

CREATING A MARKETING & SALES PROGRAM FROM SCRATCH: RECRUITING FOR U.S. ARMY ROTC.

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SUMMARY

The U.S. Army Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) is a program at many United States colleges and universities. It offers training for students to become officers in the U.S. Army after graduation. Run by officers and non-commissioned officers of the U.S. Army, Army ROTC provides classroom instruction and hands-on training for its students, called “cadets,” that supplements their academic studies. To provide practical leadership experience, much of the training, administration, and other responsibilities in the program are provided by the cadets themselves, especially senior-year cadets. These responsibilities include the recruitment of students into Army ROTC.

This case study will look at how I, as a senior-year cadet responsible for recruitment, quickly developed a recruiting program for the U.S. Army Reserve Officers Training Corps at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts. Besides considering its success in recruiting a record number of students, this study will also consider where my recruiting program was unsuccessful and why.

Specifically, this study will address:

- How I defined my target market and performed market research.
- How I transformed research results into value propositions and a customer journey map.
- The different marketing and sales methods I employed and how.
- The obstacles I faced.
- Where my program failed and why.

Topics discussed:

- Defining target market
- Market research
- Value propositions
- Journey map
- Mail, telemarketing, and face-to-face sales campaigns
- Medium as part of the message
- Training & empowering telemarketers
- Overcoming rejection
- Recruitment
- Retention

SITUATION

In the Army Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, I was put in charge of recruiting during my senior year of college. Recruitment was one of the staff roles that senior cadets filled to gain leadership and management experience prior to becoming a U.S. Army officer after graduation. In my new role, I quickly learned there were no existing marketing plans or even telemarketing scripts for me to build on. Previous recruiting efforts had been an ad hoc affair with low recruitment numbers. This was reflected in my ROTC senior class having only thirteen members, although this was comparable to other ROTC programs in Boston-area colleges. I was given no recruiting goals by my Army officer superiors, but merely told to do my best.

Resources

A few weeks into my new role, I was to receive 10 telemarketers that I would train and supervise. These were junior-year cadets, all of whom had committed to becoming Army officers upon graduation. Because they were full-time college students, I had them for only two hours a week for one semester. Having committed to becoming Army officers, all these junior-year cadets received a monthly stipend, but they received no additional pay for their recruiting work. Nevertheless, because of their commitment to the Army ROTC program, they were all motivated to grow its membership.

The U.S. Army supported my efforts by identifying prospects using free-gift offers in magazines. I would be sent the contact information of anyone responding to an offer who said they were attending Northeastern University. The information I received included the prospect's academic major if they recorded one. The Army also placed advertising in the college newspaper, but I did not have input on its content. The Army also provided me with marketing brochures and banners that they produced.

Defining my target market

On my own initiative, I undertook a crash course in sales and marketing at the University's library. I learned about value propositions and customer journey mapping and realized I needed market research to develop them. Being a full-time student and needing to start recruiting soon, my research needed to be focused, simple, and quick.

For focus, I began by considering who would not need to be considered in my marketing. I realized that would be college students already inclined to serve in the military. Any student interested in the military, especially the Army, would seek out Army ROTC on their own, as I had. Since Army ROTC was the only ROTC program on campus, we had no competition from the Air Force, Navy, or Marines. Army ROTC had only to "show the flag" regularly to attract these students. We already did that by having our cadets wear their uniforms on the day we had our weekly training sessions.

What remained for me to focus on were those students not currently interested in the Army. These were students for whom the word "Army" might be an obstacle to considering ROTC. Nevertheless, to significantly increase membership in Army ROTC, I would have to appeal to this potentially difficult market. While some of these students might join, I expected it would be out of simple curiosity, not enthusiastic interest. Hopefully, some of these students who joined would become enthused, stay members, and perhaps become Army officers.

If recruiting the Army-averse proved possible, I had to ask myself, would it benefit the Army ROTC program to increase our membership with the merely curious? Most such people would likely quit as soon as their curiosity was satisfied. Imagining many students joining Army ROTC simply to see what it was like, I could see the following possible results:

- Once in Army ROTC, these students would learn about the Army and its opportunities. Some might then decide to stay in ROTC and become an officer --- perhaps not as an officer in the Regular (full-time) Army, but perhaps part-time in the National Guard or Army Reserve. They would likely have not made that decision had they not given Army ROTC a try.
- Anyone who participated in Army ROTC, even for a short time, would benefit from it. They would learn such useful things as first aid, heat and cold weather safety, weapon safety, map reading, and basic planning and organizing. If a new member quit soon after joining, their conversations with friends about their experience would likely be neutral if not positive. Even a negative opinion expressed to friends would help make common place the idea of giving Army ROTC a try.
- Recruiting a student who was not “officer material” was not a concern. It was already Army ROTC procedure to only invite those cadets to become Army officers who met objective standards and had the necessary character demonstrated by their performance in the program. In any event, the most unfit would likely quit soon after joining if they joined at all.
- The more cadets there were in Army ROTC, the more cadet leadership positions would be needed to supervise them during training. A larger membership would therefore mean more opportunities for leadership experience for cadets at every level of the program. Rather than diluting the quality of the officers the program produced, a much larger membership would improve it through increased leadership experience.

Given all this, I decided that Army-averse students would be my target market. Students already inclined to the military (the low-hanging fruit) would be attracted to Army ROTC by any marketing we did. I therefore saw no downside to my target market.

RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

To understand my target market of the Army-averse, I wanted to interview not only non-ROTC college students, but Army ROTC cadets who had joined without originally intending to go into the Army but had eventually decided to do so:

- For the cadets I would interview, I purposely omitted anyone going into the combat arms (Infantry, Armor, Artillery, etc.). Instead, I chose cadets going into a non-combat branch, such as the Finance, Transportation, Nursing, and Signal (communications) Corps. I omitted the combat arms cadets since their career interests were now different from that of most college students.
- The non-cadets I chose to interview had varied academic majors, such as business administration, pharmacology, nursing, and art.

Due to my time constraint, my sampling method was improvised. I therefore interviewed my housemates, non-ROTC classmates, and the random junior-year cadet who came into the Army ROTC office. Although improvised, this market research was the first known to have been done at our University’s ROTC program. No such research was available from our parent Army ROTC command.

My interview questions to both groups, cadet and non-cadet, were the same except for a few specific to each group. From my interviews, I learned the following:

Insights from non-cadet interviews

- They thought joining Army ROTC meant joining the Army.
- They thought being in the Army meant the Infantry (due to television and movies).
- They had never thought of being in the Army.
- They did not know that 90% of the Army was not intended to fight, but to provide services.
- When asked if they thought Army ROTC might have something to offer them, all of them said “**leadership skills**” with some adding “**confidence**” and “**discipline.**”
- They did not know you could participate up to your junior year with no commitment.

Insights from cadet interviews

All the cadets I interviewed had held, prior to joining Army ROTC, the same misconceptions and lack of interest in being in the Army. Despite this, they still had been curious about Army ROTC and so inquired. They explained their initial motivation was “to see what it was like” and were willing to try it when they learned there was no obligation to the Army. Keep in mind that I selected these cadets specifically because they had not initially intended to serve in the Army. Cadets like me had joined Army ROTC specifically to become officers, so our “customer journeys” were far different from that of my interviewed cadets and from what a typical college student’s journey would be.

As for why these cadets stayed in ROTC up to when they had to commit to becoming an officer, all said it was because they enjoyed the activities, had grown from them, and had formed close friendships with other cadets. One other reason given was the possibility of earning a full scholarship from the Army, which most did not get. Despite not getting a scholarship, these cadets still chose to stay in ROTC.

Side note: I had a friend who had participated in Army ROTC with me up to junior year, the time when she had to commit or leave. She had stayed a member up to that point solely for fun and friendships. Until I conducted my interviews, I had not realized her experience might serve as a marketing approach.

All the cadets I chose to interview were starting their junior year of college and had committed to becoming an Army officer. A commitment was needed by junior year because it was then the Army began to invest much more time and money in training. Therefore, only committed cadets could remain in Army ROTC past their sophomore year. In my interviews, I asked the cadets why they had decided to commit to becoming an Army officer. Some said they wanted a 20-year Army career for the pension they would get. Others told me it was because they realized the Army could help their business career goals: the Army offered more training and responsibility in their chosen profession than any business would offer a recent college graduate. Keep in mind that I intentionally omitted from my interviews those cadets going into the combat arms (Infantry, Armor, Artillery, etc.) since their “customer journey” was far different from what a typical college student’s journey would be. Instead, these were cadets pursuing a commission in service branches like Finance, Transportation, Nursing, and the Signal (communications) Corps.

What I learned from my interviews of non-cadets and cadets became the foundation of my strategy, telemarketing scripts, mail campaigns, and face-to-face recruiting events.

PLANNING & EXECUTION

I took the insights from my interviews and reduced them to these four value propositions:

1. No commitment

You can participate in Army ROTC without commitment up to your junior year.

2. Help your career

- Get leadership training and experience that will help you in your career.
- 90% of the Army provides services, from finance to veterinary medicine. If you choose to become an officer through Army ROTC, you will get more training and responsibility in your field than any civilian employer would offer in your first job.

3. Scholarships

Army ROTC offers the chance for full scholarships.

4. Fun & friendships

- Army ROTC is the largest extra-curricular activity on campus by number of members.
- Make friends and have fun doing things no other campus group can offer.

My strategy for my recruiting efforts was to get all four value propositions in that exact order into the minds of every Northeastern University student. The order of these four value propositions was critical:

- First, the commitment bogeyman had to be addressed at the start, strongly and convincingly. If that misconception were not overcome, anything else said would be ignored.
- Addressing “business career” second would build on the common knowledge that Army ROTC teaches soft skills useful in one’s career. Mentioning career enhancement would then provide a segue to mention that 90% of the Army was not meant to be in combat. By quickly mentioning the variety of Army officer jobs early, the prospect could not immediately reject Army ROTC on the grounds that “I don’t want to be a soldier, I want to be [some business profession].”
- At this point, we needed to quickly shift the focus back to the present moment. We can do this by considering the immediate student needs of tuition and expenses. Mentioning the chance for a full scholarship with a monthly stipend and textbook reimbursement would add a significant reason to not immediately dismiss Army ROTC.
- At this point in any messaging, the prospect would wonder how much time would be expected of them. The concern would be not just for time away from studies and night jobs, but from friends and fun as well. Therefore, all messaging would note at this point that Army ROTC was the largest extra-curricular activity on campus by number of students and so was a good way to meet people and make friends --- something particularly attractive to freshmen. After this, we could mention the time commitment and describe the training.

Having formed my strategy and marketing plan, I needed it approved by the cadet commander of the Army ROTC program (a fellow senior-year cadet) and then the Army officer commanding my Army ROTC program (a lieutenant colonel in the Signal Corps of the Army). Both gave their approval, but the lieutenant colonel noted that anything worthwhile was worth making a commitment (a criticism of my first value proposition, “no commitment”). I said I agreed, but since he had not specifically ordered me

to drop that value proposition, I proceeded with it. Later, when my tenure as recruiter was over and recruiting records had been set, I learned that my commander had instructed that recruiting should continue without any changes to how I had done it. “No commitment” would remain as value proposition #1.

I had chosen the phrase “no commitment” rather than “no obligation” because the former had fewer syllables and sounded friendlier --- less legalese. While I can agree with my commander that “no commitment” suggested the absence of earnestness, that was the tone I was trying to strike for my Army-averse target market.

Part of implementing my marketing strategy was to have a reporter from the student newspaper accompany our freshmen and sophomore cadets on a Saturday training trip to nearby Fort Devens, Massachusetts. With my superiors’ permission, the reporter could participate in the training. I brought up my value propositions whenever I could as I described the training and the instructors (who were from different Army branches). The reporter also interviewed random cadets during breaks in the training. Since all the cadets were there voluntarily, I knew they would speak well of the program. Although the subsequent newspaper article had the unfortunate title, “I Was a Soldier of Misfortune,” the article was positive and mentioned some of my value propositions. This included the critical “no commitment” to participate.

Here is how I implemented the rest of my strategy:

Mail Campaigns

Using my four value propositions, I composed a template for a letter to be sent to prospects. Each of my recruiting staff would use this template as a guide to write a short letter *by hand*. They would be assigned a prospect based on a shared (or similar) academic major. The template had the recruiter introduce themselves and explain that the letter was an invitation to one of our training sessions. Although the template had canned text, I instructed my recruiters to rewrite it in their own words. There were also places in the template where the recruiter was instructed to write how they came to join Army ROTC, what they got out of it, and why they stayed. In my training, I had instructed my recruiters that if they had joined with the intent of becoming officers, they should say so but add that it was OK if the prospect did not want to be one.

The reason for this letter and having it hand-written on ordinary paper (not official letterhead) was to emphasize that membership in Army ROTC was membership in an extra-curricular activity, not an enlistment in the United States Army. Although the return address on the envelopes clearly stated, “Northeastern University Army ROTC,” the informal, personal approach helped convey that Army ROTC offered fun and friendships.

In the sales cycle I developed, I would send prospects this personalized form letter as the first contact. It was less intrusive than a phone call and, being hand-written, had greater emotional appeal than a telemarketing call. This was substantiated when one recipient came by the Army ROTC office to learn more about the program. I later learned he was there because of the letter and had mentioned he was touched that someone had taken the time to write him a personal letter. More scientifically, I was able to track the success of these letters by comparing attendance rolls from our weekly training with the mailing list that was used the preceding week. I do not remember the statistics, but the success rate of these short letters was such that I continued using them as my first means of direct contact.

Telemarketing

I developed a telemarketing script in the form of a decision tree based on my four value propositions and their order of precedence. Following each question or statement the telemarketer would make, there was a branch for each likely response, positive or negative. For example, the script began with the telemarketer saying the call was to invite the prospect to an Army ROTC training session and that there was no commitment. If the prospect responded, "I'm not interested," the script would have the telemarketer ask, "Have you been in ROTC or know someone who has?" If the person responded "no", the script called for saying something like "A lot of people are in Army ROTC just for the leadership training and don't plan to go into the Army. Some do. Some win full scholarships. I'm inviting people to come to a training session to see what it's like. No commitment. Would you like to check it out?"

Early in the conversation, a prospect is likely to say they are not interested in the Army and so not interested in Army ROTC. My script had the telemarketer then ask about the prospect's academic major and career plans. Rarely did an academic major or profession not have a counterpart in the Army:

- Business Administration? The telemarketer would describe the Transportation Corps and the two supply branches, Quartermaster and Ordnance.
- Marketing? Anthropology? Sociology? The telemarketer would describe the Military Intelligence Corps and its information warfare specialization.
- Mathematics? The telemarketer would explain that was needed in almost every branch to solve problems of logistics, physics, risk, communications, and encryption/decryption.

I instructed my recruiters not to sell the prospect on becoming an officer or on a particular branch but to mention the applicable branch to interest the prospect in learning more. The closing question was: "Would you like to learn more about that?"

Side note: I had an Army ROTC classmate who was an English major, one of the few academic majors with no corresponding branch. She chose to become an officer in the Quartermaster (supply) Corps.

Having developed my telemarketing script, I tested and refined it by making actual sales calls. I then trained my staff of 10 part-time temporary recruiters in a one-night training session. To gain confidence in the script and their abilities, I had my recruiters call each other from different phones in the office. One person would play the telemarketer and the other the prospect. I instructed the prospect role-players to play being uninterested, but not hostile, rude, or confused. After all, we were trying to recruit people to possibly become Army officers. If a prospect were not someone the recruiter would want as a fellow cadet, I had instructed my recruiters to politely end the call.

After each practice call, the prospect role-player evaluated the telemarketer's performance. I walked about, took notes, and did my own evaluations. The two trainees then switched roles and practiced with someone new to encounter a new personality. We went through two of these practice cycles. This training night culminated in my recruiters making one actual sales call (or two if the first ended quickly). Afterwards, I gathered the recruiters and had each comment on their experience. The confidence I heard in what they said told me we were ready to telemarket in earnest.

Although I do not recall the final statistics on our telemarketing efforts that first semester, I do remember they contributed more than a third of the new members in our subsequent record-setting

recruitment numbers (the mail campaign and face-to-face event contributing the remainder). Furthermore, four of my ten recruiting staff volunteered to continue telemarketing after completing their required three months. They said they enjoyed it. This is remarkable because they were full-time students and were not paid for this. Their telemarketing had no impact on their military careers. Some of the recruiters told me another reason was that they wanted to continue recruiting the people they would train and lead as senior-year cadets the following year.

Face-to-face recruiting events

After the mail and telemarketing campaigns had been operating for a few weeks, I organized a campus event. In one of our campus' large, high-traffic foyers, I and my fellow senior-year cadets stood below a banner I had made that said, "Ask us what we're doing after graduation." Wearing our camouflage-patterned uniforms, it was clear we would be doing something in the Army. Three of us were female, so that broke the stereotype that all soldiers were in the Infantry (females being barred from the combat arms at that time).

Simple curiosity got people to stop and ask. We would tell them: nursing, finance, logistics, communications, transportation, infantry, and (in my case) military intelligence. We would then ask them their academic major and career plans and introduce them to another cadet in our group who had the same or similar academic major or career plans. That cadet would then explain their career plans and how their Army branch fit into them. Since all of us cadets were familiar with all the branches, we could, in a pinch, draw a connection with another Army branch ourselves. The conversation would eventually be directed to an invitation to come to one of our training sessions.

My approach in this face-to-face event was a departure from always presenting my four value propositions in a strict order. Here I was starting with Value Proposition #2, "Help your career," skipping the "No commitment" proposition I said needed to be addressed first (because anything further would be ignored if you did not).

The reason for my departure was that in a face-to-face setting you need a hook to start the conversation, then a basis for making a connection between the two people. In my event, the hook was the inevitable curiosity in people dressed in camouflage inviting you to "[a]sk us what we're doing after graduation." When one of us cadets could connect with a prospect based on a shared academic major or career plans, there was a basis for continued conversation. At some point, we cadets could then say "if you are curious, you should come to a training session. No commitment." The closing question was: "Would you fill out a card? We need to know who is coming so we can plan our training accordingly, then find out later what you thought." Even if someone would not fill out a card, they still heard most (if not all) four value propositions. They also learned the Army was more than just the Infantry.

Of the students who filled out a card that day, 52 showed up at our next training session. This was a one-day recruiting record for the Northeastern University Army ROTC program.

OBSTACLES TO RETENTION

While my recruiting program set records for the most cadets recruited in a semester and in one day, retention was poor --- much worse than I expected. In follow-up calls to students who stopped attending training sessions, the unanimous reason given was the 6:30 AM start time of our once-weekly training sessions.

This start time was the result of having to use the University's gymnasium for our training. Because the sports program had precedence, our training had to be early in the morning rather than the afternoon. While 6:30 AM is a normal time for a soldier to be somewhere in the Army, it is not a normal time for college students under no obligation to show up. Therefore, after an initial visit, most of the people we recruited that first semester never came back.

It is worth noting that almost all Army ROTC programs in the United States had their training in the late afternoon specifically to support retention. My ROTC program was an exception. During that first semester, I had proposed having training in the University's classrooms so it could be held in the late afternoon. This idea was rejected by the Army ROTC commander. One of the reasons was the disruption to the work of the University's cleaning staff. Alternative locations did not exist as the campus was small and cramped due to being an urban campus next to downtown Boston.

Training would therefore continue to be at 6:30 AM. The resulting poor retention limited my recruiting program to only small gains in long-term membership.

A possible obstacle to retention was that my marketing plan was not communicated thoroughly down the cadet chain of command. While my fellow senior-year cadets in leadership positions understood that a lot of students would be coming to "check out" Army ROTC in an informal way, the junior leadership they supervised (sophomore-year cadets) did not get the message. During one weekly training session, I heard one cadet sergeant tell a first-time visitor in civilian clothes that they needed a haircut! I had to find the cadet sergeant's platoon leader (a fellow senior-year cadet) and have him explain to the cadet sergeant that we were not enforcing Army standards of appearance on new attendees. I know of no other such incidents, but I cannot be certain they did not occur.

OUTCOME

During that first semester of recruiting (the fall semester):

- More than 150 students were recruited and attended at least one training session.
- Of this total number, 52 were recruited in one day (during the face-to-face recruiting event).

The officers in charge of my Army ROTC program told me these were records for our program. Previously, fewer than two dozen new students would come to a training session in an entire academic year. I had exceeded that number in just one day with my face-to-face recruiting event. Twice as many more came from the mail and telemarketing components of my recruiting program.

Keep in mind that my recruiting program was entirely part-time. The junior-year cadets who were my telemarketers and letter writers were all full-time students as was I and my fellow senior-year cadets who joined me in face-to-face recruiting. We could only recruit a few hours a week. That made our accomplishments more remarkable and further validated the effectiveness of the value propositions, strategy, and sales tools I had developed and that my recruiters had implemented so effectively.

In Army ROTC, after a senior-year cadet had completed a few months in a staff position, they would normally move to another staff position with different responsibilities or would command a cadet unit. Because of the success of my recruiting program, the Army ROTC commander retained me in my recruiting role for an additional three months before promoting me to cadet commander of the entire

Army ROTC program at Northeastern University. I was also awarded the University President's Leadership Award (an engraved saber), awarded by Northeastern University's president to the Army ROTC cadet demonstrating exceptional leadership abilities. After graduation and being commissioned an officer in the U.S. Army Military Intelligence Corps, I was assigned to recruit again at my alma mater as I waited for the start of the next class at Military Intelligence School.

After that first semester of recruiting using my new program, I was not able to match my earlier numbers. This was not a surprise since the only significant increase in new prospects was when the new freshman class arrived in the fall semester. Even then, most students on campus were upper classmen who had already been approached by our recruiting efforts in previous semesters. Nevertheless, my program continued to be so successful that the Army ROTC commander directed that my program be followed by all subsequent cadet recruiters. Retention remained a problem, however, and would likely continue to be until the weekly training could be moved to the afternoon.

Despite the rapid churn of new members, there was still some benefit from our high recruitment numbers. The number of students returning to Army ROTC the next semester as uniform-wearing, regular attendees, although small, was still more than in previous years, I was told. The students I talked to who came for only one or two training sessions had either a positive or neutral opinion of their experience. They could therefore provide word-of-mouth advertising that Army ROTC might be worth looking into. They also bore witness that a student could be in Army ROTC without commitment, leaving when they wanted. This would help dispel the fear that might stop others from considering joining.

As for me, this experience helped me in my post-Army career. Understanding the need for value propositions, customer journey mapping, sales tools, and a call to action made me a more effective Market Research Analyst and Competitive Intelligence Analyst in the business world.

WHAT WORKED AND WHAT I WOULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY

In planning my recruiting program, I made the early decision not to pursue the low-hanging fruit of students inclined to the military. Instead, I decided to pursue Army-averse students, who comprised most of the student body. My decision was validated by the subsequent recruitment numbers.

My idea of the personalized form letter and the decision-tree telemarketing script were both validated in concept and content. If I had had the time, I would have liked to have done follow-up research with recipients of those contact methods for possible improvements.

The face-to-face event ("Ask us what we're doing after graduation") achieved high numbers, but I realized even at the time that many passersby might simply not have had the time to talk or might have been put off by such an obvious marketing ploy. In hindsight, a more effective event might have been to have Army officers from different branches give lectures like "Logistical problem-solving in World War II" or "Efficient communications network design." These would have been better ways (albeit more time-consuming) to connect student career goals with the Army.

My inability to design and place my own advertisements could have been circumvented by expanding on the existing Army ROTC cadet newsletter. At the time, it was distributed simply by tacking it on the cadet bulletin board in the Army ROTC office. In hindsight, I should have used it as a vehicle to promote our program by having copies available around campus. The newsletter already had articles describing

interesting training going on and Army ROTC social events. A new feature could have been a “What are they doing now?” section highlighting the post-graduation training and responsibilities of Army ROTC graduates, whether still in the Army or in their civilian careers. Getting such a story in front of students would have made a strong argument for the value proposition, “Army ROTC helps your career.”

The biggest lesson I learned is that the obstacles to *retention* should have been tackled by me and others more aggressively. Those obstacles were the 6:30 AM weekly training time and the tendency of junior cadet leadership to want to impose Army standards on anyone showing up at training. The Army ROTC program should have considered having a special afternoon training session just for people new to Army ROTC. To meet the unique needs of these new arrivals, the special sessions would be characterized by:

- Small classes so they could be held in one or two classrooms in the afternoon or shoehorned somewhere else. The classes would be kept small by consisting only of students interested in “checking out” Army ROTC. The cadet instructors would be trained that their job was as much retention as military training.
- At frequent intervals, new students would be invited by their cadet instructors to consider advancing to the next level: the 6:30 AM training that would qualify them to attend the occasional training at Fort Devens (rifle marksmanship, land navigation, etc.). It would be at that point that Army standards of appearance could be expected as part of receiving the uniform and additional training. Advancement to the 6:30 AM training could be made something that had to be earned through regular attendance.

For students simply curious about Army ROTC but with no immediate inclination toward the military, such a beginner class would be convenient and so conducive to longer participation. With longer participation there would be more time to convince the student to become more involved in the program and to consider becoming an officer. However, much more market research would be needed before attempting this “special session” idea or anything else.

The biggest lesson I learned from this experience is that when trying to incline someone to something they are not inclined toward, the customer journey does not end at their agreement to “check it out.” The Army-averse new attendees that my value propositions convinced to show up at training needed an experience that would continue to move them to greater participation. A more convenient time for that experience would certainly have helped. Alternately, new attendees might just need help to understand themselves before they could accept that 6:30 AM training was worth getting up for. Additional market research was needed, certainly, but also an acknowledgement that the training experience, at least initially, needed to continue the sales process.