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Honorable Joseph W. Westphal '70



Under Secretary of the Army Joseph W. Westphal '70 sat down with Adelphi Vice President for Communications Lori Duggan Gold G.C. '08 in his Pentagon office.

Reflections on Leadership: Under Secretary of the Army, the Honorable Joseph W. Westphal '70

In this new column, Adelphi newsmakers reflect on contemporary issues that impact higher education and society at large.

Imagine leading a company with more than one million employees, who are spread across the globe, and whose responsibilities include international peacekeeping, disaster assistance, and other high-stakes situations. As the 30th under secretary and first chief management officer (CMO) of the United States Army, positions he assumed in September 2009, Dr. Joseph J. Westphal '70 confronts these leadership challenges every day.

The under secretary is the second-highest ranking civilian official of the United States Department of the Army, serving directly under the Secretary of the Army. Dr. Westphal oversees all matters related to Army manpower, including operations, intelligence, command, and readiness. As CMO, Dr. Westphal is also responsible for managing the Army's business transformation initiative and business operations.

Being able to effectively lead the Army starts with "the way we train our soldiers," says Dr. Westphal. "We infiltrate a culture of leadership in every soldier...personal responsibility and being able to have an awareness of the environment in which they are working."

Dr. Westphal acknowledges that while "there is no general definition or template of

what makes a good leader," there are important common denominators, including making sure that leaders have "a sense of balance in their lives, they are comfortable with themselves...not being arrogant, or egotistical, but comfortable in their ability to function." Dr. Westphal cultivates such confidence and competence by encouraging people to "balance their lives, their education, and thinking—to reach out for opportunities in different areas to enrich their educational process, not just to limit themselves to what they've been doing." His philosophy echoes that of the liberal arts education he received at Adelphi, where he says he "was able to build great relationships with both faculty and students."

For the Army, leadership and education are necessarily linked.

"When you are moving within the Army, you are constantly being educated," says Dr. Westphal. "The individuals that we have in this army are highly educated and efficient."

When he first began his tenure as under secretary, Dr. Westphal visited with soldiers throughout Afghanistan. Speaking with soldiers is vital and "part of what we need to do as leaders... [Soldiers] are our barometer, our temperature gauge; they are the ones who most readily and candidly tell us what is going on. They are the ones in the thick of it."

He recalls a particularly memorable visit to Kandahar, Afghanistan, where soldiers were working with Afghani civilians on economic development that focused on using the land to grow the right crops and working to ensure the safety of people trying to get to market. He remembers being struck by the "amazing work that this all-volunteer force has done."

Cultivating leadership through education benefits soldiers when they return to civilian life. Dr. Westphal believes that "there is a huge connection" between returning soldiers and the country's ability to recover from the current economic crisis.

"Most easily, you see it in what we call the reserve component," he says. "The Army National Guard Reserves, those are people who work and have jobs so when they are deployed they bring that training and education." When they return, he says, they are able to integrate their Reserve experience and "able to amplify their own areas of expertise."

Ultimately, the Army needs to be ready "for any order given," says Dr. Westphal. The charge of the Army is "to generate a force and make it versatile for today's environment." 

By Linda Romano M.A. '03