



## Training With Industry

# Microsoft® offers 'keys to the castle' experience

By LTC Michael Fazen

Training With Industry is a tremendous opportunity for the Army, the Soldier and the industry partner. According to the AR 621-1, the Army sends TWI Fellows out to corporations to acquire training, and/or skills in best business procedures and practices that are "not available through the military service school system nor through civilian colleges or universities."

After being selected for the TWI Program at Microsoft, my family and I moved up to the Redmond, Wash., area, and I began work last summer in 2012.

The staff at Microsoft have essentially given me "the keys to the castle" with respect to access to their senior leadership and their strategic processes. At the same time, I've been working on different projects such as their internal deployment/upgrades of enterprise IT services and helping to develop a services analysis process similar to the Department of Defense's Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership and Education, Personnel, Facilities analysis used for acquisition.

One of the challenges that I initially faced was that the Army has been sending highly technical warrant officers to work on very specific products and services (SharePoint, Security, etc.) for several years, but the framework, scope, and goals for field grade officers are significantly different.

My focus is understanding the strategic and operational processes and planning instead of being technically focused on Microsoft products. Fortunately, several Microsoft World Wide Services senior leaders pulled me into their organization and have given me complete freedom of



LTC Michael Fazen (standing), reviews a project with Joe Wallis, one of his mentors at Microsoft.

maneuver to observe and interact with leaders and their staffs across the entire company.

In addition to the AR 621-1 and the Human Resources Command TWI Handbook, here are five snippets of advice that might be helpful for officers selected for, or at least considering, a TWI assignment.

### *Make contact early*

Gain and maintain contact as early as possible. As soon as you get your request for orders with the industry point of contact, grab on to them and don't let go.

Take the approach that you are simply an additional duty for them, and if you aren't meeting with them once a week, you will probably fall off

their radar. For example, my replacement arrives in June, but he is already in weekly meetings with the new Microsoft TWI POC and is actually interviewing with vice presidents to refine his placement and duties.

Ensure everyone you talk to understands what you (and your follow-on organization if you know it) want to get out of the experience, while at the same time emphasizing the value that you will bring to their organization. This should be viewed by all as a symbiotic relationship, and it will help open doors and create additional opportunities.

### ***Quickly learn the culture and protocol***

The one thing I can guarantee is that your TWI company culture will be different than the Army culture...and different is not bad. They will have their own language, their own set of acronyms, and their own idiosyncrasies that you will need to understand before you can operate effectively and add value. The key to gaining the most out of the experience is how fast you can learn their way of doing business ranging from day-to-day processes all the way up to strategic planning and the business cycle.

### ***Create (don't wait) for opportunities***

Meet with every vice president (or higher) that you can. A good metric for a large company is a meeting with a different VP every two weeks. But don't expect them to seek you out, as they are busy and have a significant amount of responsibility. And when you meet with them, ask to be included in their processes and routines. Toward the beginning of my assignment during an office call with the Microsoft chief information officer, I simply asked if I could attend his monthly business reviews to better understand their success metrics. Not only did he have me invited to every one of the MBRs, but he also introduced me to several of his VPs and senior general managers who have subsequently included me in their planning sessions. As a result, I now have a firm grasp of Microsoft's internal IT processes which will be quite useful in my next assignment.

### ***Be flexible and patient***

Not only does it take time to understand your

new environment, but it also takes time for your new environment to understand you. The full time employees at your TWI corporation are probably very supportive of the military, but they likely have not been living and breathing Army for the past couple of decades like you have. Initially, do not expect to fully understand everything they say even though you may be an expert in your field. At the same time, do not get frustrated that you need to explain your ideas their language. Again, different is not bad – it just takes some “getting used to.”

### ***Act decisively***

If something doesn't seem right, fire the red star cluster ASAP! You are not an intern or a student or an entry level employee! Ensure that everyone from the CEO down to the parking lot security guard understands that. Never assume that there will be a “syllabus” for you to follow and don't blindly accept the training plan that they've developed for you. You must apply critical thinking, specifically at the beginning of the assignment, because no one knows your goals and expectations better than you do. A key indicator that something isn't right is if you're not having fun.

The Microsoft TWI slot is sponsored by the Secretary of the Army Office of Business Transformation where I will conduct a three year utilization tour when I leave this summer. In the spirit of the AR621-1, this assignment is giving me a much broader perspective that I could not have acquired from an educational institution. Microsoft has some of the most talented people in the IT industry, and working with them on a daily basis for a year has been an invaluable experience.

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