

DID YOU KNOW?

Blueprint for Army



DID YOU KNOW?

Army HR Professionals

World-Class Customer Service Inspired
by Industry Leaders

■ *By MAJ Rita Failes*

Every successful project begins with a meticulously crafted blueprint. Whether you are building an impressive structure, designing an innovative system, or revolutionizing an organization's customer service model, these blueprints act as dynamic strategic roadmaps.

Just as thriving organizations and franchises build on standard models to ensure a positive customer experience, the most successful companies adhere to these architectural guidelines. The Army embodies these principles. Each unit adds its distinctiveness, yet Soldiers rightfully expect a foundation of excellence within their S-1 shops, from streamlined processes to essential customer support.

The Adjutant General (AG) Corps is already laying the groundwork for advances in enhancing our human resources (HR) blueprint through the Integrated Personnel and Pay System-Army (IPPS-A), a game-changer that streamlines HR efforts while maximizing accessibility. However, there is even more potential to reinforce our HR model by placing customer service at the forefront. Imagine constructing a robust Army HR structure by channeling the winning strategies of industry giants

like Amazon, USAA, and Chick-fil-A. By embracing these proven methodologies, we can create a customer service experience that is not only more consistent and efficient but also precisely engineered to our Soldiers. This approach will build trust and responsiveness across all S-1 shops.

By embracing these proven methodologies, we can create a customer service experience that is not only more consistent and efficient but also precisely engineered to our Soldiers. This approach will build trust and responsiveness across all S-1 shops.

Laying the Foundation: Why Customer Service Matters in Army HR

Blueprints are not just about lines on a page. They ensure stability and function. In Army HR, customer service is the foundation, the load-bearing beams that hold up the entire personnel support system. Personnel support is not just an administrative task. It directly impacts the careers, well-being, and morale of every Soldier. While IPPS-A has automated many functions, the heartbeat of HR still lies in human interaction. A 2024 Five9 study revealed that 75% of people prefer speaking with a live representative when dealing with customer service issues.

That rings true for Soldiers who seek real-time, face-to-face support when navigating complex personnel matters.

A well-executed HR experience builds trust, reinforces morale, and elevates Soldier satisfaction. Conversely, a

weak foundation, marked by delays, miscommunication, and impersonal interactions, creates cracks that lead to frustration, decreased unit cohesion, and diminished retention rates. The Army's direct, mission-focused culture often contrasts with the empathy required in HR functions. AG Corps professionals must become masters of precision and compassion, ensuring every Soldier feels heard, valued, and supported. By integrating best practices from industry leaders, Army HR can construct a service-first framework that enhances the Soldier experience at every level and strengthens the Army's foundation for future readiness.

Blueprints from Industry Leaders: Building Blocks for Army HR Excellence

In the competitive landscape of customer service, industry giants meticulously draft detailed blueprints that emphasize efficiency, comprehensive training, and genuine engagement. Three exemplary models serve as invaluable sources of inspiration for Army HR in its quest for excellence. USAA stands out with a blueprint that intricately understands the military culture, crafting personalized service that resonates deeply with its members. Chick-fil-A adopts a different schematic, prioritizing proactive engagement and a service-first mindset, ensuring every customer feels valued and prioritized. Meanwhile, Amazon revolutionizes the service blueprint through its innovative integration of artificial intelligence (AI) technology and self-service options, optimizing efficiency to keep customers satisfied and engaged.

By delving into the strategic plans and practices of these trailblazing organizations, Army HR can refine its own blueprint for personnel services and can guarantee that Soldiers receive exceptional support, regardless of the circumstances. A steadfast commitment to high-quality service will ultimately build a stronger, more resilient community dedicated to serving those who serve us all.

USAA: The Pillars of Empathy and Problem Solving

Let us embark on a journey with the insurance titan USAA. Picture a structure meticulously built on empathy, efficiency, and proactive problem solving. Each

of these pillars resonates with the mission of Army HR. Just as a master architect breaks ground with a solid foundation, USAA employees are rigorously trained in active listening, emotional intelligence, and swift decision making.

Now, imagine if Army HR took a page from this blueprint. By integrating customer service training into advanced individual training (AIT) and unit-level sustainment programs, Army HR can lay the groundwork for a team ready to handle real-world personnel challenges. Through scenario-based exercises, HR professionals can prepare to confront and resolve issues with confidence and foresight.

What if we also empowered first-line NCOs to wield greater decision-making power? Much like USAA empowers its workforce, this move could dismantle bottlenecks and expedite personnel solutions. USAA also thrives on a culture of immersion, where many employees are veterans or military spouses, and those who are not dive deep into intensive training to grasp the nuances of military life. Army HR professionals can harness this same spirit, embedding themselves within the operational environments they serve, visiting training sites, participating in field exercises, and uncovering the unique challenges faced by each unit. This hands-on engagement builds trust and fortifies HR's role as an essential enabler of readiness.

To take this blueprint to new heights, HR teams must launch regular training cycles where professionals rotate through different units, gaining firsthand insight into the various operational demands they face. Establishing mentorship programs between seasoned HR experts and junior HR Soldiers further enriches institutional knowledge. As Army HR embraces this dynamic, hands-on approach, it not only fulfills its mission but also inspires a new era of readiness and resilience in service to our military family.

Chick-fil-A: The Framework for a Service-First Mindset

Imagine stepping into a world where every meal is not just about sustenance but an unforgettable experience.

Chick-fil-A has mastered this art, consistently topping charts for customer satisfaction through its meticulous attention to hospitality. At the heart of their success lies what they call the Core 4 Model, where eye contact, a warm smile, a friendly tone, and a personal connection create a vibrant tapestry of service that sets a gold standard. Not to be outdone, their HEARD Model (Hear, Empathize, Apologize, Resolve, Delight) ensures that every customer's concern is handled with the utmost urgency and care.

Now, picture Army HR professionals applying this same transformative blueprint to their own service framework. A simple greeting to Soldiers, combined with eye contact and clear communication, weaves trust into the fabric of routine HR transactions.

Additionally, one of the standout principles that Chick-fil-A embodies is proactive engagement. Their employees do not wait behind the counter. They leap into the drive-thru lane, cutting wait times and enhancing efficiency. This dynamic approach paints a vivid picture for Army HR, suggesting the use of mobile HR stations in busy areas, whether at unit footprints, training sites, or motor pools. By bringing personnel support directly to Soldiers, disruptions to training schedules are minimized. Moreover, these mobile HR teams could proactively address recurring personnel issues before they snowball into larger concerns. To solidify this service-first ethos, HR teams can track and analyze the common concerns voiced by Soldiers, creating a continuous improvement cycle for customer service training and personnel policies. A feedback loop system can be incorporated, encouraging Soldiers to share real-time insights about their HR interactions. Through this elevated blueprint of service, the AG Corps can redefine the Soldier experience, ensuring every interaction is not just a transaction, but a testament to dedicated service.

Amazon: Engineering Efficiency Through Technology

Amazon has set an exhilarating gold standard for efficiency. With a relentless focus on the customer-first approach, Amazon stands apart from traditional businesses that often rely on manual interactions. Instead, it has

perfected a dynamic system that empowers customers to resolve issues quickly and independently, only reaching out to human representatives when absolutely necessary. This exciting hybrid model of automation and human expertise serves as a powerful blueprint for Army HR. IPPS-A marks an important step toward adopting this groundbreaking approach, but there is still so much more potential waiting to be unlocked.

Amazon goes beyond mere automation. Every facet of its system is meticulously crafted with the user in mind. We now live in a world where Soldiers can effortlessly check the status of their personnel action requests and update personal records. What if we advanced this technology further? What if Soldiers had access to AI-driven support that provided accurate, regulation-backed responses in real time? This could transform the experience for our Soldiers.

Moreover, Amazon uses robust data analytics to elevate service delivery to new heights. Army HR can harness this principle by actively tracking common personnel issues and employing data-driven trends to proactively tackle bottlenecks before they escalate into larger problems. By weaving machine learning into HR processes, the Army could unleash the power of predictive models that anticipate personnel needs and transition HR teams from reactive problem solving to forward-thinking personnel management.

And let us not forget how Amazon continually refines its self-service tools to amplify user experience. Army HR can mirror this strategy by ensuring that IPPS-A remains not only intuitive but also adaptive. Imagine a future where AI-powered HR assistants are seamlessly integrated into IPPS-A, guiding Soldiers step-by-step through personnel actions, similar to how Amazon's support systems expertly navigate customers through complex transactions. By adopting Amazon's visionary model as a motivating framework, Army HR can cultivate an ecosystem where efficiency and Soldier support thrive together.

Building a Soldier-First HR Culture

So, how can we build a Soldier-first HR culture? The answer is straightforward: a robust plan and

a strong foundation are essential. A thoughtfully crafted blueprint guarantees that each beam, bolt, and foundation stone fits seamlessly, resulting in a lasting structure. In Army HR, this means enhancing customer service at every level to construct an unwavering support system that Soldiers trust. From their first encounter with HR in AIT to continued engagements throughout their careers, every interaction must reinforce a culture of professionalism, efficiency, and care.

To cement this culture, the Army must lay the groundwork early. Just as apprentices study blueprints before they ever set foot on a construction site, HR professionals must receive comprehensive training in customer service fundamentals at the U.S. Army Soldier Support Institute at Fort Jackson. Teaching skills such as active listening, de-escalation, and problem solving from the outset ensures that HR Soldiers are equipped to handle personnel matters with the same level of expertise as a seasoned tradesman following an architectural plan. But a structure is not built in a day. Ongoing reinforcement is essential. Customer service training must be embedded into annual courses. Aligning these efforts with IPPS-A training updates ensures HR remains adaptive, responsive, and future-focused.

The key to Soldier buy-in is not just training; it is ownership. When Soldiers understand that excellent HR service is not just about paperwork but about readiness and support, they begin to see themselves as critical architects of the Army's success. Leaders must empower HR Soldiers to take initiative and allow them to propose solutions, improve efficiency, and actively contribute to a culture of service-first HR. Recognizing and rewarding outstanding service reinforces good practices and motivates professionals to uphold high standards.

By shaping a workforce that values service as much as precision, Army HR will transform from an administrative necessity into a trusted pillar of Soldier success. Just as USAA builds trust through its deep understanding of military culture, just as Chick-fil-A thrives on proactive engagement, and just as Amazon

sets the gold standard in efficiency, Army HR must combine these strengths to create an exceptional customer service model.

Conclusion

The AG Corps is on the brink of a thrilling transformation. By embracing the powerful, empathy-driven strategies of USAA, the proactive engagement of Chick-fil-A, and the unrivaled efficiency of Amazon, Army HR is poised to provide world-class customer service dedicated to serving Soldiers with unmatched precision and heartfelt care. While our analysis of methodologies from Amazon, USAA, and Chick-fil-A is illuminating, it is just a glimpse into the vast ocean of innovative strategies waiting to be explored. To truly craft an HR system that evolves alongside the needs of our Soldiers, we must embark on a continuous quest to uncover new industry best practices, dive into emerging technologies, and adopt visionary strategies from diverse sectors. Through comprehensive training, cutting-edge technology, and an invigorating culture that cherishes customer service as fiercely as mission readiness, our HR professionals emerge as trusted architects shaping Soldier success. This transformation is not merely an improvement. It is a bold commitment to excellence.

The blueprint is drawn, and the materials are primed, but true excellence demands relentless refinement and adaptability. By nurturing a vibrant culture of continuous improvement and innovation, we will position Army HR as a beacon of personnel support, ever changing and always ready to serve our Soldiers in new and exciting ways. Now is the moment to breathe life into this vision, one dynamic interaction at a time.

MAJ Rita Failes is a resident student in the Command and General Staff Officer Course at the Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. She was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Adjutant General Corps in 2014 and has served in key personnel and sustainment roles, including G-1 essential personnel services OIC for the 13th Armored Sustainment Command at Fort Hood, Texas; brigade S-1 for the 110th Aviation Brigade at Fort Rucker, Alabama; and battalion S-1 OIC for the 5th Military Police Battalion in Kaiserslautern, Germany. Her military education includes the Adjutant General Basic Officer Leaders Course and the Adjutant General Captains Career Course, both completed at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. She holds a Master of Human Relations degree from the University of Oklahoma.