

BEST PRACTICE ARTICLES

Broaden Where You're Planted: The Necessity of Broadening for Leader Development and Effectiveness

Christopher Dickey, DMin, MDiv, ThM, BA^a

¹ United States Special Operations Command

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In the late 19th century, Eliza Scidmore discovered the beauty of the Japanese flowering cherry tree. Her interesting story of vision and perseverance to bring this beauty to Washington D.C. is analogous to the opportunity for growth and broadening facing military leaders, specifically Army chaplains today. This article introduces and defines the concept of broadening in the Army, describes the importance of broadening, and casts a vision for the key stakeholders of the Army Chaplain Corps to approach the developmental broadening opportunities facing Army chaplains today. It emphasizes the need for a broadening mindset among chaplains, encouraging them to view every assignment as a chance for growth, irrespective of its classification as a broadening assignment. Key stakeholders, including chaplains, the Office of the Army Chief of Chaplains Personnel Division, and operational leaders, are urged to foster an environment where continuous learning and engagement are paramount.

Eliza Scidmore is a name that few Americans would recognize outside of trivia enthusiasts. Despite her relative anonymity, since March of 1912, hundreds of thousands of Americans and visitors from around the world benefit from her work and efforts every spring.

Eliza Scidmore was a prominent travel photographer and journalist who became the first woman board member of the National Geographic Society in 1880.¹ While on a visit to Japan in 1885, Eliza developed, “a great appreciation for the Japanese people, culture, and the beauty of the Japanese flowering cherry trees.”² This visit sparked a dream for Eliza Scidmore and upon her return to Washington, DC she began promoting her idea of planting the Japanese flowering cherry trees in Potomac Park on land recently

^a **Chaplain (Colonel) Christopher Dickey** serves as the Command Chaplain for U.S. Special Operations Command. Chris has served as an Army Chaplain since 1999, and is a graduate of East Texas Baptist University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College and the U.S. Army War College where he studied as a Fellow at the University of Notre Dame. He is most proud of his best friend and wife of thirty years, his two children, and their chocolate lab.

¹ “The Woman Who Planted the Cherry Trees on the National Mall,” <https://nationalmall.org/content/the-women-who-planted-the-cherry-trees-on-the-national-mall-1>.

² “Eliza Scidmore’s Faithful Pursuit of a Dream,” <https://www.nps.gov/articles/scidmore.htm>.

reclaimed from the Potomac River. As she later wrote, “since they had to plant something in that great stretch of raw, reclaimed ground by the river bank, since they had to hide those old dump heaps with something, they might as well plant the most beautiful thing in the world—the Japanese cherry tree.”³ Millions of people have benefitted from her undying passion and persistence to bring something beautiful from far away, close to home.

Consider the environment that Eliza Scidmore witnessed in the nation’s capital in the late nineteenth century. Before her and her fellow leaders and citizens was a stretch of barren, reclaimed land on the banks of the Potomac. Eliza met this opportunity with a vision for what it could become. This interesting story of opportunity, pursuit, and beautiful growth is analogous to the opportunity for broadening facing Army leaders, specifically Army chaplains today. This article will introduce and define the concept of broadening in the Army, describe the importance of broadening, and introduce a vision for the key stakeholders of the Army Chaplain Corps to approach the developmental broadening opportunities Army chaplains possess to enable them to lead and to serve effectively throughout their careers of service to God and country.

Because people are the Army’s greatest strength, the Army has enacted several people-centered initiatives and programs in order to sustain, develop and manage its most valuable asset.⁴ At the center of this cultural transformation is a new talent management-focused assignment strategy for aligning and developing officers according to their preferences and their unique Knowledge, Skills, and Behaviors (KSBs).⁵

In real estate, the operative word-phrase is “location, location, location.” For leader development and talent management, the critical concept is “broadening, broadening, broadening.”⁶ What is broadening and why is it foundational to the development of Army leaders? Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3 states that “officers should view the concept of broadening

3 Ibid.

4 “Prioritizing our Most Valuable Asset,” <https://www.army.mil/peoplefirst/?from=features>.

5 “Army Talent Alignment Process,” <https://www.army.mil/standto/archive/2019/10/16/>.

6 Retired Army Strategist Lieutenant Colonel Jason W. Warren’s outstanding article, “The Centurion Mindset and the Army’s Strategic Leader Paradigm” highlights this key point writing that “officers broadly educated can better inform strategic discourse, having had their intellectual abilities expanded to think deeply and widely about complex issues.” Warren’s foundational argument is that the Army must break its paradigm of simply promoting tactical prowess and must strive to broaden its officers through challenging civilian educational programs and through broadening experiential assignments. See Jason W. Warren, “The Centurion Mindset and the Army’s Strategic Leader Paradigm,” <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol45/iss3/5/>. This note is cited from the author’s Army War College research project, Christopher E. Dickey, “Miracle Grow: Forming a Strategy for Chaplain Leader Development,” U.S. Army War College Fellows Strategy Research Project, February 2, 2022, 57.

as a purposeful expansion of a leader's KSBs provided through opportunities internal and external to the Army."⁷ The two key aspects of this definition are "purposeful expansion" and "opportunities."

For the Army leader, broadening begins not with an assignment, but a mindset. Leaders should begin each assignment with a hunger to learn and develop. What can I learn in and from this assignment? How can I challenge and stretch myself so that I can grow in knowledge and skills? Is there a hard project I can volunteer for? Is there a challenging course that I can prepare for and complete? These and similar questions undergird a purposeful, intentional expansion mindset that is the hallmark of broadening.

Broadening generates from a purposeful mindset to expand one's knowledge and skills, and it is "accomplished throughout an officer's career through experiences or education in different organizational cultures and environments."⁸ A broadening mindset prepares a leader to look for and take advantage of both experiential and educational "opportunities" regardless of where he or she may be assigned. Army leaders would benefit from a divorce of the word "broadening" from its corollary word, "assignment." Why is this separation important? Army leaders must understand that leaders can and should not only "bloom where they're planted," but also "broaden where they're planted." Broadening, therefore, is not only for the select few who are assigned to designated "broadening assignments," but is possible for every Army leader wherever they may be assigned.

An oft-quoted axiom is that "leaders are readers," which is certainly true. A similar more encompassing truth is that "leaders are learners," which captures the broadening mindset of effective leaders introduced above. The environments in which Army leaders practice their leadership demand that they "commit to a lifetime of professional and personal growth to stay at the cutting edge of their profession. They must keep pace with changing operational requirements within their area of expertise. Each officer is responsible for their self-development."⁹

In addition to the institutional and operational domains of learning, the self-development domain lies at the very center of leader development and drives each Army leader to learn, grow, and succeed no matter where they may be assigned. I remember a period in my career in which the unit to which I was assigned had faced several deaths caused by a variety of means from combat to an accident. During this period, as an Army chaplain, I routinely found ministry opportunities amongst my soldiers and family members who were

⁷ Department of the Army, Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3, *Officer Talent Management*, (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2023), 22.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

grieving. Although death and grief were subjects with which I was familiar and had studied, I found myself desiring to learn more and to grow as a spiritual leader and caregiver during this time. I invested time to read articles, consult books and other resources, and later even researched a grief recovery course to learn and grow because soldiers and their families deserved the very best religious support.

Now that the “What” of broadening has been introduced, the question, “Why is broadening important?” is paramount. Some argue against the need for designated broadening assignments based primarily on a perceived mandate to serve in only tactical and operational assignments to remain competitive for promotions and Centralized Selection List opportunities. Few would argue against the need for Army leaders to be developed at every opportunity.

Major Aaron Berg succinctly captures the value and importance of broadening Army leaders in his excellent article, “Importance of Broadening Assignments: Developing the Strategic Minds of 2035.” Berg writes:

As highlighted in the 2018 National Defense Strategy, we should expect disruptive changes in the character and conduct of warfare through 2035. We are in the throes of “Great Power Competition” with China and Russia. We face continued irregular warfare challenges, complicated by regional instability in several places around the world; the rise of the information age, cyber-attacks, and disinformation; a looming climate crisis threatening greater global insecurity; and a growing threat of domestic terrorism. These challenges and threats introduce policy implications that extend to stakeholders across the defense, intelligence, inter-agency, and geopolitical realms. Protecting our vital national interests in 2035 and beyond requires unprecedented global integration and a whole of government approach. . . . With such stark threats and changes abounding, the Army Strategy and The Joint Chiefs of Staff have prioritized critical and creative thinking and continuous learning as areas of essential focus to win in 2035 and beyond. Broadening assignments provide an essential platform to achieve these goals. These assignments prepare officers to lead in complex environments through intellectual rigor, improving diversity of thought and perspective, and building critical and creative thinking skills.¹⁰

¹⁰ Major Aaron Berg, “Assignments: Developing the Strategic Minds of 2035,” *The Medical Leader*, November 12, 2020.

Berg clearly identifies the demands of the current, complex geo-political environment that Army leaders and leaders across the joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational organizations and sectors must be prepared to face to win. Leaders who possess a broadening mindset and who are driven to not only pursue broadening assignments, but to pursue broadening experience wherever they may be assigned are challenged to think critically and creatively which creates the capability to face the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) problems of today and tomorrow.¹¹ Winning today and tomorrow demands leaders who are intentionally and continually striving to learn, grow and achieve. Leaders must be learners.

The final objective of this article is to apply the foundational understanding of broadening and its necessity to the Army Chaplain Corps. Before an application can be offered for the Chaplain Corps, it is important to introduce three key characteristics which describe in part the current Chaplain Corps climate as it relates to broadening. First, a Chaplain Corps-wide understanding of broadening and by relation broadening assignments does not currently exist. The Army Chaplain Corps recently released its “Slating Philosophy” which communicates that chaplains should “seek broadening assignments aligned with gifting, calling, and future career goals,” and “should also seek to serve in various MACOMs [Major Commands] and locations so that they are well-rounded and prepared to serve wherever needed at future ranks.”¹² This Chaplain Corps personnel assignment policy for each chaplain rank aligns with the Army vision of broadening as a purposeful expansion of a leader’s knowledge, skill, and behaviors through various opportunities for growth introduced above.¹³ This clear and perhaps unprecedented communication from Army Office of the Chief of Chaplains Personnel Division (DACH-PER) reinforces the central tenet of this article and portrays the need for chaplains of all ranks to pursue growth as they strive to fulfill their sacred calling.

Building upon the lack of a foundational understanding of what broadening is and why it’s important, a second characteristic is an ignorance of what assignments in the Army Chaplain Corps are characterized as “broadening assignments” to which Army chaplains may be assigned.¹⁴ The “(DRAFT)

11 Bill George, “VUCA 2.0: A Strategy For Steady Leadership In An Unsteady World,” <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hbsworkingknowledge/2017/02/17/vuca-2.0-a-strategy-for-steady-leadership-in-an-unsteady-world/?sh=4ba56f8013d8>. In this short, but substantive article, George argues that today’s VUCA world requires a “VUCA 2.0” response (Vision, Understanding, Courage, and Agility) of its leaders.

12 DACH-PER Slating Philosophy (DRAFT), January 2025.

13 Although U.S. Army Chaplain Corps policy and doctrine as found in Army Regulation 165-1 and Army Field Manual 1-05 do not define nor describe broadening in the Chaplain Corps, the Office of the Chief of Chaplains Personnel Division (DACH-PER) recently published the “(DRAFT) DACH-PER Slating Philosophy” which communicates a transparent assignment slating philosophy for the Army Chaplain Corps.

14 While the Army Chaplain Corps does not have many assignments specifically designated as “broadening assignments,” it does have many positions serving in special operations. One of the most effective ways of broadening high-potential Army chaplains, if they are willing to volunteer for Airborne training, is to assign them to serve in a special operations forces (SOF) assignment. “Special operations assignments

DACH-PER Slating Philosophy” addresses this ignorance listing “Broadening Opportunities” for captains, “Developmental/Broadening Assignments” for majors, and “Developmental and Broadening Opportunities” for lieutenant colonels and colonels. The “Slating Philosophy” however lacks clarity in defining captain “Broadening Opportunities” describing them first as “assignments within TDA organizations, usually non-deployable,” and later in the same paragraph stating, “Chaplains should also seek to serve in various MACOMs and locations so that they are well-rounded.”¹⁵ Whereas the former sentence too narrowly describes broadening assignment opportunities as essentially only being non-operational and non-deployable, the latter sentence gets it right. “Broadening” should be divorced from its normal object “assignments.” Growth and broadening opportunities abound in any assignment across all the MACOMs and in every environment: garrison, institutional, and operational.

Because Army Chaplains have a limited awareness and understanding of broadening assignments across the Chaplain Corps inventory, a third characteristic is that many if not most Army chaplains see broadening as something that only leaders in other branches experience. There are several broadening opportunities and other “branch immaterial” jobs that exist for Army competitive category officers that afford opportunities for growth outside of the standard career progression. Newly commissioned officers can even volunteer for a branch detail which affords the opportunity to attend a Basic Officer Leadership Course and serve in a foundational leadership position in a separate branch than their primary branch. These broadening opportunities simply do not exist for Army chaplains. The recently published DACH-PER guidance is an important step. But chaplains need to consider broadening more than once a year when recommended broadening assignments have to be placed in Officer Evaluation Reports.

How can the Chaplain Corps deepen its understanding of broadening to inform and inspire growth in its most valuable resource: its people? At least three stakeholders should be considered to address this question: Army chaplains, specifically active-duty Army chaplains for this writing, DACH-PER, and leaders across the operational domain.¹⁶

broaden Chaplains and other Army leaders by creating opportunities for leaders to face complex problems and environments which force agile thinking and problem solving to accomplish the mission.” From Dickey, “Miracle Grow,” 69. In addition to the “(DRAFT) DACH-PER Slating Philosophy,” See also an outdated 2019 DACH-PER resource “Chaplain Corps Operational and Broadening Assignments by Rank.”

¹⁵ Ibid., 9.

¹⁶ Although the scope of this article limits the discussion to Regular Army chaplains, the principles introduced in this article and its central argument are also applicable to chaplains serving in the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve. Army National Guard chaplains can benefit from participating in the many educational and operational support activities as part of the Army National Guard State Partnership Program. See National Guard Bureau Website, <https://www.nationalguard.mil/Leadership/Joint-Staff/J-5/International-Affairs-Division/State-Partnership-Program/>.

Army chaplains “care for the spiritual, moral, and emotional wellbeing of the Army—and make it stronger from the inside out.”¹⁷ In fulfilling this sacred calling to care for the souls of its soldiers, families, and civilians, chaplains are assigned to a myriad of different units and organizations from the tactical to the strategic level. Army chaplains must embrace every assignment as a broadening opportunity with a wealth of broadening experience to be gained, regardless of where they are assigned.

If broadening could be calculated, its mathematical formula would be:

$$| \quad \textit{Exposure} \times \textit{Engagement with Leaders} \times \textit{Education} = \textit{Broadening}$$

Exposure means everything from the organic mission of the particular unit of assignment to organizations the unit may partner with and serve alongside from the joint services and from Components 2 and 3, and everything in between.¹⁸ From an airborne infantry battalion to a sustainment brigade to an armored division, and to a principal staff position on the Office of the Chief of Chaplains staff in the Pentagon, every assignment exposes Army chaplains to opportunities for growth.

Every assignment also affords chaplains access to exceptional leaders with a variety of experiences. Consider the wealth of experience that a chaplain beginning his or her service as a Battalion chaplain has access to today. Chances are that new chaplain's Battalion Command Sergeant Major has at least three or four combat deployments and more than two decades in uniform.¹⁹ The opportunities for learning and growth are endless. But chaplains must demonstrate initiative to engage with leaders fostering opportunities to be taught, coached and mentored.²⁰

Exposure, intentional engagement with leaders, and finally, education. What educational opportunities exist to enable the chaplain to better understand and build relationships with the people he or she is called to serve? Opportunities abound from learning how to draw blood and save a teammate's life to learning how to identify and address moral injury and save a teammate from ending their own life. Whether through face-to-face or

¹⁷ U.S. Army Recruiting Website, <https://www.goarmy.com/chaplain.html>.

¹⁸ As part of large and smaller scale training rotations and events, Army chaplains have opportunities to interact with and be broadened by partners from the Army National Guard, Army Reserve, the Joint Services, and international partners. “The Army Modernization Strategy (AMS) describes how the Total Army — Regular Army, National Guard, Army Reserve, and Army Civilians — will transform into a multi-domain force by 2035, meet its enduring responsibility as part of the Joint Force to provide for the defense of the United States, and retain its position as the globally dominant land power.” See <https://www.army.mil/about/>.

¹⁹ I recall spending hours riding with my battalion command sergeant major in his Humvee at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Germany. He shared stories and offered counsel as we traversed the terrain visiting our soldiers. I remain thankful for his invitation to share the journey with him and for his intentionality to invest in me.

²⁰ This foundational understanding and mindset cannot simply be left to chance and individual initiative. I recommend incorporating this into the Chaplain Basic Officer Leader Course (CHBOLC) Program of Instruction. As a former CHBOLC Instructor and Small Group Leader, the author recognizes the need for a block of instruction on self-development to prepare soon-to-be Army chaplains. In addition to the Religious Leader Academy, the Army Chaplain Corps Graduate School is also key in the career-long education and professional development of Army chaplains.

through distributed and distance learning, the opportunities for “purposeful expansion of a Chaplain-leader’s KSBs are truly endless.”²¹ Driven by a passion for God and a compassion to care for those who have been entrusted to them, chaplains must “strive to learn, read, study, observe, and seek out knowledge and skills required as they serve God and country.”²² Chaplains can and should broaden in place wherever they are planted.

DACH-PER also plays an important role in the development and broadening of chaplains. DACH-PER leads the talent management efforts for the Army Chaplain Corps. Talent management is “about the expansion of skills and development and utilization of leadership capabilities and not simply the logistics of moving officers around every two to three years. [Talent Management] is vital to the mission of developing effective religious leaders.”²³ Inherent in talent management is talent identification. Senior chaplains, leaders across the Army, and the self-assessments and preferences of individual chaplains are all important components of identifying and maximizing talent.²⁴ As DACH-PER assesses chaplains and executes talent management, it should strive to activate the emerging potential in its chaplains by assigning them to units and organizations that will broaden their experience and prepare them for current and future success. The effectiveness and success of each chaplain means a stronger and more resilient Army ready to face a complex and uncertain future.

Leaders across the force are also important stakeholders for the broadening of Army chaplains. Leaders must also fulfill their integral leader development responsibilities and intentionally seek to coach and mentor their subordinate chaplains, expanding their knowledge, skills and behaviors. Leaders exposing chaplains to new information and experiences early and often in their careers supports the “growth of adaptable, critically minded leaders who are better suited for the modern era.”²⁵

In the late nineteenth century, Eliza Scidmore saw the opportunity that the barren, yet fertile ground of the Potomac basin presented, and today millions continue to benefit from her vision for what it could become. After initially defining broadening and describing its critical role in preparing leaders to face a dynamic, VUCA environment, this article applied this foundational

21 DA Pamphlet 600-3, 22. The centrality and importance of self-development for chaplains individually and for the Chaplain Corps collectively is a central theme of the author’s Army War College Fellowship at the University of Notre Dame, See Dickey, “Miracle Grow.” See also Patrick Lowthian, “The Chaplain Corps in 2025 and Beyond,” (Fort Jackson, SC: U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School, Capabilities Development Integration Directorate, 2016), 1.

22 Dickey, “Miracle Grow,” 21.

23 Dickey, “Miracle Grow,” 24.

24 The continual challenge facing the leaders of DACH-PER is the daunting task of balancing the competing priorities of filling slots (career management) and forging growth (talent management) in its chaplains. The tyranny of filling slots most often wins. DACH-PER must create and utilize a long-term system of talent identification built upon knowledge management that outlives the two-year cycle of its Career Managers. Until this occurs, long-term Chaplain talent management will not be achievable.

25 Dusty Eggleston, “New Approach Needed to Educate Junior Leaders,” *Army Magazine*, May 2017, 15.

understanding to the Army Chaplain Corps and its key stakeholders. May the Army Chaplain Corps catch the vision to maximize every opportunity for broadening experience and live lives “worthy of the calling they have received,” and may the exceptional soldiers, families, and civilians benefit every day from the growth and beauty of each member of the Chaplain Corps’ service for God and country.²⁶

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²⁶ Paraphrased from Ephesians 4:1, *NIV*.