

'Master black belt' cited for leaning medical retention boards

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Under Secretary of the Army Joseph Westphal and Lt. Gen. William T. Grisoli, director of the office of business transformation, presented a 2011 Army Lean/Six Sigma Excellence Awards Program award to Shane Wentz, during a ceremony Nov. 29, 2011, at the Pentagon.

WASHINGTON (Army News Service, Nov. 29, 2011) -- Shane Wentz isn't entirely responsible for reducing processing time for the Military Occupational Specialty/Medical Retention Board process by more than half -- but he is responsible for validating the results of the effort.

Wentz, a "master black belt" in Lean Six Sigma, was honored for his contribution Nov. 29 at the Pentagon during a ceremony to recognize winners in the 2011 Army Lean/Six Sigma Excellence Awards Program, or LEAP.

"These awards of course recognize the work that organizations and team leaders have been doing in finding real savings, and really getting these business processes to perform much better," said Under Secretary of the Army Joseph Westphal at the LEAP awards ceremony. "I am a big supporter of Lean/Six Sigma because I think it does give us a way ahead. It is always a learning process, it builds sustainability within our business processes so that future leaders, future managers can benefit from the success of all of you today and we can continue to learn and move those processes forward."

Wentz had been nominated for his part in developing the Military Occupational Specialty, or MOS, Administrative Retention Review, known as the MAR2 process. That process will soon replace the existing MMRB process, and takes less than half the time to complete.

When a Soldier, for medical reasons, is no longer able to perform in his or her MOS, the Army must decide if the Soldier can be allowed to continue in that MOS, can be moved to a new MOS, or should be separated from the Army.

Under the existing MMRB process, it takes the Army an average of 61 days to come to that decision, but the time in some cases could be as much as 400 days. Under the newly developed MAR2 process, it takes less than a month.

"I don't think we've seen any take more than 30 days now," Wentz said.

When a Soldier is going through either the existing MMRB process or the newly developed MAR2 process, they are essentially stuck in one location -- meaning they can't deploy, they can't make a permanent change of station, and they can't go to school. That's a problem for both

Soldiers and commanders, because being in either process means a Soldier's future is on hold.

"It is scary for the Soldier and their family, and that's one of the problems they had is some of these Soldiers were sitting in excess of a year waiting for this process to go through," Wentz said. "In that year they don't know what their career is going to be."

The reduced processing time of MAR2 means Soldiers will spend less time waiting to get on with their careers and their lives. That's good for the Soldiers, their families and their commanders.

"That Soldier and their family don't have to sit and wait -- and commanders -- the feedback from commanders has been phenomenal," Wentz said. "They know now within a month or so ... they are going to have a decision on that Soldier. It helps with that non-deployable problem, which is a huge issue for the Army now."

Wentz is very clear about his role in developing the MAR2 process -- he didn't come up with the idea. "I wasn't the good idea fairy on that one," he said. "I just helped them show that the good idea really was."

"My piece of it was helping with the analysis, setting up how we are going to do the analysis," Wentz said. "When they said MMRB is not working well, I was the one that went in and pulled data from four different active-duty sites, ran and crunched the numbers and did the analysis and said -- here's exactly how bad it is currently working."

Wentz was able to show, using Lean and Six Sigma tools, that MAR2 was better than MMRB because it took less time to process, generated fewer errors, cost less money, and didn't have the variability in outcome of MMRB.

Part of the problem with the MMRB was the amount of variation within the process due to boards being run on a monthly basis at installations around the Army.

"Every installation was doing it differently," Wentz said. "Or a lot of the installations were doing it differently."

As an example, at one location, due to medical reasons a corporal in the infantry might now only be able to lift 30 pounds. The requirement for an 11B is that he be able to lift 40 pounds. The board at his installation might allow him to stay in the Army as an infantryman, however. At another location though, there might be a different outcome.

"There was a lot of variation within that process," Wentz said.

The MAR2 process has done away with the local boards. Now, Wentz said, a Soldier's profile, along with a commander's recommendation and a Soldier's recommendation are submitted through the chain of command to Human Resources Command, and HRC makes a determination based on those three documents and what the regulation says.

With the MAR2 process, Soldiers and commanders will get answers faster, and the answers will be consistent no matter where they are. Additionally, the Army will have better visibility over the MAR2 process. Finally, under MAR2, the Army will yield a cost avoidance of as much as \$15.3 million a year due to reduced manpower costs for processing packets, conducting boards, and reduced paper costs.

Wentz is a "master black belt" in Lean Six Sigma certification. That's one of three certification levels, which also include a green belt and a black belt. Lean and Six Sigma, Wentz said, are tools "used to improve the efficiencies and effectiveness of processes."

Lean is used to get rid of waste in a process, while Six Sigma is used to reduce variation.

Wentz served 20 years in the Army and retired this year as a master sergeant. He now works as an Army civilian at the Army's Human Resources Command as the deputy SIG chief. He became involved in Lean and Six Sigma while working on his MBA in 2006-2007.

Approval to implement the MAR2 process throughout the Army is currently being staffed to the Secretary of the Army. The Army Reserve and the Army National Guard are currently using MAR2 as a pilot program.