

## Counseling Enhancement Tool: CET

**Background:** NCOs play an important role in the professional development of junior enlisted Soldiers by training, educating, and counseling Soldiers to improve performance of present and future duties in accordance with the Army Ethic. To support NCOs in this task, the Counseling Enhancement Tool (piloted as the Soldier and Leader Development Tool) was designed to assist NCOs in having quality conversations with Soldiers that promote the professional development of junior NCOs during the performance counseling process. The CET provides guidance for interactive, collaborative, two-way conversations about Soldier development for the purpose of improving performance.

The CET is based on motivational interviewing, which is a collaborative, goal-oriented style of communication designed to strengthen personal motivation for, and commitment to goals by eliciting and exploring the person's own reasons for change. The *Talk Like a Leader (TLaL)*, an empirically supported communication skills training developed for Army NCOs, provides skill-based training that supports the CET. (Contact Dr. April Sanders at the Army Research Institute Fort Hood for more information on the TLaL; april.d.sanders9.civ@mail.mil).

**Purpose:** The CET was designed to aid leaders in fostering an open dialogue between themselves and their subordinates regarding the developmental progress of the subordinate. The tool is not intended to make evaluative decisions, but rather maximize existing opportunities for NCOs and their Soldiers to share their observations, discuss expectations, and develop collaborative plans to increase goal attainment.

**General overview:** The CET provides seven topic areas, gleaned from doctrine and research, relevant to all junior enlisted Soldiers. These topics should be considered a minimum for developmental counseling, rather than an exhaustive list of potential topics. There may be other areas that you and your Soldiers need to discuss regarding development and these should be added into the discussion. The CET consists of two parts: a Soldier Form and a Leader Form. The Soldier Form is designed to prepare junior enlisted Soldiers for the performance counseling by engaging in self-evaluation exercises. The Leader form provides prompts for the NCO to walk through a conversation about developmental counseling with the Soldier. Both forms include embedded instructions in the interactive PDF form and expanded instructions here. Each form also includes the same seven focus areas to be discussed: *Tactical and Technical Proficiency; Communicates Effectively; Exhibits Effort; Exhibits Personal Discipline; Contributes to the Team; Exhibits Fitness, Military Bearing, and Appearance; and Manages Personal Matters.*

### Procedure:

- A. Part 1: Preparation: The leader provides the CET *Soldier form* to the Soldier along with these instructions and a time-frame for completion. The leader completes each sub-section A and B of each of the seven topic areas included on the CET.
  - Sub-section A. *Sustain and Improve*. The leader reads each description and marks each with the rating that best describes the Soldier's performance over the past rating period (typically in the past month).
  - Sub-section B. *Observations*. The leader makes notes of the Soldier's behaviors, either direct observations or those reported by others, that support the *Soldier Performance* choice. Observations should include areas of strength, as well as opportunities for growth. It is important observations be as specific and detailed as possible. Including the

frequency of the behavior, the impact it has on others, its connection to Soldier and team performance, goals, and the overall mission may be particularly helpful. If Soldier observations are currently tracked in another format (e.g., a green book, running DA Form 4856), note their location for quick reference in preparation for the discussion with the Soldier.

- B. Part 2: Conversation with Soldier: The leader and Soldier set aside time to review sub-sections A and B. The leader guides the conversation using the rest of the CET, sub-section C-E and Section 8.
- Sub-section C. *Expectations*. The purpose of this section is to set the tone of the conversation, demonstrating to the Soldier they will have an important part in the discussion about professional development. The basic approach is to balance expertise (*What are you seeing? What recommendations do you have?*) with evocation (*What is the Soldier seeing? What ideas does the Soldier have?*). Understanding the Soldier's perspective on their own performance, barriers, and needed resources provides the leader with important information. In addition, by encouraging Soldier input, this helps him or her be better prepared when they begin providing developmental counseling to others. It is important to note that it is not necessary to share leader ratings immediately with the Soldier, especially if it is significantly lower. The purpose of this section is to gain a better understanding of what your expectations are and how they are being met or not met. Based on how they are presented, your rating of the Soldier may inspire them or discourage, and thus it should be shared with the intention of helping the Soldier improve, not simply to provide a number that does not constitute a score or assessment rating.
  - Sub-section D. *Goal*. In this sub-section the leader guides the conversation to a specific goal the Soldier wants to accomplish using more open-ended questions. The purpose is to leverage the Soldier's internal motivation to a goal by allowing the Soldier a more active role in the goal setting process. It would be very easy for you as the leader to tell the Soldier exactly what to do. Guiding the conversation in such a way to increase the Soldier's internal motivation and commitment to the goal allows the Soldier to take responsibility for the goal, and develops a sense of empowerment. The leader can provide suggestions or resources at opportune times (e.g., when the Soldier agrees to hear suggestions) in order to maximize the Soldier's receptiveness and utilization of provided suggestions.

The leader will repeat these steps for all seven sections (*Tactical and Technical Proficiency; Communicates Effectively; Exhibits Effort; Exhibits Personal Discipline; Contributes to the Team; Exhibits Fitness, Military Bearing, and Appearance; and Manages Personal Matters*).

- A. Section 8. *Plan*. The purpose of this sub-section is to guide the leader through a discussion focused on a plan forward. Have the Soldier identify three of goals from previous sections. Once they have chosen the areas of focus the leader will help the Soldier develop SMART goals. The leader can ask clarifying questions to make the goals Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-Bound. Be sure to include a plan on how this goal will be followed up on. See section below titled: Help the Soldier to Plan. Ideally the leader will help link these goals to the Soldiers Individual Development Plan in Army Tracker. This section is designed to ensure that you and your Soldier have a shared understanding of the plan, any barriers or resources needed, and how and when progress will be evaluated.

**Tools and Approach:** Developmental counseling relies strongly on interpersonal listening strategies

such as open-ended questions, affirmations, reflections, and summaries (“OARS”). These strategies are used throughout the meeting to ensure that the leader understands the Soldier’s perspective and is engaging the Soldier in the process.

- B. Ask Open Questions: Closed questions ask for yes/no or limited-range responses, while open questions ask for longer answers or elaboration. Closed questions are better for getting short answers or verifying understanding. Open questions are usually better at pulling out detailed information or encouraging a person to think about the answer.

For instance:

- *What questions do you have?*
- *What do you want to do after you’re done with active duty? Where do you want to be long-term?*
- *What other ideas do you have? What else might work for you?*

Open questions can also help a Soldier to arrive at a specific plan of action:

- *There are a few things that people do here (provide a short list). Which of these do you think would work for you?*
- *Who would (or will) help you to...?*
- *What worked for you in the past?*

During developmental counseling, it can be more useful to concentrate on “forward-focused” questions that ask what Soldiers *could do*, *will do*, or things that *will work for them*. In contrast, backwards questions ask why Soldiers *can’t*, *won’t*, or *didn’t* do something. For instance:

<b>Avoid</b>	<b>Try</b>
Why did you do that?	<i>How can you fix this?</i>
Why did you forget to submit the form?	<i>What’s your plan to make sure the form gets submitted next time?</i>
Why are you late?	<i>How will you make sure you’re here on time tomorrow?</i>

The questions on the left encourage Soldiers to talk about barriers, while the ones on the right encourage Soldiers to talk about solutions.

- C. Affirm Positive Progress: Good leaders go out of their way to call attention to positive progress. Some leaders take time to learn about a Soldier’s family, hobbies, and strengths so that they can show a genuine interest in his or her personal life. Knowing what drives your Soldier, and what he or she is doing well is a crucial part of developmental counseling.

One kind of affirmation highlights something a Soldier has done well:

- *This is really great work. The attention to detail is excellent.*
- *You’re making great progress on this exercise.*
- *It’s clear you’ve thought a lot about this.*

Another kind of affirmation calls attention to strengths or character traits:

- *You care a lot about your work product. I think you'll do well as a sergeant.*
- *You're the kind of person who speaks up when something's not right, and that's a real strength.*
- *You have a lot of leadership qualities. It's clear that people listen to you.*

“How” (rather than “why”) questions can reinforce positive efforts and build confidence:

- *How did you do this?*
- *How did you know that would work?*
- *You've done a remarkable job putting all of this together. How did you manage to do all that?*

Emphasizing positive qualities can help shift Soldiers' perspectives from their deficiencies to their capabilities, and from past disappointments to future opportunities.

- D. Reflect what the Soldier is Saying: Reflections are restatements or summaries of what a Soldier is saying or thinking. They may repeat or rephrase what a Soldier has said, summarize an emotion, or point out mixed feelings. The best reflections use slightly different words to demonstrate that the leader understands the point the Soldier is trying to make. Reflections demonstrate respect, and clarify that you and the Soldier both understand what the conversation is about.

Here are some ways a leader could reflect back a Soldier's statement: “The PT standards are too strict. The kind of food they serve in the Army makes people fat.”

<b>Repeat/Rephrase</b> (use similar words)	<i>You think the PT standards are strict.</i>
<b>Paraphrase</b> (use different words)	<i>It's been hard to meet the PT standards with the available food options. [adds meaning]</i>
<b>Double-Sided Reflection</b> (capture both sides)	<i>On the one hand, you do have a choice about what you eat, but on the other hand, your choices are pretty limited.</i>
<b>Reflection with a Twist</b> (reflect back part, with a slightly different emphasis)	<i>It feels like you're being set up for failure. You'd really have to plan ahead and be more careful about what you eat. [agrees with part of statement, adds meaning]</i>

At points of disagreement, reflections can acknowledge the Soldier's viewpoint while keeping the conversation moving forward. Instead of disagreeing or pointing out a Soldier's poor attitude, a better response is usually to reflect what the Soldier is saying and redirect the conversation with an open question or a statement that highlights the Soldier's options or responsibility to meet the standard.

<b>Soldier Says:</b>	<b>Less Effective</b>	<b>More Effective</b>
I can't get to PT on time. Everyone's coming here at the same time and the traffic at the gate is terrible. It takes forever to get through!	Maybe you should leave your house earlier.	<i>You're right. Traffic in the morning is bad. Everyone's got to figure out their own plan for getting here by 0600. What are your options?</i>

I was never told I'd have to take all these classes. I'm just sitting in a room all day.	You signed the contract, didn't you? You sure didn't have any problem taking the signing bonus.	<i>So, this part is surprising to you. Given that this is part of your training, what are some things you can do to help you get through this class?</i>
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Importantly, a leader does not have to agree with the Soldier in order to reflect. Rather, reflections show that a person understands what someone else is saying.

- E. Summarize What you are Hearing: Summaries remind a person about major discussion points, the plan of action, and the person's own reasons for taking action. Summaries also allow for direction or commentary by the leader to emphasize parts of what the person has said. A summary at the end of the counseling session demonstrates that the leader understands all that has transpired, and reminds the Soldier about the plan of action to address any deficiencies.

Here's an example of a summary where the leader and Soldier are talking about a stressful home situation that is beginning to affect work performance. In this example, the leader does not have a particular goal in mind other than helping a Soldier think through a difficult situation. The summary alone can be helpful.

*It's like you said...marriages can be difficult. In your case, it's sort of like a vicious cycle. When you get home, you're exhausted from being at work all day, and she's exhausted from being alone with the baby. You both end up saying things you regret later. You've suggested she spend more time with the other wives on the base, but for whatever reason, it's just not working for her.*

Here's an example of a summary where the leader does have a goal in mind: helping improve a Soldier's PT performance.

*So, let me summarize here. We've been talking about time management and PT performance. This week you've been consistently a few minutes late to formation, and the running, in particular, has been rough. Because of the weight gain, you're at risk for failing your next PT test. So, what's your plan here?*

Here's an example of a summary that closes a developmental counseling interaction:

*We've talked about a couple things. One is getting caught up on your training hours, and you thought that working with PFC Marshall on the flashcards would help. I think that's a smart idea, and would benefit you both. As far as your work assignment, we talked about a couple of options for the days you're not on vehicle maintenance. You said it's important to you to get some skills you can use on HVAC repair when you finish active duty. What else do you want to add to this plan?*

- F. Help the Soldier to Plan

Soldiers are more likely to achieve their goals if they are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time bound (sometimes called "SMART" planning). If a Soldier has a large goal, it may help to break the goal into smaller, short-term steps that will increase the chance of success. For example, if a Soldier wants to obtain a job in an area where they have no experience, a leader might help the Soldier to break the goal into smaller pieces. The leader can give suggestions and advice where

appropriate, but it is better if Soldiers are doing most of the problem solving.

	<b>Key Question</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Specific</b>	What specifically do you want to achieve?	<i>I'd like to get more experience in air defense.</i>
<b>Measurable</b>	How will you know if you've reached your goal?	<i>When I leave the Army, I'd like to get my degree in aviation or aerospace engineering.</i>
<b>Attainable</b>	What resources are needed?	<i>I would need to apply to Air Defense Artillery School.</i>
<b>Realistic</b>	Is the goal reasonable?	<i>I have a good head for numbers. Aerospace is a big industry where I live.</i>
<b>Time-Bound</b>	When will each of the steps be completed without kicking the can down the road?	<i>In the next week, I'd like to do some research on what training programs are available.</i>

A leader can help a Soldier brainstorm situations that might cause problems.

- *What are some parts of your plan that might be difficult?*
- *What would you have to do to address that?*

A leader can also help a Soldier identify who (or what) would help to achieve the goal. Here are some questions that ask specifically about that person's role in the change process, and what the Soldier would need to do to involve this person.

- *Who is someone who might be able to help you? How would they help?*
- *What's your timeline?*

Written or visual cues, such as notes, schedules, and reminders, can also be helpful. Again, the Soldier should be the one who is doing most of the talking. Leaders sometimes add a bit of advice or information where appropriate, and use reflections or summaries to reinforce the plan.

- *What would that look like? Where would you start? What would happen next?*
- *What are some things that might get in your way? How would you deal with that?*
- *If you're at a 2 now in your progress, what would it take to get you to a 3?*