



Company Command

Building Combat-Ready Teams



To: Company Commanders and Platoon Leaders
From: Company Commanders and Platoon Leaders

Leading in the Age of Facebook

Eight years ago, Facebook did not exist. Today it has more than 600 million users worldwide and grows by a million more each week. Its wide net—who among us is *not* on Facebook?—and its egalitarian structure—anyone we connect with is a “friend”—create real challenges for those of us who have a duty to know our Soldiers yet also to maintain a professional distance from them. Should we become “Facebook friends” with our Soldiers? If so, how can we manage that relationship without undermining our team’s military effectiveness? If not, what are the second- and third-order effects? Should we create and maintain a unit Facebook page?

What are the benefits and risks, and how can we maximize the former and mitigate the latter? It’s not an overstatement to say that Facebook represents a revolution in communications affairs, and it’s one that each of us must deal with. Whereas most of the challenges of leading Soldiers and building combat-effective units are timeless, and thus we can learn from those who have gone before us, the challenges of Facebook and other contemporary social media are genuinely new. We really need to come together and learn from each other quickly on this topic. We invite you to read, think about and join the conversation.

Michael Stanski

Det 1, B/1-111th GSAB

I do not “friend” my Soldiers on Facebook, but if they want to friend me, I let them. As officers, we are expected to set the example in any space, including cyberspace. I never post or have depictions of me doing anything illegal, unsafe, immoral or unethical, so I really do not have a problem with what I am sending out. One caveat to this conversation is that all of my Soldiers are warrant officers and NCOs, so they are different from a company of 18- to 22-year-olds.

Facebook has many pros: 1. Connecting and mentorship—I currently have enlisted Soldiers or former enlisted Soldiers on their way to flight school or in flight school who I am able to connect with and help with issues they might have at that difficult school. 2. Setting the example, and letting Soldiers into your world—a lot of these young guys don’t know how to act; show them. 3. Social networking—it is becoming a big part of modern life. If you shut it out, you are losing opportunities to connect with your Soldiers.

Facebook has its cons as well: 1. Wives—I have found that my biggest problem is with wives becoming my Facebook friends. They are much more likely to post something inappropriate or to become overly familiar. My policy is that only wives of Soldiers in my direct command can be my Facebook friends. If they post something I do not like, I just delete the post. Once a husband is no longer in my command, I delete that wife. 2. Should it be that “what happens



1LT Michael Stanski, an aviation detachment commander, uses Facebook to mentor his soldiers. “Facebook is a tool,” he says. “Used correctly, it can do good.”

on Facebook stays on Facebook”? This has been a big dilemma for me. Recently, the wife of one of my Soldiers posted photos showing behavior that the Soldier had recently been counseled about by myself and the battalion commander. The behavior was not illegal or unsafe, but the photo showed that this Soldier was lying to me and the battalion commander. I did not use the information because the Soldier was already on his way out due to this behavior. However, I would take action on something on Facebook that was illegal, unethical or unsafe. Bottom line: Facebook is a tool. Used correctly, it can do good.

Carla Getchell

KY Agribusiness Development Team

Mike, I agree with you on every point, including your discussion on wives. Recently, I had a young Soldier who has PTSD and was having marital problems—a deadly combination. I was able to keep tabs on his personal life through his wife’s Facebook postings. (She had friended me.) I could immediately call his closest friend in the unit, an NCO, and have him check on the situation and keep me updated. I don’t seek out my Soldiers, but if they find me, I don’t refuse their requests. We also have to think about how we handle up-the-chain friend requests. I’m in the National Guard and have had to accept requests from my commanders, Chief of Staff and former Adjutant General. I do recommend using the “Limited View” option, which I use



CPT Carla Getchell accepts “friend requests” from soldiers up and down her chain of command, but she restricts the personal information that they can see.

to restrict access to my personal information and my political and religious beliefs.

I accept my Soldiers’ requests. I also set my privacy setting so that their ability to see my page is limited. This allows me to preserve my privacy, but it allows them to have an additional line of communication if needed.—Anthony Roberts, OMLT-A

Charlie Dietz

WTB-TAMC

I decided to shut down my Facebook account as I was getting sick of seeing all the “X likes ice cream” updates. Also, the drama is not worth it. From my experience, Facebook is used not only as a tool to communicate, but also partly as a tool to lurk and watch people you normally would feel awkward asking about. Such is the same with your Soldiers. Do you really want them looking at what you do on the weekends? Want them to see your religious views and favorite movies? While there are privacy settings, being able to see someone’s photos is easily accomplished through some URL changes—so, in essence, there is no photo privacy. There are many ways we can keep tabs on our Soldiers, but there should be a limit, especially when they then can keep tabs on us. Also, I can only imagine how happy my commander would be hearing that someone wrote on my wall or posted a picture about something in college or a crazy weekend. In an era when people’s lives are being ruined by posts, pictures and everything else online, I think Facebook is something that is not worth risking.

Brandon Hennagan

5th EN BN

I believe that as a leader, it is not your job to be your Soldiers’ friend. You have been given the responsibility to lead your Soldiers. In doing so, it is important to get to know your Soldiers on a personal basis, but getting to know your Soldiers does not constitute being their friend. Your personal life is none of their business. Soldiers will respect you a lot more if you engage in conversation with them to get to know them rather than by reading about them on Facebook. Bottom line: Don’t worry about trying to be their friend. Worry about ensuring that they are trained and prepared for combat so that you can bring them back home alive. Professional respect is much more valuable than a friendship between a Soldier and his leader.

Where this gets confusing and perhaps “over the line” to some people is the fact that it is called a friend request. How many people who are your Facebook friends can you truly call your real friends? Contact would be a better term.—Peter Sukits, OIG 1-30 FA



John Renehan
B/1-41 FA

If you have a page on Facebook and deny your Soldiers' friend requests, you will likely be perceived as a snob, "too good" to let your Soldiers into your life and generally "that" kind of officer. It's not the kind of reputation you need out of the gate. Now, this is not to say that you don't need to keep things in that friendly-but-professional zone with your Soldiers. You are *not* their friend. You can be friendly and accessible, but you can't do your job properly if you think of them as friends.



CPT Brandon Hennagan does not "friend" his soldiers on Facebook because he believes that "soldiers will respect you a lot more if you engage in conversation with them to get to know them rather than by reading about them on Facebook."

So what's the solution? Use sites like Facebook in a professional manner that suits an officer, so that you won't be embarrassed by your Soldiers seeing what you have up there. It's like keeping your POV [car] clean on the inside so that when you unexpectedly have to give a Soldier a ride someplace, you're setting the right kind of example.

Patrick Moore

A/2-113 IN, 50th IBCT

Speaking from a Guard perspective, Facebook is about the most reliable means I have to communicate with my Soldiers. I am not friended with junior Soldiers from my current unit, but my NCOs are Facebook friends with just about all of them. When an e-mail gets ignored on AKO [Army Knowledge Online], usually we can track down a Soldier through Facebook and have him either check AKO or call to get information. We don't post anything on Facebook regarding report times, movement, etc. I fear it is just going to get worse when we go to CAC-only [common access card] AKO access. Most of my Soldiers don't have CAC readers and cannot afford them; heck, several of my Soldiers are homeless. Facebook has also proven useful to check on a Soldier who claims he can't make drill because of a family problem; when he posts what bar he was at that night and pictures of him dancing, well, that becomes a powerful lesson for teaching Soldiers about OPSEC [operations security].

Mark Franzen

346th MP Co.

I've seen what appears to be a pretty even split here—with many of the active duty leaders reluctant to friend their Soldiers, while Guard and Reserve (myself included) see value in it. The fact is, in the Guard/Reserve world, we don't have the luxury of people walking into our office, or hearing the discussions in the hallway about what PVT Smith is up to outside of work. In this regard, Facebook has been an invaluable tool for my unit.

I also think that when your Soldiers know you're on Facebook, they tend to police themselves a little better. Sure, I occasionally see someone on Face-

CPT John Renehan recommends using "sites like Facebook in a professional manner that suits an officer, so that you won't be embarrassed by your soldiers seeing what you have up there."

1LT Patrick Moore (left) and his National Guard unit utilize Facebook to disseminate information and to maintain communications with soldiers between drills. "Facebook is about the most reliable means I have to communicate with my soldiers," he says.



book acting like a jackass, but I also am wise enough to understand that people have lives outside of the Army Reserve.

Robby Mallory C/3-8 CAV

One of the main issues here is whether Soldiers are capable of understanding the difference between being Facebook friends and being friends in real life. I never had any issues with my own Soldiers seeing the difference. In my own experience as a platoon leader, I didn't friend Soldiers but accepted requests from them. This was my personal preference, since no command directives had come out about it.

As leaders, we set the boundaries and standards for our Soldiers. If you make your relationships clear with your Soldiers from the beginning, you should not have any boundary issues. Should one arise, however, as a leader you must step up and correct that problem. It's no different from seeing Soldiers anywhere doing something unsafe or not to standard.

Michael Shepard HHC, 22nd CM BN

Aside from individual pages, which can be of use to first-line leaders and the chain of command for monitoring Soldiers, leaders can establish a unit page that is designed to share nonsensitive information, unit history, chain of com-

mand contact information and upcoming social events on a calendar. These unit pages can be bad if not managed closely and properly. If you decide to do a unit page, I would recommend assigning someone who is willing to monitor it as an additional duty.

Mollie Kedney E/1-6 CAV

When I was in command, we established a unit page on Facebook in order to share our unit's activities and training experiences with families and friends outside of the local area. Once we deployed, the page became a way to keep families aware of what was going on with the troops and to share pictures from downrange with them. Facebook also became helpful for my 1SG and me to remain in contact with our Soldiers' families and to gain awareness of issues at home that may have been affecting our Soldiers' focus at work. We were then able to get the Soldiers help or give them time to take care of their families' needs. The unit Facebook page also became a tool for spouses and other family members to communicate with each other, allowing

Guidance from the U.S. Army Social Media Handbook (January 2011)

Social media has improved the way we connect and communicate as a culture, but it presents some interesting dilemmas for Army leaders. Social media is about connecting, so it's only natural that Army leaders may interact and function in the same social media spaces as their subordinates. How they connect and interact with their subordinates online is up to their discretion, but it is advised that the online relationship function in the same manner as the professional relationship. ... When in a position of leadership, conduct online should be professional.

By using social media, leaders are essentially providing a permanent record of what they say, so, if you wouldn't say it in front of a formation, don't say it online. If a leader comes across evidence of a Soldier violating command policy or the UCMJ on social media platforms, then that leader should respond in the same manner they would if they witnessed the infraction in any other environment.

See <http://www.slideshare.net/usarmysocialmedia> for resources and official guidance on establishing your unit's social-media presence.

them to share their experiences and provide help to each other at home while we were gone. Also, since our unit was spread out across five locations in Iraq, the page became a tool for us to remain in contact with our Soldiers, whom we couldn't always see on a daily basis.

Ralph Merrill

B/2-1 AD

I utilize Facebook within my Family Readiness Group [FRG]. Here are a couple things to consider: 1. OPSEC: I know we talk about this quite a bit these days, as there isn't a commercial on AFN [Armed Forces Network] that comes out that doesn't speak about OPSEC and the importance of having your Soldiers and their families understand the importance of OPSEC. I recommend that you carry this information over to your unit's Facebook community, if you decide to create one. 2. Unfiltered information. Facebook is a double-edged sword. It is a great way to pass information; however, I have seen Army pages become places to vent. On the one hand, this makes a unit's Facebook page a great way to learn about the morale of a Soldier, who might tell you to your face that everything in the unit is great, but will vent to millions of Facebook users what he or she really feels. This provides an honest perspective from the Soldiers and families who utilize the page, which is good, but it also can reflect poorly on the unit. Overall, Facebook is a powerful tool, so leaders need to be very intentional about how we utilize it within our organizations.

The closed Facebook pages for FRGs are nice because information can be sent out for those family members who don't have an AKO account and can't get behind the OPSEC screen.

—Patrick Moore, A/2-113 IN

Will Mangini

A/3-10 IN

I think that the use of social media should be limited to organizational information that is OPSEC approved and relevant to the entire unit, families and supporters. I do not think it should be used as a primary form of communication with any group, individual, or detachment within my company or organization. I am a believer in the three-to-five person sphere-of-control rule. We should control those platoon leaders and platoon sergeants under us and require them to communicate with their subordinates. Always opt to communicate with people face to face, and when that is not possible, use the phone or radio; e-mail and text messaging should be your last resort. The younger generation may be more savvy when using technology to communicate, but we should never abandon the fundamentals. For example, just because I have a GPS doesn't mean I shouldn't know how to use a compass. We should all make every effort to talk to our people face to face and not through a piece of technology. It's all about leadership.

Roger Farina

F/5-17 CAV

Having run unit Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn pages, [I can attest that] there are definitely some things to consider. First, the Army command has embraced these brands of social media. At the AUSA Annual Meeting and Exposition, I was awestruck by the breadth of the usage. As with anything in life, there can be abuse. If you monitor it within yourself and within your unit, you will not run astray. The best way I have seen to do this is to have two separate Facebook accounts. My main Facebook page is linked to my personal e-mail account. On this account, I friend my closest friends, family, school buddies and the closest of close Army friends. I then have my professional Facebook account linked to my AKO e-mail. I use this account for unit pages and interactions with my Soldiers. I keep it locked down tight. No one can find me, and no one can read what I write unless I am friends with them. By having the professional Facebook account, I do not cross any lines. I maintain my military bearing and professionalism, and there are no issues of becoming friends with any Soldiers. I communicate with Soldiers and pass on valuable information. Facebook is a great tool because it's the way this generation communicates, and the Army sees that.

We thank Heidi Bredlow, Tom Handy, Kimberlynn Hunter and Matthew Hovde for raising this timely topic in several conversations in the CompanyCommand and PlatoonLeader forums. If you are a currently commissioned officer or cadet, we invite you to participate in MilSpace, the on-line social-learning system for company-level officers. When you join the CompanyCommand or PlatoonLeader forum, you automatically have access to all of MilSpace.

