BUILDING STRONG STARTS WITH GETTING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

By Lieutenant General Robert L. Van Antwerp

We are in historic (many would say "hysteric") times. The challenges are legion with military and civilian deployments, an aging infrastructure, and an unprecedented workload. The United States Army Corps of Engineers is making a difference now and positioning for the future.

That positioning requires that we grow by recruiting the right military and civilian professionals needed to deliver superior performance. It means building our organization "strong" so that it is built to last. We're doing it by hiring passionate and talented people who care about the role they play in providing the infrastructure our nation needs to strengthen our economy and keep our country, armed forces, and their Families safe and secure.

The right people make a difference, and they—more than our programs—will determine our organization's ability to succeed now and in the future. Our talented men and women plan, orchestrate, and execute our multifaceted array of engineering operations, ranging from combat engineering to general and geospatial engineering, to massive reconstruction of entire nations, such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

However, it's one thing to say that we need great people; it's another thing to critically examine what people we need and what makes them relevant to our mission. In Jim Collins' book *Good to Great*,[1] he talks about the importance of having the right people in the right seat on the bus. The individuals who work in our Regiment should demonstrate great character and values. They should be fit, tough, smart, innovative, and adaptive. They must be energetic, passionate, and truly committed to the mission. We need to be smart in how we recruit for our Regiment, which means going after the right people who want to work for us for the right reasons.

Collins also talks about being experts in our field. That starts with getting certified—your Professional Engineer (PE) license if you are an engineer, your Project Management Professional (PMP) certification if you are a project manager, your real estate license if you are a real estate professional, etc.

We are recognized around the world for our engineering expertise, construction management, and skills in many other disciplines. Our workforce possesses extraordinary experience and expertise in every one of our diverse functional areas.

But one day, our most experienced engineering professionals will leave us, and we need to build our bench now. The most effective way to grow tomorrow's experts is by giving them hands-on experience today. We are in the midst of an estimated $44 billion in military construction and Army Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission projects between now and fiscal year 2013, which translates to more than $44 billion worth of living classrooms to train new, talented, and passionate engineers. At Fort Bliss, Texas, we are completing one building a week for the next five years. In Iraq, we have $3.6 billion worth of military construction projects.

By designing and building billion dollar facilities that help improve a Soldier's quality of life and battlefield preparedness, to improving dams, levees, and other flood risk management projects, our young engineers, biologists, chemists, physicists, and architects will experience unique training opportunities that no other organization can begin to offer.

The future is bright for the Corps. There is a growing requirement to approach engineering challenges in a sustainable manner, with alternative approaches to design, construction, materials, energy development and use, water resources management, land use, and watershed planning. Engineers need the ability to work across boundaries and communicate with their diverse base of customers. They must have effective leadership skills to guide multidisciplinary and multinational teams of volunteers, contractors, and state and local officials.

These are new and exciting times, and the Corps of Engineers is blessed with a unique opportunity to lead the way and make a real difference in the lives of every American.

Building Strong!

Lieutenant General Van Antwerp is the 52d Chief of Engineers and Commander of the United States Army Corps of Engineers. Previous assignments include Commanding General, United States Army Accessions Command and Deputy Commanding General for Initial Military Training at Fort Monroe, Virginia; Commanding General, United States Army Maneuver Support Center and Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and Commandant, United States Army Engineer School; United States Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District; the United States Army Division, South Atlantic, Atlanta, Georgia; and the 326th Engineer Battalion, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

Endnote

[1]*Good to Great* by Jim C. Collins, Harper Business: New York, 2001.