

An Interview with Grant McFarlane: Regimental Sergeant Major- Army

Chris Sharp (CS): What have you learned from the Chief of Army (CA) in the past year?

Grant McFarlane (GM): I've learned that the [Chief of Army](#) is passionate about the direction that the Australian Army is taking, that he's clear in that direction, and he is encouraging our Army to think differently. He's encouraging us all to be part of the solution for our Army. The Chief of Army is about setting the Army up for success well into the future.

Samuel Cox (SC): You mentioned in that answer that the Chief of Army is encouraging us to think differently. You've been in the Army for a long time now. What ideas are you seeing nowadays that are entirely new?

GM: We are encouraging our soldiers to think about the future. They have a voice in our Army, and they can assist in the direction of our *Army in Motion*. Nowhere, in my time, has there been engagement this deep with soldiers and junior leaders.

SC: How does the work you and the Chief of Army do here in Canberra apply to and impact Army's junior soldiers in units all across Australia? Why should they care about the Chief's [strategic documents](#)?

GM: Everything that comes out of the Office of the Chief of Army, especially these key documents, is about soldiers and their future. The strategic documents are informed by feedback from working groups that happen at lower levels. Nothing is done in isolation. We are endeavouring to set up our leaders and new capabilities for success. They will be the ones who develop the training, techniques and procedures (TTPs) and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for Army's new capabilities. They should care, because it's about their future.

CS: After over a year in the role of RSM-A, can you give me your three main After Action Review (AAR) points for the state of the Army at this time? 'The Improve', 'The Fix' (for that improve), and 'The Sustain'.

GM: The Sustain: The Army is in good shape; the best I've seen it in my career. The modernisation of our organisation is first rate, and our people are engaged. There are so many soldiers out there that are studying or doing other things to develop themselves and it's really pleasing.

The Improve: I want to encourage people to keep getting better every day and keep educating themselves in a manner that suits them and their desired outcome for professional development.

The Fix: [That doesn't mean getting a degree, but being prepared to write](#), even short blogs, and perhaps we can get after instilling those behaviours in the All Corps Training Continuum. Developing critical thinking on a Corporal's course might involve writing a reflective paper at the end of each week, or one at the start and one at the end of course about what sort of

person and leader they are and that they want to be. I think journaling is something everyone should undertake to reflect on what we've done and we're we've come from. I do it. I really value reflecting on where I've come from.

SC: Engaging with writing and reading as a way to think critically and innovatively, as well as challenging accepted ideas, is a cultural change that is captured by [Good Soldiering](#). What do our junior leaders need to understand about that document?

GM: *Good Soldiering* encompasses everything that we want to get after in our Army and is central to good character, forming teams and leadership. It's about our core values and culture underpinning every individual in our Army: courage, initiative, respect, teamwork, looking after your mates, being honest and being responsible. It's one of the best documents our Army's ever come up with for our soldiers and leaders.

SC: What does the RSM-A do? Are there any issues or programs you are taking ownership of addressing/delivering during your time as RSM-A? What is the nature of your command relationship with CA?

GM: I don't have ownership of any issue, but I'm here to support the Chief of Army and everything our Army does. I am an enabler for other people, including the Chief, to move ideas forward, and I am a sounding board for ideas. My relationship with the Chief is no different to that between a Lieutenant and a Sergeant. We communicate, we travel together, we travel separately, and we share trust and accountability. I think we're a very good team.

CS: Over your career, in what role or from what person did you learn the most about leadership?

GM: Warrant Officer Class One Arthur Francis, CSC, OAM was a mentor from 1985 when he came to the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR) as the RSM until he passed away. I was a scrawny, little Corporal who was close to leaving the Army when I met him. He changed my world. Another mentor is Warrant Officer Class One Kevin Woods CSC, OAM; now retired. He really taught me to understand people and to give everyone a fair go as my Directing Supervisor (DS) on Subject One- Sergeant in 1989. Finally, [Major General Adam Findlay, AM](#), now Special Operations Commander, when we were Commanding Officer (CO) and RSM together at 3RAR. He is a great leader.

I've taken bits of goodness from all three of these people and made it my own.

CS: What have you learned from failure?

GM: Don't fear it and accept that you will make mistakes. Learn and adapt from those experiences. We need to support people to let them fail safely, then debrief on that failure, and go again.

CS: That's definitely a message I'm trying to get across to the trainees in my Squadron at the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA). The CSM and Squadron Sergeant Major (SSM) are there to be a sounding board for Lieutenants. Yes, the Officer Commanding (OC) is running the show, but Lieutenants don't need to leave the OC's office and go straight back to

Platoon Headquarters (PHQ) when they can come by the CSM/SSM's office. A Lieutenant doesn't have to do everything alone; leadership is not a solo endeavour and there are people there to help them. If you do the right thing, your CSM/SSM will always back you.

GM: That's good advice. There needs to be trust between a CSM/SSM and Lieutenants.

CS: What is your proudest moment in Army?

GM: I always wanted to be Company Sergeant Major, Charlie Company, 3RAR. When I achieved that, my wife challenged me: "what's next?" I decided I wanted to be RSM 3 RAR and then a Career Manager so that the Royal Australian Infantry Corps and larger Army was setup for success and that there were procedures in place to develop the workforce. I achieved both of these. The journey since then has been full of fantastic opportunities, development at every rank level, and I've thoroughly enjoyed each job. I've learnt something every day.

CS: That reflects the importance of goal setting, rather than flapping in the wind without anything to work towards.

GM: Definitely, and people need to know what your goals are in order to support you. I haven't had a 'normal' career or followed the 'traditional' pathway to become RSM-A, and I believe Career Managers shouldn't be afraid to support that. People should be encouraged to develop themselves along their career journey.

Warrant Officer Class One Grant McFarlane, OAM, has served as the Regimental Sergeant Major of the 10th/27th Battalion, Royal South Australia Regiment, 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 2nd Division and Career Management– Army. He was officially appointed as the 11th Regimental Sergeant Major– Army in July 2018.

It helps to know what is happening when you challenge the accepted. 10in10 is an interview series designed to share insight into future-leaning work across the Australian profession of arms. One interview will be released every day for 10 days. You can find previous interviews [here](#).

About the Authors: *Chris Sharp is a Squadron Sergeant Major at the Officer Training College within the Australian Defence Force Academy. He has been an Associate Editor with Grounded Curiosity since 2017. You can follow him on Twitter via the handle [@SHARP_CR](#).*

Samuel J. Cox is the editor of Grounded Curiosity. You can follow him on Twitter via the handle [@samuel_j_cox](#).