can trust they won't be shamed, criticized, blamed, or otherwise negatively received. Allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions. Don't interrupt with counter arguments. Interrupting frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message.

Click on each skill to learn more.
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Active Listening Skills

Avoid "yes or no" questions; they often produce dead-end answers. Instead, ask open-ended questions about the person to show you are interested in them and to encourage thoughtful, expansive responses.

If you'd like to better understand something the person has said, ask for clarification. But don't focus so much on insignificant details that you miss the big picture.

Example:
"Can you tell me more about your concerns?"
"Is there anything else you'd like to share?"
"How long have you been dealing with this issue?"
"What are your thoughts on the matter?"

ASK QUESTIONS

Active Listening Skills

Reflection is also known as mirroring and can be used in conjunction with paraphrasing and summarizing. Paraphrase what the person has said, rather than offering unsolicited advice or opinions. For example, you might say, "I'm hearing what you're saying" or "I'm hearing that you're frustrated" or "I'm hearing that you're frustrated about this situation." Summarize what you've heard. Mirroring what the person has said helps them feel validated and understood.

REFLECT

Active Listening Skills

Paraphrasing is restating the information the speaker has said, but using different words. Paraphrasing allows you to validate with the speaker that you have interpreted what they said correctly, to include their feelings.

For example:
"The speaker may say "I don't know what I'm doing here.""
"Your response may be "So you have some ideas about how to improve the way the work is done and you want to know that someone is actually hearing your input.""

PARAPHRASE

Active Listening Skills

Unlike in paraphrasing, in summarizing you reiterate all of the main points of the discussion. Doing this can serve as a check-in not only to validate your understanding of the speaker's viewpoint, but also to recap the progress of the conversation and organize the thoughts.

For Example:
"These seem to be the key ideas you have expressed..."
"If I hear you right..."

SUMMARIZE

Active Listening Skills

When you empathize with the listener, you are attempting to understand their point of view. It's not about how you feel in that moment, but about understanding how they feel and how it is affecting them.

Be patient. Don't interrupt, fill periods of silence with speech, finish the person's sentences, or talk about them. (For example, saying "that reminds me of the time...".)

Similarly, listen to understand, not to respond. That is, don't prepare a reply while the other person is still speaking. The last thing they say might change the meaning of what they've already said. Don't change the subject abruptly; this conveys boredom and impatience.

EMPATHIZE

Active Listening And Relationships

Relationships

Being an active listener in a relationship means that you recognize the conversation is more about your partner than about you. This is especially important when your partner is distressed. Your ability to listen actively to a partner going through a difficult time is a valuable skill. It helps keep you from offering opinions and solutions when the other person really just wants to be heard.

Work

Active listening at work is particularly important if you are in a supervisory position or interact frequently with colleagues. It helps you understand problems and collaborate to develop solutions. It also showcases your patience, a valuable asset in any workplace.

Social Situations

Active listening techniques help you develop relationships as you meet new people. People who are active and empathetic listeners are good at initiating and maintaining conversations.
* Listening is not understanding the words of the question asked, listening is understanding why the question was asked in the first place.

Simon Sinek

- Active or empathetic listening is a way of listening and responding to another person or group that improves mutual understanding.
- Active listening can be learned through practice and skill engagement.
- Key skills of active listeners include:
  - Empathy
  - Withholding Judgement
  - Reflecting
  - Summarizing/Paraphrasing
  - Paying Attention
  - Asking Questions
- Active listening can improve and build relationships.
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APPENDIX G: ASSET VS DEFICIT BASED FEEDBACK TRAINING OUTLINE

NOTE: This outline can be easily adapted into a PowerPoint or other media presentation for instruction and supported by the presenter’s own knowledge, the information provided in the training development overview and outside supporting research.

I. Defined:

- Asset based feedback is a feedback approach that is grounded in what individuals or groups can do rather than what they cannot do or areas of weakness.
- Deficit based feedback is a feedback approach that focuses on the perceived weaknesses of individuals or groups, such that the individuals or groups become viewed as “the problem.”

II. Comparison:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asset Based</th>
<th>Deficit Based</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strengths Driven</td>
<td>Need Driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity focus</td>
<td>Problems focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internally focused</td>
<td>Externally focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is present that we can build upon?</td>
<td>What is missing that we must go find?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May lead to new, unexpected responses</td>
<td>May lead to downward spiral of burnout, depression, or dysfunction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II. How:

- Shift language. Provide more descriptive feedback.
  - Deliver timely, actionable, and specific feedback
- Provide feedback identifying what they can do and strategies for using their strengths to address their areas of need.
- Provide a space for the individual to process and react to the feedback
- Discuss the challenging parts for the individual

IV. Why:

- Promotes a growth mindset.
- Builds enthusiasm and energy
- Strengthens relationships
- Moves people and productivity to the next level
- Promotes suspension of judgment
- Promotes optimism

VI. Asset Based Exercises
• Improv. Have individuals role-play funny mishaps or mistakes and other players must think on their feet to turn their mishap into something positive but in a way that also provides feedback.
• Reflect. Pick a weakness (or two) and then reflect on ways you can use your strengths to improve the weakness(es)
APPENDIX H: LANGUAGE/QUESTIONING TRAINING OUTLINE

I. Asking the right questions:
   - Improves information exchange/communication
   - Creates a Shared Understanding
   - Helps in diffusing arguments
   - Uncovers specific information

II. Tips for question asking:
   - Ask open-ended questions
   - Ask follow-up questions for clarity
   - Listen to the answers
   - Don’t interrupt
   - Ask for clarification or confirmation i.e. “Let me see if I understand what you’re saying”

III. Language Use:
   - Consider:
     - Your audience
     - The organization of your message
     - Word choice and their implications
     - Tone
     - Connection to your nonverbal communication

IV. Improving language
   - Expand your vocabulary
   - Avoid awkward, vague and unclear word.
   - Do not use the word only because others are using it.
   - Replace general words with more specific ones.
   - Use bias-free language or word.
   - Use politically correct words.
   - Use proper diction.
   - Avoid slang.
   - Avoid jargon.
V. Questioning Exercises:

- Play 20 Questions
- Riddle/ Logic Question:

Example:

Question: A woman walks into a hardware store. She can buy 6 for $6, 12 for $12, or 24 for $12. What is she buying?

Answer: House numbers. Each number costs $6. Therefore, the number 6 (or 7, 8, or 9) is $6. 12 is two numbers, "1" and "2" - and is therefore $12. 100 is three numbers and is $18.
NOTE: This outline can be easily adapted into a PowerPoint or other media presentation for instruction and supported by the presenter’s own knowledge, the information provided in the training development overview and outside supporting research.

I. Mindful Communication is applying the principles of mindfulness to the way we communicate with others.

- Setting an intention
- Being fully present
- Remaining open and non-judgmental
- Relating to others with compassion

II. Mindful Communication Mindset:

- Pause/ Think before starting a conversation: Consider how your message will be received and affect those around you.
- Fully Arrive: Fully arrive for conversation. Clear your mind of rushing thoughts and prepare to be physically present and attentive.
- Observe how others are responding: pay attention to how others are responding to your message, verbally or nonverbally.
- Label & notice how you feel: Are you open to communication, closed (Defensive) to communication or in-between. Encourage others to do the same. Notice your physical reactions to these three categories is important as well.
- Use I Statements. Explain/communicate things in terms of how they are affecting you, how they make you feel, how you are interpreting them.
- Make eye contact/Pay attention.

III. Mindfulness Exercises:

Practice Alert-Yet-Relaxed Posture

- Whether standing or sitting, place the soles of your feet on the floor at about hip’s distance apart.
- If standing, distribute your weight evenly between the two feet. Lift energetically through the arches of the feet, gently waking up the muscles in your legs and toning through the lower and upper abdomen.
- If sitting, wiggle your fanny way back in the chair and sit upright on your sitz bones (bottom part of your pelvis). Keep your feet flat on the floor and knees in line with the hip bones, avoid clenching between the inner thighs.
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- Keep your pelvis neutral and elongate your spine by lifting through the sides of your torso. Relax the tops of your shoulders while lengthening through the back of the neck. Picture the head sitting lightly on the top of the spine. Arms can be held gently at your sides.
- Gaze ahead softly, while maintaining an open and responsive brow and facial expression. Begin to memorize this alert-yet-relaxed countenance so you can re-center and return to it at any time.

Practice Mindful Breathing

- Begin to pay attention to your breathing. At first, only observe your breathing for clues that help you detect information about your inner state. After a few rounds of breathing, begin to shift your attention from simply observing your breath into investing your breathing with intentions that will help you perform at your best.
- As you breathe in, feel the effects of inhaling as if gathering inspiration from your surroundings. As you do this, imagine being curious not only about your own experience, but the experience of the person you are speaking with and the possibilities that may arise as your conversation unfolds.
- As you breathe out, feel grounded in this alert-yet-relaxed posture, giving attention to the stability of your feet and core body, and if seated, your connection with the chair. Imagine that while the currents of the conversations may shift, you can stay grounded and stable.
- Continue to breathe; breathing in feeling curious; breathing out feeling grounded.

Practice Mindful Listening

- Select a piece of music you have never heard before. You may have something in your own collection that you have never listened to, or you might choose to turn the radio dial until something catches your ear.

1. Close your eyes and put on your headphones.
2. Try not to get drawn into judging the music by its genre, title or artist name before it has begun. Instead, ignore any labels and neutrally allow yourself to get lost in the journey of sound for the duration of the song.
3. Allow yourself to explore every aspect of track. Even if the music isn’t to your liking at first, let go of your dislike and give your awareness full permission to climb inside the track and dance among the sound waves.
4. Explore the song by listening to the dynamics of each instrument. Separate each sound in your mind and analyze each one by one.
5. Hone in on the vocals: the sound of the voice, its range and tones. If there is more than one voice, separate them out as you did in step 4.

- The idea is to listen intently, to become fully entwined with the composition without preconception or judgment of the genre, artist, lyrics or instrumentation. Don’t think, hear.
IV. Reflection Questions on Mindfulness:

- What are my core values?
- How does anger/grief/anxiety/happiness present in my body?
- What is the fear beneath one of my surface fears?
- What is most difficult for me to accept about myself?
- What do I judge in others that I, too, embody sometimes?
- What matters most to me?
- What is this moment asking of me?
- Do I practice what I preach?
- Where might I lean into forgiveness (of self or other)?
- In a recent disagreement, what was I not acknowledging or accepting?
- What is my happy place?
- When do I feel most like ‘me’?
- If I was sure to succeed, what project or course of study would I begin tomorrow?
- What thoughts, beliefs, or stories am I holding onto that no longer serve me?
- Who am I without using any words to define myself?
NOTE: This outline can be easily adapted into a PowerPoint or other media presentation for instruction and supported by the presenter’s own knowledge, the information provided in the training development overview and outside supporting research.

I. Personal Accountability is being willing to accept and rectify the consequences that result from choices, actions, or behaviors. i.e., owning the situation whether it is good or bad.

II. Why is Personal Accountability Important?
   - Builds/maintains relationships
   - Increases positivity of social interactions
   - Builds trust & respect
   - Develops problem-solving skills
   - Shows dependability

III. Personal Accountability Model
   - Provides insights into what it means to be accountable.
   - Responses to difficult or tricky situations result in one of two responses
     - Display victim mentality
     - Display accountable behavior
   - Identifying accountability
     - Recognize the behavior that does not contribute to the desired result.
     - Identify the counter action necessary to stop the behavior.

IV. Organizational Consequences of Blame
   - Slows Information Flow
   - Reduces Innovation
   - Shifts the Burden

V. Responsibility in communication.
   - Validates message is accurately interpreted by the receiver
   - Provide feedback
   - Be prepared
   - Be Organized
   - Be Clear
   - Be Punctual
   - Be Ethical

VI. Accountability & Responsibility Reflection Questions:
   - How is another acting rationally from their perspective?
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- What is my role in the situation?
- What information am I missing that would help me understand this person’s behavior?
- How might this behavior make sense?
- What pressures is he or she under?
- What systems or structures might be influencing this behavior?
- Did I take some actions that seemed right at the time, but that had intended consequences?
- What am I learning about myself in this situation? About others?
- What does this remind me of?
- What new behaviors or thoughts does this situation call for that may be a stretch for me?
APPENDIX K: BUILDING RAPPORT TRAINING OUTLINE

NOTE: This outline can be easily adapted into a PowerPoint or other media presentation for instruction and supported by the presenter’s own knowledge, the information provided in the training development overview and outside supporting research.

I. Rapport is a connection or relationship with someone else.
   - The process of developing that connection or relationship is building rapport.
   - Sometimes rapport is built organically.
   - Rapport is critical to building and maintaining healthy relationships and communication.

II. Techniques for Building Rapport
   - Be polite. Use non-threatening and ‘safe topics’ for initial small talk
   - Listen for shared experiences or circumstances
   - Eject humor (when appropriate)
   - Be conscious of body language and nonverbal signals
   - Show Empathy
   - Eye Contact
   - Use names in conversations
   - Ask open ended questions
   - Use feedback, summarize, reflect, and paraphrase
   - Build on other person’s ideas
   - Be nonjudgmental
   - Give your reason before stating you disagree
   - Be genuine/authentic

III. Reflection on Building Rapport:
   - In what environments or contexts does rapport building feel easier?
   - What holds me back from attempting to build rapport?
   - When do I find myself not feeling authentic? Why?
   - What are my strengths and shortcomings in building relationships?
   - How does my rapport building differ between written and verbal communications?
I. Compassion Fatigue & Empathy burnout results from a person expending too much emotional, mental, and physical energy in caring for others, only to then feel exhausted themselves. Can lead to a diminished ability to feel compassion or empathy.

II. Symptoms:
- Excessive blaming
- Bottled up emotions
- Isolation from others
- Receives unusual number of complaints from others
- Voices excessive complaints about work functions
- Substance abuse used to mask feelings
- Compulsive behaviors such as overspending, overeating, gambling, sexual addiction
- Poor self-care
- Legal problems
- Reoccurrence of nightmares and flashbacks to traumatic event
- Chronic physical ailments such as gastrointestinal problems or colds
- Sadness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Mentally and physically tired
- Preoccupied
- In denial about problems

III. Treatment:
- Be kind to yourself
- Take personal time and breaks
- Educate yourself to understand your reactions
- Accept where you are in your own journey
- Know that the people who are close to you may not always be available to help you cope.
- Talk things over your feelings and thoughts with people who can validate you
- Listen to others who have had similar experiences
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- Be sure to set boundaries in your work and care giving relationships
- Express your needs out loud
- Create a better work-life balance
- Develop relaxation strategies

IV. Practical steps to avoid empathy burnout:
- Shift empathy usage to a skill versus a feeling
- Set clear boundaries
- Don’t take thinks personally
- Believe in other’s abilities to help themselves
- Provide them with tools
- Recommend professional assistance/resources
- Understand its ok not to have all the answers or solutions
- Don’t take it personal

V. Realizing limitations in unproductive conversations:
  Consider ending conversations:
  - When you’re talking to a bully
  - When the conversation is going in circles
  - When emotions are preventing momentum/clarity