

Commentary

Editor: Dustin Perry dustin.perry@bliss.army.mil

Troop Talk



The Secretary of the Army has always had “business process revamping” as one of his major priorities. In order to do this he has encouraged the use of Lean Six Sigma techniques. This technique, which the

business world has used successfully for some time, really takes a look at your process from a customer viewpoint. Many of you probably think, “well that’s nothing startling,” but the power of the technique is to use the people who work the process day in and day out to oversee the revamping of the process.

For some time I have heard concerns about the Welcome Center here at Bliss. Not that the folks running it are not good, but that the waits are too long and that some of the briefings are redundant. So recently we decided to use Lean Six Sigma to examine our entire Welcome

Center process from start to finish. This was not a small endeavor in that we inprocessed more than 650 new Soldiers in January, and the center provided services to another 4,000 people. Thankfully we had the help of some industry experts to guide us through this, but the results have been simply amazing to me.

The team tackled key issues such as: process, vision, mission, priorities, workflow, undesired effects, commitment and the improvement plan. They divided into three teams to assigned to three different areas, and as a result came up with the following recommendations: Evaluate briefings on contents and relevance, eliminate redundancy in briefs to reduce time, create an efficient schedule of events, reconfigure briefing days and eliminate one day of briefings, move the finance brief to day 1 (since it is critical for everyone) and to add a finance drop box for missing documents. Additionally the team eliminated day 5 of inprocessing by combining it with day 2, saving more than 5.5 hours.

Finally we decided to add some computers to the Welcome Center and to add one counselor so as to reduce backlogs and wait time.

Ideally, to maximize effectiveness, we should move the entire complex to a larger facility, but that will have to wait until BRAC moves free up facilities on post. In the mean time, the Welcome Center team took matters into their own hands to fix troubled areas in their lane and to make significant improvements. To me this validated the Lean Six Sigma approach to improving organizations and processes. Even more important it validated in my mind what talented, dedicated people can do to make good things happen when we empower them to do so. My challenge to everyone else is, who is next?

Brig. Gen. Robert P. Lennox
Fort Bliss Commanding General

Combat TSP equals tax-free retirement

MAJ. PATRICK A. SWAN

Army News Service

WASHINGTON – Slogging it out each day in a combat zone has plenty of drawbacks, not the least of which is getting shot at routinely by the bad guys.

One of the good things a combat zone offers us is that our wages here are not subject to federal or state income taxes. That tax-exempt status adds a little bit more money to our paychecks.

Another good thing is that our Thrift Savings Plan contributions are tax-free as well. That adds a little bit more money to our future retirement checks.

For those who need a reminder, the Thrift Savings Plan is a voluntary retirement savings-and-investment plan. We pay no taxes on the money we save and earn through TSP until we withdraw them from our account. And we never pay any taxes on our TSP combat-zone savings (only on the earnings from those savings).

The rules have changed recently. You can start making contributions to the Thrift Savings Plan at any time during the year. It is strongly suggested that you start TSP before you enter a combat zone, but if you’re in one NOW, get to a Web site as soon as possible. You can start, change, or stop contributions at any time by using the myPay website <https://mypay.dfas.mil>. If the Web site is not available there is still Form TSP-U-1 which is submitted to finance for processing.

This year, a servicemember may contribute any percentage of their basic pay, incentive, special or bonus

pay. This means if you want to contribute 100 percent of any extra pay you receive for hostile fire or special duty, you can do it under the TSP guidelines. (For details, visit the TSP web site at <http://www.tsp.gov> or log onto <https://mypay.dfas.mil>).

Taking a close look at what TSP offers us is important for a big reason:

One day this war will be over. Those of us who return home will serve out our military obligation and one day retire.

When we are less healthy and less able:

- We’ll draw military pensions, for which we will pay tax.
- We’ll draw civilian pensions, for which we will pay tax.
- We’ll draw dollars from traditional individual retirement accounts, for which we will pay tax.

But, when we draw from our TSP accounts, we won’t pay tax on that portion we socked away while we served in the combat zone.

The more money we save now

with TSP will mean more tax-free money in our old age when we are boring our grandchildren with tales of life in a combat zone in the great Global War on Terrorism.

That pocket change could certainly come in handy then – by giving us the added means to purchase ice cream for those grandchildren burdened with listening to our war stories.

(Editor’s note: Maj. Patrick Swan serves with the 204th MPAD.)



The Monitor is an unofficial publication authorized by AR360-1 and printed each Thursday in the interest of the Fort Bliss and El Paso, Texas communities.

The Monitor is published by the Commanding General of Fort Bliss through The Laven Group, LLC, 1420 Geronimo, Bldg. E, El Paso, Tx. 79925 (915) 772-0934, fax: 772-1594 slav@whc.net, www.lavenpublishing.com.

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The Monitor has a circulation of 18,000 copies. Editorial content is prepared, edited and provided by the Public Affairs Office of Fort Bliss, Bldg. 15, (915) 568-4088 or fax (915) 568-3749.

Items submitted for publication in The Monitor should be sent to The Monitor, Fort Bliss, Texas 79916, by noon on Friday before issue. All submissions become Army property and should be typed, double-spaced with the author’s name, signature, and mailing address. Photos should have information attached describing photo and have photographer’s full name. The editor reserves the right to reject or edit all submissions or advertising that do not conform to The Monitor’s journalistic standards. All photos are U.S. Army unless otherwise designated.

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