



Guest Editorial: Duct tape, cardboard, and humility

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Earlier this month featured a good week at the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle.

Students from across the globe arrived at the college, processed through the administration requirements of the installation, and received a bevy of orientation briefings for the community. Along the way, there were icebreaker gatherings for the newly formed cohorts and a county fair to learn about the myriad activities available inside and outside the gate for the greater Carlisle community.

The convocation introduced the students to the Army War College leadership and faculty as well as their own class leadership for the American students and International Fellows for the year. The convocation included the installation of a senior noncommissioned officer as the Command Sergeant Major of the Army War College.

The solemn nature of the entire ceremony demonstrated the commitment to education, service above self and membership in the profession of arms. This was especially relevant because of the more-than-a-decade length of conflict for our service members

Over the course of the week, time spent in the new seminars provided insights of the diverse backgrounds, experience, talents and expertise of colleagues. Each student realized that the great challenges and opportunities ahead in the coming months in the curriculum would extend beyond mere academics to include personal and professional growth.

A welcoming picnic was held Friday evening for the student body and their families along with War College faculty and staff. It was a time to share experiences of the week with others in the community. The capstone activity was the "Boatyard Wars."

While a light-hearted and silly endeavor, this was the first competitive event among the newly formed seminars. Their task was to construct a floating vessel using predominately cardboard and duct tape that could be propelled the length of the pool. Each vessel would hold two seminar members who would race down the pool lanes. The two teams with the best time competed for the title of Boatyard Wars Champion.

http://cumberlink.com/news/opinion/columnists/guest/guest-editorial-duct-tape-cardboard-and-humility/article_719af3ee-0b44-11e3-916e-001a4bcf887a.html

Imagine the scene with 24 groups of highly successful and competitive individuals. Each group had its initial bonding and started to establish its unique identity. Members of the group had to agree upon the design of the vessel and then translate the plans into an actual product. Someone had to lead or share leadership of the effort. Others had to determine how to best contribute.

Still, some students had to govern themselves against their natural tendencies. All had to understand and accept the goal and then become part of the team to achieve it.

As one looked across the seminars during the construction phase, there were signs of intensity and earnestness, joviality and high spirits, and, in some cases, anxiety. All wanted to do well! The moment of truth arrived when each team placed their vessel in the pool for their respective heats.

There were cheers and shouts of support from all around. With arms flailing and water splashing about, some boats made it to the finish while several sank.

In many of the race heats, the efforts of highly intelligent and talented people who forged into committed teams failed to accomplish a fairly simple task. Those with vessels which sank were embarrassed and slightly dejected. Those who were still in the hunt were energized.

In an earlier year, after results of the championship heat I heard one student make the remark. "It wasn't about the product and the result. It was really about the process." That student got it. It was really an opportunity to quickly build a team (not a boat), to handle ambiguity, to face a challenge, and to strive for a goal while maintaining fellowship with colleagues from other teams.

Throughout the year, we at the Army War College will study people and groups who have faced tough circumstances, and, despite their talents and best efforts, were not successful in resolving some very critical strategic problems. Sometimes short-term success was just not in the cards for those best-laid plans.

For our students and faculty, the lesson to be learned may be from Rudyard Kipling's poem, "If," — "If you can meet with triumph and disaster, And treat those two impostors just the same..."

The lesson is humility.

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