



BUILDING MOMENTUM FOR THE FUTURE

By Ms. Shirley A. Bridges

Lieutenant General Robert L. Van Antwerp, 52d Chief of Engineers, began his address at the 2010 ENFORCE Conference by talking about the legacy of the Engineer Regiment to remind the attendees of what the engineers stand for.



“We’re going to talk together about some of the things important to the Regiment,” he said. “But first, you know, it’s always great to go back to your history and think about what we stand for.”

1775—Bunker Hill, Continental Army. President-to-be George Washington recognized the need for engineer capability and chose Colonel Richard Gridley as the first Chief of Engineers.

1802—West Point. This was the beginning of the Engineer Regiment as we know it today. We were just starting to explore the west, and we needed surveyors and engineers. Today, 51 or 52 percent of the Regiment’s officers come out of West Point—the others are out of the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) and the Officer Candidate School (OCS).

1824—Civil Works Mission. Some incredible things were going on in the Ohio River and the Mississippi River and, by Act of Congress, the Corps of Engineers—the Engineer Regiment—was given the civil works mission. Today, we have 12,000 miles of inland waterways that touch 41 states. And we have 241 locks and dams.

1914—Panama Canal. The Canal was started by someone else, but engineers finished it. Now, they’re building a new lock, and we’re advising on that.

1941—Construction Mission. Today, we do the construction—to include some for other Services—on 103 military installations.

1943—The Pentagon. We built the Pentagon in Washington, DC, in 15 months; now, it’s going to take 13 years to renovate it.

1961—National Aeronautics and Space Administration. We built the NASA facility.

1986—Water Resources Development Act. This authorization document tells the Corps of Engineers how to do what Congress wants them to do.

1986—Cost-Sharing Provision. This changed life in the Corps of Engineers. No longer can we say, “Here’s what needs to be done.” Now, there has to be a Congressman willing to put in a request and get it authorized and appropriated.

2004—Standup of the Gulf Region Division. At its height, the Gulf Region Division had three districts in Iraq, but two of the three districts have been stood down. We’ll be in the third one at least until December 2011. In Afghanistan, we have two districts and a deployable command post—the 412th Engineer Command.

2005—Katrina. This effort involves the largest design-build civil works project ever for the Corps of Engineers—more than \$800 million.

2009—Greatest Amount of Work Underway. We have 37,000 people in the Corps of Engineers—more than 100,000 in our Regiment. And we have great partners—400,000 contracts, worth \$45 billion.

“That’s our history,” Van Antwerp said. “That’s where we come from. What a wonderful history.”

He remarked that a lot of those in the audience know that when he looks at an officer, a noncommissioned officer (NCO), or a civilian, he has 4 Es in his head. He explained that as follows:

- **Energy.** Energy starts with fitness, and you have to keep that fitness up every day until it becomes a lifestyle.
- **Energize.** Energizing others is leadership. Influence. A lot of times it’s taking people where they might not want to go, but if they buy into you they’re likely to buy into where you’re taking them.
- **Edge.** The edge is hard to describe, but when you see it, you know it. It’s those people who will say, “I’ll be in that pilot program. I want to be out there—I want to be experimenting for the future.” They’re innovative. Visionaries.
- **Execute.** When you have a \$45 billion program, the ultimate test is not going to be all the great disciplined thought you put into it, or whether you have great people. It will be what’s left. It’s why the buildings we built back during World War II—that were intended to be used for five years—are still standing in some places. It’s because they were done right. That’s the test.

Van Antwerp gestured as if drawing an imaginary circle that was going counterclockwise like a flywheel. He said that if a flywheel is heavy enough and you get it rolling, it’s pretty hard to stop it. But it’s very hard to get started. So you have to make sure it gets started, and when you get it started, you want it to go in the right direction—because it’s hard to redirect.

He asked the audience to imagine a line drawn from one end of the circle to the other, right through the middle. Then he asked them to mentally divide the top half of the circle into thirds—to represent disciplined people, disciplined thought, and disciplined action—and to divide each third into two parts. Then he explained his “drawing.” (The figure to the right, from the book *Good to Great* by Jim Collins, depicts this.)¹

Disciplined people. One part is about leaders and the other is about getting the right people in the right seat of the bus. How do we select, develop, retain, promote—all those things of great people?

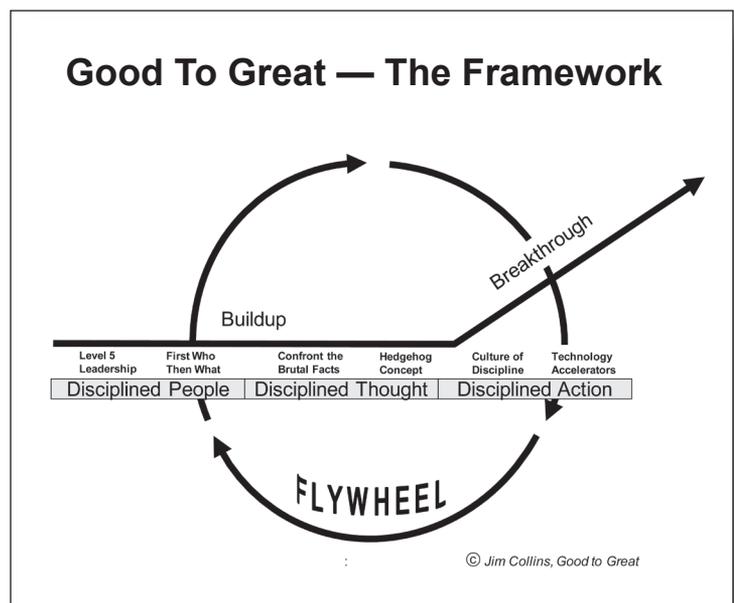
Disciplined thought. One part is similar to an after action review (AAR)—confront the brutal facts; look at yourself really hard. Find out where your pros and cons are, and that is where you start to establish your campaign plan for the future. The other part is called “the hedgehog” in *Good to Great*.² Keep your focus; look at your core—what made you great—and if that core isn’t changing, invest in that core.

Disciplined action. One of the marks of a great organization is that you tell people what you’re going to do, and you do what you say. That’s the ultimate mark: You deliver. The second part, though, has to do with innovation and technology acceleration. That is what the edge is. And it isn’t about boxes and electrons; it is about having that edge of innovation.

“Now there’s something that happens when you get the right people on the bus—and the right leaders, the Level 5 leaders,” he said. “When you get that about midway through the *disciplined thought* part, there’s a line that goes from the center line up to the flywheel. Where it intersects the flywheel, there’s a picture of greatness, but it doesn’t mean that you’re done, or complete.”

Van Antwerp said that we’re tracking a lot of things in our campaign plan in the Corps of Engineers, and we’re saying when we’re complete. When we get close to that point, we’re going to say, “What’s next? What’s the next greatness part there?” But when you go up on that line, one of the things you have to do is have a picture of where that line intersects with the flywheel. And once you get it going, you get momentum. “We have momentum in the Corps of Engineers,” he said. “We have momentum in our Regiment right now that we want to keep. In fact, we want to get it going faster and faster.”

“I want to talk about something that’s kind of near and dear to my heart,” Van Antwerp said, “because I think it’s on the cutting edge in the future—*how we select and assign people*.” He added that “we have this thing called the Green Pages,”³ and he had four slides to show the audience to expose them to that concept and get them to think about where we’re going. “First of all,” he said, “using the ‘steal (good) ideas shamelessly (SIS) principle,’ we stole this idea from IBM, who has what they call the Blue Pages.⁴ They use that to put people in the right seats of the bus, using the vernacular of the book *Good to Great*.”⁵



Slide 1 showed what is available, personnel-wise, and it might be called the “supply side.” Young officers in the Engineer Captains Career Course (ECCC) and the Basic Officer Leader Course (BOLC) have been asked to put in their supply side—where they have expertise. Then units are asked to put in their talent requirements—what do they need? Is it a civil engineer? A professional engineer (PE)? The idea is to capture those requirements so we can see what is needed out there. And it’s about the Green Pages.

Slide 2 consisted of supply side statements that came from the young officers from ECCC and BOLC. For example, “Explosive hazard team leader in Task Force Troy. Taught Counter-IED and tactical...” Another student wrote, “Prior experience... Project Manager...DC /Baltimore metro area...internationally. Experience with federal and government...” “That’s a lot of talent right there that we would have never known about,” he said. “That’s what we want to capture: What’s the talent out there?”

Slide 3 concerned how we match up the talent with the needs. “We’re actually going to fill 31 officer positions out of these classes in session right now, based on Green Pages,” he said. “We’re running a pilot that maybe the Army eventually will go to. Do we have the edge? This is a place where we have a chance to be on the cutting edge—matching talent with needs and requirements.”

“I think that if you’re going to have a great organization, everyone has to feel as if he contributes,” Van Antwerp said. “So we also took a little survey as we were doing this talent input. We asked ‘How important is it that the Army treats you as a unique individual?’ Ninety-one percent said that it is ‘very important’ or ‘important.’ ‘How important is it that units provide detailed descriptions of their job requirements?’ Ninety-seven percent said they want to know what they are getting into.”

Slide 4 contained two other questions: “What is most important to you when looking for your next job assignment?” To most of the young officers, it was “the job.” The second question was “What am I going to do next?” Van Antwerp thinks that we’re going to have an interesting dilemma: Units are beginning to have longer dwell time between deployments, but there are young people coming up who are saying, “I want to go—I want to be part of this fight; that’s why I came in.” “So we have to get this right. We want to treat them as unique individuals, and we want to match up with their positions. We’re going to give them a lot of say in this, but that’s where we’re headed. It’s all about selecting the right people and getting them in the right positions.”

“There are a lot of ambiguities out there,” he continued. “Could we prepare them better? I think we have to be listening to this group and bring them on our team and do the development—count on the School for a lot of that, but over on the USACE side, we have \$45 billion worth of projects. We need to get our young officers and NCOs over into the Corps for a period of time. What we do well is project management, and we do contracting well. If you’re in-theater and you have funds for a project, you need to be able to manage projects so you’ll be better equipped. So we have to

work this part together. That’s about the *disciplined people* part.”

“Now let’s talk about *disciplined thought*,” Van Antwerp said. Then he asked BG Bryan Watson, Engineer School Commandant, to talk about the *disciplined thought* he’s putting into the School, on how we might train our officers in the future.

BG Watson said that to train officers in the future, we have to recognize that they’re unique—that they all come with different education and different training. “However,” he said, “we have a one-size-fits-all approach to how we train our officers and NCOs. And we’re not even giving them credit for their previous education when they come into the Corps or when they come into the Captains Career Course for a second assignment.” He said that Soldiers who are going from a construction outfit to a sapper outfit, or vice versa, are given the same instruction. And so they begin to see less relevance. But now the School is looking at how to take a university approach—really put three people in charge of tailoring that program:

- *Former commander.* Let the former commander help the Soldier see where his or her weakness is and tailor the program. That’s part of Green Pages.
- *Future commander.* This is the one who will get the Soldier. Can the commander tell us what the Soldier needs to be trained in so we can use that to tailor the program?
- *Soldier.* What is that person’s passion? Where does the Soldier see his or her own strengths and weaknesses? That has to figure largely in the program.

Van Antwerp thanked BG Watson and commented that one thing the Commandant mentioned was passion. “Green Pages isn’t just sticking you in a hole because on paper it looks like you fit,” he said. “There’s also that other piece. Because what does passion do to your talent? It energizes it.”

“Okay,” he said, “that’s disciplined thought going into the School. Let me tell you a little bit about disciplined thought in USACE. First, how do we eliminate the backlog of maintenance or repair? That’s a big deal for us. One of the other things to be thinking about is that we hired 8,213 people last year from outside the Corps. I’m so proud that we’re building the Corps to last. About 3,000 of those new people came pretty much out of college or what we would call “early entry.” And we got a lot of journey people. It takes a lot of disciplined thought on how to bring new people in. Just like a unit commander: How do you bring new troops into the unit when you have a busload of people coming out of advanced individual training (AIT)? They get shipped to your unit during reset, and you don’t have your NCOs yet—How do you do it? How do you bring them into your culture?”

Van Antwerp remarked that one of the unique things we’re finding is that the new people set up their own classes—in a way. “And I would say the same thing

happens in the troop unit,” he added. “When you get a busload of troops, they identify with each other. They’re all in the same boat. There’s some teamwork there that I think is good. Before, they might have been isolated—single replacements coming in, and they’re in their barracks room, and they don’t fit. Now they fit, because there’s another 50 just like them right there. But how do you bring those 50 people in? That takes disciplined thought.”

He said that the last thing he wanted to talk about was *disciplined action*. “*Disciplined action* means how do you execute a \$45-billion program? How do you, on the tactical side, get your units ready so that you can do the mission you’ve been given? That’s where leaders come in—you have to know what your plan is and then how to execute that plan.”

“Everybody needs somebody to come alongside them,” he said. “We know in the Corps that each of these 8,200-plus new people has a sponsor, everyone is being brought online, and the way we’re growing our force is that we’re getting them out to get experience. And when they’re on a job site to watch work being performed—such as a lock repair—it becomes a classroom. If we think like that, we’ll have this force long into the future.”

“Thank you very much,” he said in closing. “This has been a privilege—a ‘get-to’—for me. I love being with this Regiment—this tribe—as BG Watson calls it. And we need to continue to grow the tribe. The country needs 160,000 engineers to graduate from our universities and come to work in our industries and with *us*. Last year, we graduated 75,000. So the challenge is there: We need great

engineers. But the *Building Great Engineers* campaign is not just for us—this is for America!”



Ms. Bridges, managing editor of the Engineer Professional Bulletin, has been a member of the bulletin staff for almost 16 years. A former recipient of the Secretary of the Army’s Editor of the Year Award, she holds a bachelor’s from Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri.

Endnotes

¹Jim C. Collins, *Good to Great*, Harper Business: New York, 2001, p.12.

²Collins, pp. 90–119.

³A personnel tool designed to display an individual’s talents, experience, and most desired assignments beyond current capabilities. Rather than contracting this initiative, Army Knowledge Online (AKO) is improving the “My Profile” section, which will become the foundation of the Green Pages. Supplied with this additional data, the Human Resources Command will be better informed in selecting the most qualified individuals for available positions or for consultation or reachback support.

⁴An employee directory originally designed to replace IBM’s telephone directory. It is now used to find the right people to get a job done. <http://www.intranetjournal.com/articles/200209/pij_09_25_02a.html>, accessed 14 August 2010.

⁵Collins.