

The Red, Squiggly Line

Improving Intelligence Training

by Staff, MARDET Dam Neck, Marine Corps Intelligence Schools

Innovation has become a popular concept over the last few years. On the surface, this concept can be difficult to grasp. As explained by the September 2016 *Gazette* article “Marine Corps Innovation: It’s Simple. It’s About Leadership,”¹ however, innovation is not so much about advancement as it is about creating an environment for Marines to embrace change and share their modernization concepts with one-another. At MARDET Dam Neck (Marine Detachment Dam Neck), we have focused energies not on creating or using innovative concepts but on arming Marine intelligence professionals with an understanding for *how* today’s innovative technologies actually work. In other words, we know that today’s Marines know how to right click their mouse on the red, squiggly line and select an item from the suggested correct spelling list. Our goal, however, is to ensure that students understand how to use a dictionary and how the program arrived at its recommended spelling. If intelligence Marines know how modern technologies work, they can achieve a relationship with the data being input. Understanding data is much more than gather, filter, and record, and we aim to teach the basis of gather, filter, and record, arming students with an understanding of basic processes so that they are able to embrace innovation in an operating environment that promotes doing so.

Technological advancements, especially in the last 10 to 15 years, have sought to simplify life. Some, however, believe that today’s youth are now lacking interpersonal skills. Moreover, social media has removed the need for in-person interaction, creating online

environments where individuals can converse without having any personal involvement with one another. We have nurtured an entire generation whose over reliance on the red, squiggly line is their critical vulnerability—a generation who lacks social skills due to an absence of interpersonal communication. This generation is more commonly known as the millennial. Creating a training program to reach the millennial learner is the most critical issue facing entry-level military schools.

We would be remiss, however, by not mentioning that we teach an older generation as well, one whose learning style differs in such a way that they lean toward non-automated work styles that ignore technological advancements. With the high rate of continuous data flow on the 21st century battlefield, under reliance on technological advancements is just as detrimental to battlefield success as over reliance.

MARDET Dam Neck is faced with a multi-faceted challenge in developing curriculum that breaches the generational divide, one that brings the older generation into the technological age without losing the attention of our technologically-driven youth.

The most recent program of instruction for entry-level intelligence students focuses on having them conduct detailed practical application and execution. Marines spend nearly 70 percent of their time engaged in practical application and evaluation with as little as 5 percent devoted to formal lecture. In order to gain and maintain attention, instructors tap into the cognitive domain with auditory and visual aids. The focus, however, is on those kinesthetic learners, those who learn by doing. This

focus has yielded the highest success rate for our program, seeing the academic attrition rates plummet from nearly 30 percent to less than 15 percent in the past year alone.

Previously, instructors attempted to introduce advanced-level concepts, such as structured analytical techniques and intelligence support to specific MAGTF elements, in the classroom. What we found, however, is that without organizational experience and prior knowledge to lean on, these concepts were too advanced for students to understand. Students rarely retained information without understanding how the application worked. MISEC 4.0 (MAGTF Intelligence Specialist Entry-level Course, Version 4) teaches basic concepts of filter, record, and research based on the *Training and Readiness Manual* 1000-level events and the 4-steps of *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlespace*. Structured analytic techniques and support to specific MAGTF elements were removed from the program of instruction to align with this basic concept and structure. MISEC is producing a basically-trained 0231 Intelligence Specialist and placing the burden of education on the fleet chiefs and follow-on schools to teach advanced concepts. By tailoring the program of instruction, we have freed up weeks within the curriculum. Now, instructors can teach and develop curricula that forces students to use both automated and non-automated tools to complete the practical applications, blending academic and vocational training.

Despite blending the two learning styles, MISEC continues to place heavy emphasis on utilizing technology to conduct production and analytic tasks.

With the time gained through tailoring curricula, instructors are now able to implement technology appreciation practical applications, where students are taught and trained to perform analytic tasks utilizing non-automated techniques before being given the same task using analytic systems and programs of record. Although there is a need to maintain manual skill sets, it is important that students leave MISEC understanding that the information flow from and to the battle/cyberspace of the 21st century is fast and continuous. In order to keep up with the demands of tomorrow's data, it is necessary to know and become intimately familiar with multiple programs of record and databases.

The MCISRE's Best of the Best: Intelligence Instructors

Instructors are not only going through the Marine Corps-approved adult learning methods taught in the Curriculum Development Course. Rather, they are expanding beyond PowerPoint-centric lectures, incorporating a variety of guest speakers, hands-on application, site visits to related support facilities, and blended learning techniques in the classroom. Furthermore, instructors bring in guests to receive brief-backs, ensuring that students get feedback from a variety of different senior officers from varying backgrounds/Services.

Instructors are relating material through experience. Providing examples, especially when dealing with entry-level students, structures the lesson, presenting it in a way that is both applicable and understandable. Case studies are employed to provide context to the formulation of doctrinal concepts. Multi-media support is utilized but kept to short clips in order to maintain attention. With senior classes, instructors use the Socratic method to keep students mentally engaged in the learning process.

During classroom instruction, we strive to provide course content in a dynamic manner that incorporates the instructor's experience and allows the student to ask themselves how they would respond in hypothetical situa-

tions. Our instruction goes above and beyond what occurs in the classroom, and the majority of learning occurs during practical application in our scenario-based training. Here, students are allowed to "choose their own adventure," so to speak. Because there is very little about the practice of intelligence that is a one-size fits all answer, we encourage students to adopt a free-thinking approach to problem solving. Student attention span and skills retention are greatest when the student is allowed to apply the concepts they are taught, can see the results of their efforts, and learn from successes or failures in a controlled environment.

Instructors at MISEC are always looking for new and innovative ways to get experiential training for students. This is primarily accomplished through field trips to active units, such as SIOC's (Signals Intelligence Officer Course) trips to 2d Radio Battalion; AIOC's (Air Intelligence Officer Course) trips to Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point ordnance and squadron operations; or SIOC radio training at MCSF. Additionally, the focus of much training has shifted from a pure Operation ENDURING FREEDOM/IRAQI FREEDOM mentality back to a MAGTF/MEU support mentality because of the changing nature of USMC employment.

Our cadre is always working to improve the training provided to our students. We have a vested interest in training the best intelligence professionals in the world as our students will one day be our team members, subordinates, or leaders. In that spirit, our cadre has a strict, no-nonsense approach to training and realism, constantly evaluating our practices for their benefit to the student. We have made significant improvements to our scenario to better incorporate multiple functions of intelligence support to operations in order to provide the best possible support to our end user. While our traditional mission has been tactical in nature, we are increasingly focused on preparing our students for the operational and strategic mission as we go forward.

Instruction remains grounded in the basics, as it must be due to the training and readiness manual. All courses

utilize the classic "crawl, walk, run" concept, with instructors presenting material, demonstrating key concepts, and then evaluating students through testing via practical application. Instructors continue to relate key concepts back to support of real-world operations and the ultimate goal of intelligence: reduce uncertainty and aid in decision making.

Training is always our number one priority. We are committed to providing the highest quality intelligence professionals the DOD has to offer. Our instructors give each student every opportunity to master the concepts of the course. They routinely invest their time and energy in order to ensure every student's best chance at success. Our course directors bring in representatives from Palantir, Joint Improvised-Threat Defeat Agency, National Reconnaissance Office, National Geo-Spatial Intelligence Agency, and other organizations who demonstrate software applications that are of use to the modern intelligence professional. Whether leveraging a SharePoint site to provide reach-back for students once they are in the fleet or video teleconferencing to gain access to a greater number of guest speakers who would otherwise be unavailable, technology is one of our greatest advantages, but it is also one of our greatest hurdles.

In a world of status "likes" and 140 character tweets, our youngest generations are increasingly more connected to computers and less inclined to direct personal connection with the world around them. We teach excellence in the basics, and our students are educated on the myriad opportunities to integrate technology into their operations alongside the caution that technology has increasingly become a double-edged sword. After all, that the red, squiggly line can be both your friend and your enemy.

Note

1. BGen Dave Reist, USMC(Ret) and Capt Chris Wood, "Marine Corps Innovation: It's Simple. It's About Leadership," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: September 2016).

