



Relational Wisdom for Military Chaplains

By Ken Sande | www.rw360.org

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OVERVIEW

When military personnel seek out a chaplain, it's usually because of a relational problem at home, in their unit or in their chain of command. These problems are often aggravated by the fact that many individuals have never learned how to read and manage their own emotions, much less those of the people around them (see [Raising Emotionally Stunted Boys](#)) or by the fact that their [ascent in authority has impaired their capacity for empathy](#). As a result, they are unaware of how emotions are clouding their judgment, aggravating misunderstandings, and triggering decisions that reduce military readiness and resilience, damage family bonds and contribute to the incidence of [sexual assault](#), [divorce](#), [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) and [suicide](#) among military personnel.



Relational wisdom is an enhanced form of emotional intelligence that chaplains can use to help others navigate relational challenges, thereby strengthening combat readiness and resiliency as well as family bonds. When individuals are facing an immediate relational crisis, chaplains can show them how to apply the principles of relational wisdom to manage their emotions, read others accurately, avoid impulsive reactions, communicate graciously and resolve conflicts in a way that reduces stress and builds trust, respect and unit cohesiveness.

Better yet, chaplains can teach these relational principles *proactively* within their units, helping military personnel *and their families* to develop relational skills that enable them to *get upstream of conflict* and experience stronger and more productive relationships, both professionally and personally. These skills include self-awareness and self-discipline, empathy, communication, anger management, conflict resolution, interest-based negotiation and emotional resilience.

AVAILABLE IN FAITH-BASED AND VALUES-BASED FORMATS

Relational wisdom is being taught in a wide variety of settings, including military bases, businesses, social service agencies, counseling organizations, churches, police and fire departments, [state legislatures](#) and to [members of the U.S. Congress](#). Training resources are available in both [faith-based](#) and [values-based](#) (secular) formats that can be adjusted to match the worldviews and core values of different individuals and audiences (see [sample corporate, military and first responder core values statements](#)). RW360's resources have been approved

for use in the U.S. Army's [Building Strong and Ready Teams Program](#) and the U.S. Air Force's [Strong Bonds Program](#).

FAMILY BENEFITS

Teaching relational wisdom in military units can produce a double benefit. When service men and women take new relational skills home, they can enjoy more stable marriages and better parenting relationships, thereby helping to reduce the military divorce rate of 3% or [21,000 troops per year](#).

These benefits are magnified when spouses and children improve their relational skills through the same training. Studies show that individuals who leave a peaceful home in the morning tend to be more focused and productive when they come to work (see [Employers Reap a Double Benefit with RW Training](#)). These relational improvements are so consistently pronounced that they can be measured in financial terms:

“When companies invest in the physical and relational wellness of their workers, returns on investment can range between \$1.50 and \$6.85 for every dollar spent on these types of programs.” [Relational Wellness: Corporate America’s Business](#)

SUPPORTING STUDIES

The value of improved relational skills in a military setting is described in numerous articles.

1. [Fifteen Ways that Relational Wisdom Builds Readiness and Resilience in the Military](#) (RW360 Blog)

“Before being elected to Congress from Oklahoma, Lt. Col. (U.S. Army, Retired) Steve Russell led the 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 4th infantry Division in Iraq. In 2003, his battalion occupied Tikrit, Saddam Hussein’s hometown, during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Steve’s book, [We Got Him: A Memoir of the Hunt and Capture of Saddam Hussein](#), provides numerous examples of the importance of relational skills in military leadership.”

2. [Emotional Intelligence and the Modern Military Advisor \(2020\)](#)

“Security Force Assistance Brigades, outfitted with NCOs competent in EI, will be the global leaders in contested environments across all domains as the U.S. Army continues to set the standard for what a military leader must be, know, and do.”

3. [Emotional Intelligence: A Step on the Path to Developing “People First” Leaders](#)

“Junior leaders can utilize emotional intelligence to better themselves, their Soldiers, and the Army as a whole. In the end, EI provides leaders the skills needed to genuinely care for their subordinates, promote trust, and form cohesive teams that invest in and value their people. “People First” must be more than a slogan for us. Emotional intelligence provides a concrete solution that if correctly prioritized and altruistically implemented, can help manifest the positive change we need in our formations.”

4. [‘This Is My Squad’: SMA Grinston Talks About His Push to Build Cohesive Units](#)
“The new SMA wants to find and replicate the model of strong, cohesive units across the Army by focusing on the positive aspects of being a soldier. Doing so will hopefully address ongoing problems, including sexual harassment and assault, suicide prevention and domestic issues, while also building on Army readiness priorities like preparing soldiers for the new fitness test.”
5. [EI: Thoughts for Military Leaders](#) (2017, The Field Grade Leader)
“At its core, emotional intelligence, or EQ, is a set of characteristics or traits possessed by effective and influential leaders. Emotionally intelligent leaders have a heightened awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and can adjust their leadership approach after reading group dynamics.”
6. [To Be Effective, The Corps’ New “Toxic Leadership Test” Will Have To Be Marine-Proof](#) (Dec. 2017)
“The Marine Corps announced a pilot program to start giving re-enlisting Marines emotional intelligence, or EQ, tests. The idea is that testing for emotional intelligence might give them a chance to remove toxic leaders before they infect units as noncommissioned officers.”
7. [Emotional Intelligence, Leadership and Resilience](#) (2016)
“The Army has become smarter in the way it leads, educates and develops its leaders; especially as the concept of emotional intelligence evolves, transforming concepts of command and leadership and applying it diligently in order to improve leadership methods and techniques.”
8. [Emotional Intelligence and Self-Efficacy in Military Leaders](#) (2016)
“The study supported the hypothesis that the higher a leader’s emotional intelligence, the higher the leader’s self-efficacy.”
9. [How Emotional Intelligence Can Make a Difference](#) (March 2011)
“The Army has recognized the need for mental resiliency beyond the battlefield – and not just for soldiers, but for all members of the Army family. The necessity for strengthening this vital behavior has become more significant because of the stress on the force of more than nine years of war.”
10. [Creating an Emotionally Intelligent Warrior](#) (2011, Washington Post)
“The past 10 years and two wars have made clear that professionals working in today’s complex, high-risk operating environments do not need more technical skills, but rather more sophisticated social skills to build their leadership capacity.”
11. [Emotional Intelligence and Army Leadership](#) (March, 2007)
“Leaders who exhibit heightened levels of emotional intelligence may be more likely to engage in transformational leadership behaviors than those individuals who possess lower levels of emotional intelligence.”

12. [The 3 C's of Leadership](#) (2008, Air Force Public Affairs)

“The importance of emotional intelligence is also illustrated by the number of workshops and seminars constantly offered and attended by businesspeople and military leaders. Improving one's ability to interact in conflict management, negotiations, communications, consensus building and persuasion are but a few traits targeted in these seminars. The military environment provides the opportunity for individuals to excel in many of these traits.”

COURSE DEVELOPER

Ken Sande is the founder of Peacemaker Ministries and Relational Wisdom 360. Trained as a mechanical engineer, lawyer and mediator, Ken has conciliated hundreds of family, business, church and legal conflicts. As president of RW360, he now focuses on teaching people how to build strong relationships in the family, church and workplace. He teaches internationally and is the author of numerous books, articles, and training resources, including *The Peacemaker*, which has sold over 500,000 copies in twenty languages. He is a Certified Emotional Intelligence Instructor with [Talent-Smart](#), a Certified Relational Wisdom Conciliator and Instructor, and has served on the Alternative Dispute Resolution Committee of the Montana Bar Association and as a Certified Professional Engineer and as an Editorial Advisor for Christianity Today. Live RW seminars are taught by RW360 staff and Certified Relational Wisdom Instructors™.

TRAINING RESOURCES

[Values-Based Summary Sheet](#)

[Values-Based Website](#)

[Values-Based Study Guide](#)

[Values-Based Online Course](#)

[Values-Based DVD Set](#)

[RW360 Smartphone App](#)

[Faith-Based Summary Sheet](#)

[Faith-Based Website](#)

[Faith-Based Study Guide](#)

[Faith-Based Online Course](#)

[Faith-Based DVD Set](#)

RESOURCE APPLICATIONS

➤ Reactive – Responding to Current Conflict and Relational Challenges

- Use [Smartphone App](#) for quick overview of a key principles
- Share [RW articles or blog posts](#) that apply to specific presenting issues
- As a supplement to personal or marriage counseling, recommend that soldiers (and their spouses) go through either the faith-based or values-based [online course](#) and then meet with the chaplain periodically to review their Personal Study Notes and discuss specific issues and applications.
- To help soldiers and their families resolve conflict, provide them with a copy of [The Peacemaker](#), [Peacemaking for Families](#) or [The Young Peacemaker](#) books and recommend specific chapters or assign questions in [The Peacemaker: Personal Application Workbook](#).

➤ Proactive – Equipping Service Personnel with Improved Relational Skills

Don't wait for the next crisis ... get upstream of conflict! When servicemen and women experience relational tensions or conflict, they are likely to share their concerns with a

peer before turning to a chaplain. If every person in a unit has been trained in the basic principles of relational wisdom and conflict resolution, they will be equipped to offer one another constructive, relationship-building advice rather than simply commiserating and inflaming emotional reactions. Here are some practical ways to provide such training.

- Make short 15-30 minute presentations on relational wisdom to units on a regular schedule, using either the [faith-based RW Pamphlet](#) or the [values-based RW Pamphlet](#) and referring soldiers to the more detailed training online.
- Use [RW blog posts](#) in staff meetings, newsletters and other communications to teach and reinforce relevant relational concepts.
- Arrange small group studies for soldiers or couples using either the [faith-based DVD set](#) or the [values-based DVD set](#) (typically 60-90 minutes per lesson).
- “Flip education” by arranging small group studies where soldiers or couples go through the [online course](#) on their own time and then get together as a group with a course moderator to discuss and apply what they are learning.
- Enhance personal or group studies by using the discussion questions and case studies in [Challenging Military Scenarios](#) (or develop your own scenarios).
- Arrange study groups just for spouses so they can discuss the unique relational challenges in their lives and the lives of their children.

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