

General Lorenz on Leadership

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A Dynamic Tradition

Our Air Force has many traditions. Some we inherited from other services; others are more recent and will take time to fully develop. Traditions are positive things, deeply rooted in our heritage and pride. Traditions are things we don't easily give up.

One of our traditions, however, isn't often recognized as "positive" and doesn't get the applause it deserves. That tradition is one of our strongest and most resilient. You see, our Air Force is dynamic - always adapting to meet new missions and to counter new threats. With our world and its realities continually evolving around us, living in a culture of change is inevitable. This creates a level of uncertainty, and people generally don't like uncertainty. Such change, however, is vitally important and allows us to maintain our efficiency, effectiveness and relevance.

So then, what is the best way for a leader to guide people through change? There are certainly many methods to do so and each one depends on the type of change expected. In all cases, however, the principles that underlie the preparation for change are the same. Preparation builds confidence, helps a leader's organization be less fearful of approaching uncertainty, and ensures the organization is much more effective once change arrives.

This is where education and training come into play. We educate in order to prepare for uncertainty. Education helps us understand why the change is necessary. It also helps us objectively assess the environment and rationale necessitating the change. With objectivity, we can unemotionally assess the benefits and drawbacks of the different potential courses of action.

Education is a never-ending self-improvement process. The different levels are predicated to occur at specific spots in our careers - opening doors and creating opportunities. Because the Air Force lines up education programs with future levels of responsibility, it can be difficult to adequately catch up on education. Never pass up the opportunity to further your education.

While education helps us prepare for uncertainty, training programs are designed to prepare for certainty. After all, it's those things that we expect that fill our syllabi and lesson books. We train for them over and over until recognizing and reacting to them is second nature. This is one reason why we use checklists so much in the Air Force. They help lead us accurately through challenging times.

Through experience, our collective list of "certainty" grows. It shapes the evolution of our training programs. You see, when we react to a challenge, we create a certain result. Positive results reinforce the action - and make us more confident. Although the positive result "trains" us to use the same response next time, it typically doesn't teach us to handle anything but the exact same challenge. When we make mistakes or experience negative results, we truly have an opportunity to learn. Even though it may not be as much fun to

investigate our failures, we are more apt to critically assess the challenge and develop other, more successful potential courses of action.

This is why our integrated safety programs, after action teams and lessons learned archives are so valuable. They are an effort to take advantage of the experiences and mistakes of others to avoid having to relearn the same lessons over and over again. In essence, such programs help each of us prepare for future uncertainty and help bridge our learning programs from the training arena into our education enterprise.

As a leader, you must ensure your people have the education necessary to prepare for uncertainty and the training to guide them through certainty. As an individual, you must aggressively pursue these opportunities to further develop yourself as well. Such preparation will instill the confidence necessary to embrace change.

Implementing new ideas in your organization can be challenging. It takes careful thought, skilled execution and the full support of your team. It can also take time. It is always important to be evolutionary with change and not revolutionary. That way, your changes will have a much better chance to succeed over time.

Sometimes it is hard to take pride in a culture of continuous change. But within uncertainty is opportunity and opportunity helps fuel growth. Today, we must all adapt to change much more rapidly than ever before. It is one of our oldest and most important traditions ... and one that I hope will never change.

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Leading Airmen through force management

RANDOLPH AIR FORCE BASE, Texas -- The Chief of Staff of the Air Force recently announced that our service must reduce its personnel end strength to meet congressionally-mandated limits. Air Force retention is currently at a 15-year high, which is a testament to the tremendous dedication of our Airmen serving during a time of unprecedented deployments. However, the high retention means our end strength is above the limits set by Congress, and we have to take steps to reduce the number of Airmen on active duty.

Normally we are able to adjust our recruiting and accessions so the number of new Airmen generally equals the number of separating or retiring Airmen. We have already reduced the number of new recruits and officers entering the service this year, but there is a limit to how much we can cut incoming year groups before we start damaging the future Air Force. We have also implemented voluntary options for Airmen such as enlistment contract waivers, limited active-duty service commitment waivers, and voluntary separation pay. So far not enough Airmen have taken advantage of these programs to get us under the Congressionally-approved end strength, and other involuntary programs such as selective early retirements of some officer ranks are being implemented.

The numbers this time around are much smaller than in the past, but for Airmen faced with force management it will be a stressful, possibly life-changing event. I expect the leaders -- officer, enlisted and civilian -- in Air Education and Training Command to help each individual facing this uncertainty with the support they need and deserve.

I urge leaders to be empathetic to the turbulence these decisions cause in the lives of Airmen -- and the lives of family members too. Be engaged in their decision-making processes, be attentive to their concerns, be assertive but fair advocates for their contribution to today's fight. And be ready to help Airmen who leave active duty -- whether voluntarily or involuntarily. Fully participate in their transition, whether they return to civilian life or choose to serve in the Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve or another branch of the armed services.

If you have questions about the upcoming force management process, please visit the Air Force Personnel Center Web site, <https://gum.afpc.randolph.af.mil/> or contact your military personnel flight.

The decision to undertake these measures was not made lightly by our leaders. But in the end the Air Force, like all the services -- and indeed, like all of us -- must live within its means. You have my pledge that we will do everything we can to make this process as fair as possible and to help Airmen affected by force management as they start the next phase of their lives.

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Cherish Your Spouse

Just last week, while walking past the base chapel, I witnessed a scene that caused me to pause and reflect. I turned and watched as people, dressed in their Sunday best, flowed from the chapel doors, smiling and casually chatting. They slowly split into two lines, creating a path that led to a waiting limousine. The crowd stood and waited, fueling my anticipation. Suddenly, a photographer burst from the doors, turned and captured a bride and groom as they ran outside. The crowd erupted with cheers. The bride, white gown flowing as she ran, paused to hug a friend. The groom immediately tugged at her hand, pulling her towards the waiting limousine. Without pause, they hopped in the limousine and the crowd again cheered as they sped away.

I couldn't help but smile as I watched the newly married military couple start their new live together. It made me think about our spouses and our military families. The Secretary of the Air Force and our Chief of Staff named this the "Year of the Air Force Family." In doing so, they hoped to bring more attention to the sacrifices our families endure and the service they provide our nation. I couldn't agree with them more -- our families, especially our spouses, are the foundation that enables each of us to serve in the world's greatest Air Force.

I don't think anyone would argue the importance of having such a foundation. Our lives need balance and our spouses help provide that stability. I like to use the analogy that such balance is similar to the spokes of a bicycle wheel. You see, a bicycle needs balanced spokes in order to provide a smooth ride. Our lives are no different. I think of the spokes as the different priorities in our lives. If one of the spokes, like the relationship with your spouse, the needs of your children or the responsibilities at work, gets slighted, the wheel no longer rolls the way it should. It might even get to the point where it stops rolling all together.

We must balance each of our life's spokes very deliberately and carefully. When we are balancing shortfalls and managing a limited amount of time, money and manpower, our spouses often are the ones who get shortchanged. We can't afford to let that happen and must always make time to tell our spouses how much we appreciate them. When you're tired from the challenges at work, take a deep breath, walk in the door with a smile, and tap your energy reserve to make a difference with the time that you have. It only takes a minute to let them know how much you care ... a simple squeeze of the hand, rub on the shoulder, or a phone call during the day. Think about the things that make you feel appreciated and loved. Do those things for them in return. Always strive to give more than you receive.

This isn't an easy thing to do. Maintaining the friendship, trust and energy in a relationship is a full time job. It's up to you to make it a fun job -- for both you and your spouse. In a recent article I talked about the danger of complacency in our professional lives. The same goes for our personal lives too. Many people

confuse complacency with comfort. Although comfort can help build stability in a relationship, complacency can cause a relationship to drift apart. Never, ever take your spouse for granted.

Our spouses make significant sacrifices each and every day. There are countless stories of spouses who go above and beyond – stories of men and women who volunteer in the local community and pursue their own successful careers despite long days and deployments by their military spouses. There are even more untold stories about spouses who quietly make a difference every day. The story of the wife who, after a long swing shift, returned home to wake her family, cook everyone breakfast and send them all out the door before collapsing herself; the story of the husband who stayed up all night taking care of sick children so that his wife could go to work rested and ready. Resist the temptation to become accustomed to such acts of sacrifice and kindness.

These tremendous examples are often interrupted by the “other” stories. We’ve all done “boneheaded” things – forgotten important occasions, not paid enough attention to our spouse’s concerns, tried to solve their challenges for them (instead of just listening sympathetically). Work hard to avoid these thoughtless acts in the first place. Be critical of yourself and the things you do. Your standard of excellence at work should be no different when at home. Lastly, when you feel your spouse has neglected you in some manner, it is best to forgive without pretense. Put past grudges aside so that you can move forward together. After all, forgiveness is what you hope for after apologizing for those “boneheaded” things I just discussed.

As I turned to leave, the crowd had already forgiven the bride and grooms’ hasty departure, and started to dissipate from the front steps of the chapel. The couple was starting their life together, as a military team. I thought of my spouse, Leslie. We made a commitment to each other more than 34 years ago. We knew that our lives would be better if spent together and have learned through the years to depend on each other in order to accomplish our goals.

For me, Leslie has been the key to keeping my wheel balanced. I’ve worked hard through the years to make each day with her better than the one before; to keep my wheel rolling smoothly. Our individual strength comes from the foundation that our spouses provide at home. By cherishing your spouse and making sure they know how much you appreciate them, your wheel can continue to cruise happily through life as well.