leaders will simply talk about incentives like the Montgomery GI Bill and tuition assistance and try to force a Soldier to extend his or her contract. Alternatively, active listening is about empathizing with the individual, giving him or her a chance to talk about what's affecting his or her decision and then providing the Soldier with multiple options that serve the best interests of the Guard and the individual.

"If you show that you're concerned, your Soldier is more likely to respond appropriately," said Staff Sgt. George Knox, a UCC student representing the 193rd Military Police Battalion.

A recent push for Recruiting and Retention Command is to move Soldiers into the Inactive National Guard at the end of their contractual obligations instead of moving them into the Inactive Ready Reserve. Once in the IRR, Soldiers are no longer affiliated with the Guard and become federal assets who can be deployed with any unit. By transitioning into the ING, Soldiers maintain affiliation with the COARNG, and to some degree, their units. Instead of being mobilized federally with a unit they've never encountered before, Soldiers would stay in the ING as Colorado assets. If needed for deployment, Soldiers would be brought in to their former units and serve with the people they know.

Class instructors Krenz and Lockert received high praise from their students.

"They were great," said Spc. Courtney Burgwald, acting squad leader for ancillary services with the 928th Area Support Medical Battalion out of Montrose, Colo. "Learning through regulations can be dry and boring, but the instructors kept us motivated, engaged and even entertained."

Burgwald said she's excited to begin working as a UCC.

"I feel more prepared now," Burgwald said. "[Retention work] is all very new to me and I had no idea what to expect, so this class was a lifesaver. The information gained is invaluable."

Slow down, listen

Commentary by Sgt. 1st Class Pamlia C. Ames
Colorado National GuardPublic Affairs

A few months ago, I learned a really good lesson.

I called Bernie Rogoff, director of the Education Foundation, to inquire about a request he had made. Of course we started the conversation with the usual greetings, but I was really ready to move on to business, so when Bernie asked me how I was doing I replied, "Great." (So I lied. I was having a horrible day. So what?!) Then out of politeness I asked the same of him. He said, "Not so good." But I was on autopilot, and before I realized what Bernie said I replied, "Great. Good to hear it." Then I realized what had just transpired. So I stopped to listen.

After inquiring what was bothering him, Bernie told me his young daughter-in-law was on the verge of death and wasn't expected to live another week. As he explained the circumstances and suffering of the woman – a young wife and mother dying of cancer – I sat at my desk, humbled.

I asked if there was anything I could do. Anything. Bernie told me I already had. Just to be able to talk to someone about it made it easier for him to try to adjust to the idea that his grandchildren would soon be without their mother.

So what?!

All I did was slow down and listen, and that extra few minutes of my time made it a little easier for someone else to cope with a life-changing event.

So what?!

Just imagine what we could all accomplish if we just slowed down; if we all took a few extra minutes every once in a while to just listen. Listening is not simply hearing. The more we listen, the better we understand each other, our mission and how we each fit into the bigger picture.

Listen to the ideas of our subordinates, the meaning of our leader's directions and the hearts of our colleagues. It's to these men and women we are all obligated.

If we slow down and listen now, we'll do an even better job of assisting our Soldiers, Airmen, civilians and family members when they face troubles – and they'll know they can also count on us to help celebrate their successes.

When we listen, we treat people like people and not as a means to an end.

And if we listen now, we know we can be counted on to lead – or follow – when lives are at risk.