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# What Every Boss Wants: Forecasting

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# *What Every Boss Wants: Forecasting*

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It was the first day at my new unit. As a staff officer I wasn't surprised when the Battalion Executive Officer (XO), my new boss, motioned me into his office for a chat. What he said next left me speechless. I anticipated the normal "welcome to the unit" speech, but instead he offered one sentence worth of guidance and sent me on my way: "forecast my needs and that of the unit and you will succeed here." What exactly did he mean by this? How does one forecast without additional information? Where should I start? What should the priority be? How far out should I forecast? My new boss clearly didn't have the time to answer these questions, so I would have to figure it.

Missions are often filled with ambiguity. Commander's intent is designed to allow for flexibility. It lacks specificity by design. Solutions, however, require the opposite. They demand specific inputs. How many rounds of ammunition are required? How much water should we bring? How many meals should we request? Number of batteries for the radios? Grid coordinates for ambulance exchange points? None of these are vague. Get it wrong and you will suffer the consequences.

As I walked to my new office I made a commitment to figure out what the XO meant. Forecast his needs. Okay, great. So that means I should look one level up. "And that of the unit" likely means two levels up or it means look laterally. I can figure that out. The word "forecast" seems intuitive enough. I would set out to make accurate predictions both one level up and laterally for future events. This will require understanding how the unit performed similar events in the past as well as understanding my role as conditions change.

The idea was simple but brilliant. I need to stay out of the near-fight. My boss needs me to delegate the routine day-to-day tasks in order to think deliberately about the future. But I shouldn't limit planning to my stovepipe. I need to consider how the other staff sections integrate and what resources they might need. This will require synchronization and cross-talk. The beauty of this idea is it will also free the boss to think one level up and long-term. He won't need to reach down and micro-manage each staff section. If we all forecast the needs of the unit, it really will succeed.

The first opportunity I had to demonstrate this in action was an upcoming Battalion-level small arms qualification. Why were we doing this? To qualify yes, but we needed to qualify for the buddy team live-fire range next quarter. To an organization that wasn't concerned about forecasting, you simply conduct the qualification range. However, to us qualification became an opportunity for much more. How could we anticipate the boss's needs at the live-fire? Well, we could use this range to validate

safety NCOs. We could expand the training to include classes or practice at react to contact, bounding, buddy team movements, and other similar drills. To accommodate this, we would leverage the time soldiers normally wasted behind the firing line while waiting to shoot. We could also pull key leaders to conduct a recon of the live-fire ranges. This would pay dividends when we started to develop the live-fire plan.

Had we simply focused on the mission at hand we no doubt would have completed it, but we would have missed this opportunity to get ahead of the next event. But where does the lateral thinking come in? In this example we should invite a few members of our sister Battalion or even Brigade staff to come qualify. It is the gesture of a good team player and doing so would provide depth should we need additional lane walker or safety support in the future.

When the small arms qualification ranges finally came time to execute, the boss was pleased. Even more so when the Commanding General unexpectedly arrived. We had an extra range briefing book and hot coffee waiting. You see, we forecasted this might happen and subsequently prepared for it.

This one example merely serves to illuminate the possibilities of forecasting. If you keep the XO's guidance foremost in your mind, you will be forced to think beyond the immediate. This puts your unit in a proactive position and contributes to unit success. Should you find yourself lacking clear guidance, remember to forecast the needs of your boss and that of your unit.