

Soldier Takes Hard Look at Self, Impact of Diversity

By Sergeant Major Greg Jenkins

I had been in the Army for over 20 years and had recently returned from Iraq when I got the news that I was going to attend something called equal opportunity training at a place referred to as the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI). I could not even pronounce the acronym DEOMI; much less understand why I was being sent to learn about an Army program that I had thought was designed exclusively for women and minorities. Needless to say, my initial reaction was one of disbelief. I could almost see myself kicking and screaming as I was being led to the front door of this place called DEOMI, but that's not what happened at all. For me what transpired was nothing less than an awakening of monumental proportions, a transformation of self.

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I can't exactly remember the first time I realized that the Army did in fact have an Equal Opportunity (EO) Program. However, I do remember having the perception that EO was something that white males like me didn't seem to be concerned with. I thought the EO Program was something for other people, some kind of program for those different from me, but not me. Again, nothing could have been further from reality. My journey of transformation beginning at DEOMI was something that initially I was not prepared for, but it became something of which I grew to embrace more and more with each passing day. My perceptions of self were being examined, and I felt uncomfortable

and unsure as I began to see things from different perspectives and from different people. As this training went on the first perception I had to examine about me, was me as a leader, a perception that I held on to with great strength.

I had always thought of myself as a good leader. I had numerous awards and annual reviews which spoke of my excellent leadership abilities. I had been given the opportunity to serve in many of the enlisted leadership position the Army has to offer; from team leader to squad leader to drill sergeant to platoon ser-

geant to first sergeant and many other positions that would all enhance the career of any enlisted Soldier. And to top it all off I had the most important verification of all, I had the approval of my Soldiers, peers and superiors. I felt good about all of that until I was asked, “What did the Soldiers, peers and superiors look like that told you, you were a good leader?” The answer to that specific question, as difficult as it was for me to accept was that they all looked like me. It was then that I had to reevaluate my perception of me and my own leadership. I had been a leader to all kinds of people; women, African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, and the list goes on and on. We’re a very diverse force representing the most diverse nation on earth, yet I had never been told by anyone other than a white male how good I was as a leader...and why was that?

That question and the many others like it made me have to look inside and answer some tough questions about me. Am I racist? Am I sexist? Do I really discriminate against other people different from me? Had I used my power and positions to treat all people not equally? Did I blindly go about my daily business as a leader without fully understanding the conditions of all of my Soldiers? Painfully, the answers to all of those questions were yes! Did I have the ability to lead well? Yes I did, and still do! But was I aware of my own stereotypes and biases? Was I aware of the people around me, different from me? Did I really understand the trials and tribulations of those people different than me? Sadly, the answers to those questions were no...

A transformation of self had begun; a transformation that enlightened and educated me about myself and others. I am now on my way to becoming a new leader, a leader who had to come to grips with my own self, a leader who now has to make the best efforts to learn more about self and others. We live in a diverse nation within a shrinking diverse world where leaders will be required to understand self and others in ways like never before. A transformation of self just may be the requirement new leaders need to be successful in our ever changing world.

Author Bio

Sergeant Major Greg Jenkins is a team member with the Army Diversity Office. During his twenty-eight year Army career assignments and missions include those in Missouri, Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, California, Washington DC, Germany, South Korea and Iraq. He has served as a Squad leader, Platoon Sergeant, Drill Sergeant, Service School Instructor, Operations Sergeant and First Sergeant. At this time, Sergeant Major Jenkins is finishing his final classes for a MA in Human Resources Development from Webster University, and continues to develop and expand his passion for diversity and inclusion.

