

Welcome To The Air Force Family

The Airman's Field Manual For Success



Welcome to the Air Force Family

Some people live an entire lifetime and wonder if they have ever made a difference in the world, a veteran doesn't have that problem.

~Ronald Reagan

Congratulations on joining the most elite and technologically advanced fighting force on Earth! I am so thankful that you have joined our ranks to defend our nation and way of life, and I would like to be one of the first to welcome you to our amazing Air Force family! Your Air Force career, regardless of length, will be an excellent experience for you, and I could not be prouder of you as a human, **Airman**, teammate, wingman, warrior, and family member. You are now part of a family that you will grow to love and embrace for the rest of your life. The profession of arms is unique, and the people you will serve our nation with are among some of Earth's finest humans. Let's jump right in and prepare your successful career for take-off!

What is success to you? My ideals of success are not in accomplishments like rank, decorations, awards, etc. I believe that success is in our journey, our relationships, our experiences, and the legacy we leave behind. Don't worry; all the rest comes with you in due time if you focus on the right target. What will your story be? Will you leave a great legacy?

This manual is a guide for great success in the Air Force regarding the opportunities, the character you display, and your probability for increased responsibility and higher echelons of leadership. However, you must **put** in the work to produce success; you can't simply read this manual and then sit around and wait for success to fall into your lap. It is easy to be successful in the Air Force if you follow these tested, tried, and proven **absolutes**.

This journey is not for everyone; only around **1%** of our nation serves in the armed forces. You are now part of the **1%ers**! This journey will take hard work and effort, and sacrifice; and there will be times that it will seem overwhelming, but do **not** worry, we (**your family**) are right here.

We are in the profession of arms and designed to execute the "M" in "**DIME**," which is the military response. That is rarely an easy task, and it takes competent people of great character to execute it properly. We should evaluate our readiness to carry out our duties and responsibilities in defending our nation every day. Are you worthy of that responsibility?

Being an **Airman** is a lot different than being an employee of any other profession, as they typically don't ask their employees to be prepared to sacrifice their lives. We are distinctly different in the **Profession of Arms** (PoA) (**video**). We must be professional and well-prepared through the hard life of training and preparing to be our nation's warfighters. It takes all three phases of our professionalism and foundations, where we work to hone the PoA and our specialties, and then **battlefield** is where we put it all together. We are **warriors**, and we will get this right. If we don't, we lose, and **America isn't in the business of losing!**

There aren't any secrets to being a **great Airman, just be brilliant at the basics!** Sacrifice, blood, sweat, and tears make Airmanship work.

*This document is best viewed in electronic format to take full advantage of all hyperlinks.

www.linktr.ee/theinformedairman



Who & What We Are: The U.S. Air Force ... *The Design*

*Our Airmen are the competitive edge we have over our adversaries
and the reason we are the world's greatest Air Force.*

~JoAnne S. Bass, 19th Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force

Seek to understand our heritage and legacy. Read the **Blueprint**, **Brown, Blue**, and **Purple** books (linked below). These documents accurately describe our Air Force and what is expected of you. Our heritage and legacy are important to understand who we are and where we came from. You **must** put these into **action** because being a great **Airman** takes **action**. We cannot expect to be professionals, ready or prepared for conflict by happenstance. We **must** strive for additional knowledge and understanding, starting with these foundational competencies and guidance, and then put it all into action.

Link for our foundational resources: <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Foundational-Resources/>

****Visit this article for the strategic documents in print and audio format:** [Strategic Docs](#)

The Air Force's Strategic Design

Our strategic design is to support and defend the [Constitution of the United States](#). You aren't expected to be experts in the National Security Strategy ([NSS](#)) or the National Defense Strategy ([NDS](#)); however, you should periodically read and strive to understand these documents and their strategic imperatives. The [NDS](#) is the strategic guidance that defines our force functions. The Air Force provides the Nation with **Global Vigilance**, **Global Reach**, and **Global Power**, and our [doctrine](#) describes how we fulfill that responsibility.

Global Vigilance is our capability to obtain and sustain awareness anywhere, to provide warning, and to determine the enemy's intent, opportunity, capability, or vulnerability. Then, sync this information with our joint force (or other agencies) to use and share relevant information across the DoD portfolio.

Global Reach is the ability to project military capability expeditiously, with unsurpassed speed and exactness, anywhere and at any time we choose! It also provides mobility to source, position, or reposition forces quickly.

Global Power is the ability to hold at risk or strike any target anywhere, assert national sovereignty, safeguard joint freedom of action, and create swift, decisive, precise effects.

The Air Force organizes, trains, and equips forces within this strategic environment to achieve our national objectives. As outlined in the NSS and NDS, these objectives include **defending the homeland**, continuing to be the **preeminent military Power in the world**, ensuring the **balance of Power remains in our favor**, and **advancing an international order** that is most conducive to our (the USA's) **security and prosperity**. When the Air Force mobilizes to pursue these objectives, we are integrated as a part of the joint force.

Our Profession, The Profession of Arms

I am unaware of any profession that asks more of its members than the Profession of Arms, except emergency and first responders (**police, firefighters, and medics**). We are expected to lay down our lives if the need arises to defend our great Nation. Our Airman's Creed states that we have answered our Nation's call, which is a higher calling that carries more significant standards and responsibilities. We all freely accepted those standards and commitment when we answered that call and swore to support and defend the Constitution of the United States!

As **Airmen**, we accept a sacred trust from the American citizens that goes beyond anything else in our society. We are distinguished from others because of our expertise in the justified application of lethal military force and the willingness of those who serve to pay the ultimate sacrifice of our lives should the need arise. Our citizens and government trust us with our Nation's security, their protection, and the preservation of our way of **life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness**. We must always remain professional and remember our sworn obligation is to the Constitution.

Seek to understand the importance of the [Profession of Arms](#). Our status as the world's greatest Air Force was earned by those outstanding **Airmen** who have served and paved the way ahead of us, and we each have a responsibility, a duty, to carry this forward. Our profession as **Airmen** of the United States demands that we serve and live honorably and inspire the best out of those around us.

As professional **Airmen**, we are known for our strength of character, respect for others, and a lifelong commitment to our [Air Force Core Values](#). We all have a responsibility not to engage in nor tolerate behaviors that harm members of our Air Force. Harassment, sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, bullying, extremism, and discrimination are rotten and destroy us from within our ranks. These actions violate our commitment to each other and our core values, and we **must never** tolerate such behavior!

[Our Family's Identity](#)

Internalize, and seek clarification as applicable to understand who we are as an Air Force. Look at Generals [William "Billy" Mitchell](#) and [Henry "Hap" Arnold](#). They were visionaries and risk-takers. Let's keep their legacy alive! Every **Airman** is a **Warrior** | **Pioneer** | **Innovator** | **Defender**. The U.S. Air Force is the world's preeminent force on the globe, **period dot**; however, it won't remain that way if we do not give our very best!

[Know our MVPs & Creed](#)

Our Vision Statement: THE WORLD'S GREATEST AIR FORCE: POWERED BY AIRMEN, FUELED BY INNOVATION

Our Mission Statement: Fly | Fight | Win ... AIRPOWER: ANYTIME, ANYWHERE

[Airman's Creed](#)

I am an American **Airman**. I am a Warrior. I have answered my nation's call.

Yes, we have and will continue to answer her call, whether you think about it that way or not!

I am an American **Airman**. My mission is to fly, fight, and win.

*We don't all fly ... but we are **all** integral to flying ... **Airpower**.*

I am faithful to a proud heritage, a tradition of honor, and a legacy of valor.

*[MSgt John Chapman](#) and [SrA Jason Cunningham](#) are **great representations of a tradition of honor and a legacy of courage!***

I am an American **Airman**, guardian of freedom and justice, my nation's sword and shield, its sentry and avenger. I defend my country with my life.

I am an American **Airman**. Wingman, leader, warrior. I will never leave an **Airman** behind, I will never falter, and I will not fail.

[Core Values & Priorities](#)

INTEGRITY FIRST | SERVICE BEFORE SELF | EXCELLENCE IN ALL WE DO

A lot goes into the core values, and I encourage you to read more about them and their attributes because they are **vitaly important to understand the core values**. The Air Force has provided it in an easy-to-read format [here](#).

The 5 Core Air Force Missions

Air Superiority | Intelligence, Surveillance, And Reconnaissance | Rapid Global Mobility | Global Strike | Command And Control: We offer expert combat support across deployment and sustainment, including all permanently based and expeditionary forces. Where do you and your team fit? Do you know?

My Perspective

Every **Airman** is a **Warrior**, a **Visionary**, and a **Pioneer** who is **always** looking for ways to be better and will defend our country at all costs. We are superior at determining the enemy's centers of gravity and exploiting those; we are on the watch **24-7 / 365**. We can mass **devastating** and regime-ending **combat power** faster than anyone else. **on Earth; be proud to be an Airman!**

Our History & Heritage

Our history, heritage, symbols, colors, etc., are more than words; and they are more than a line or two in the **Airman's** Creed; they are who we are. We are not the first and not the last to be somewhat rebellious or have great and daring ideas. We are visionaries and innovators at heart; it is in our bloodline. Our Air Force **forefathers**, Generals [William "Billy" Mitchell](#) and [Henry "Hap" Arnold](#), represent this DNA.

We have legendary warriors who have sacrificed for our nation and their brothers and sisters. We are not the "chair force," and never accept that! Take the time to get to know [Senior Airman Jason D. Cunningham](#) and [Airman First Class Elizabeth N. Jacobson](#). These are two of the many heroes who have served our great Nation. You **belong** to the **long blue line family**, and it is one filled with tradition, heritage, sacrifice, bravery, courage, **grit**, innovation, discipline, and an overwhelming sense of duty.

We are **not** a "9 to 5" profession; we are the most advanced, ready, and fastest strategic military response option for the President of the United States. We must be prepared to do what the rest of our citizens expect of us when it is required: fight for and sacrifice for them and our homeland. As **Airmen**, we deploy, and we must spend time away from our family and friends; it is a part of our way of life. You must understand what we do and be ready to execute at a moment's notice. **You must connect with our mission and how that mission ties into the bigger picture of what we do as an Air Force to preserve our nation's freedoms.**

Achieving A Successful Career Starts with You: You Must Be Brilliant At The Basics

Execute Your Mission & Model Excellence

It is vitally important for you to remember that you must be great at your mission, aka: "what the Air Force 'pays' you to do." The rest of this manual will go into how you can enhance your performance and potential success; however, it starts **first and foremost with you doing your J.O.B.** This manual does not go into the specifics of executing your mission, as there are so many career fields, and your supervisors and trainers will cover that. You will not know how well you are meeting or exceeding the standards without feedback.

That Other Taboo "F-word"... Feedback

Based on my experience, most of us are not raised or taught to receive or give constructive feedback. This hinders many when they first enter the military because we **must** give and receive feedback to be successful in our missions. The first time you get feedback, it may sting, but it is a normal human response. Just remember, it is about your growth. We cannot and will not provide feedback with haughty attitudes or from a place of anger that is not professional or constructive.

You should have the mindset of looking for constructive and critical feedback. You will need to set your pride aside and look at the feedback as a way for you to grow. Whether you like them or not, the ones giving you feedback have already traveled the road you are now on. Do **not** take it personally. When done correctly,

feedback is about helping you grow as a human and an **Airman**. **We need feedback to grow, do not take it personally.**

Do you know your current performance level or how it is perceived and assessed by the established standards? Do you even know what the standards are? What performance rating or markings would you receive if your performance report were to close out today? Do you have a grade applicable feedback in your files? Do you have 'Initial,' 'Mid-term,' and 'Follow-up' feedback? Where can you find out about all of this? The answer is simple—your **supervisor**.

1. *Feedback is not only the "formalized" process of using your organization's formal processes and forms.*
2. *You should know where you stand compared to the standards.*
3. *You should **always** receive professional, and constructive feedback. If you don't, you need to elevate your chain of command. Read the Air Force Instructions (aka AFIs) and know what you are afforded and what is required of you, too! You have a role in your feedback.*

Airmen are committed to excellence. We must pursue excellence daily; high-performing teams understand what excellence is and aggressively pursue it daily as a part of their routines and culture. In its most simplistic explanation, excellence is being the best in the world at what you do. **Are you the best in the Air Force at your assigned duties and responsibilities? Are you committed to excellence?** If you are not committed to excellence, figure out why and then **change** your mindset!

[Know Your Story, Your Values, Your Why & Set Goals](#)

Your story matters, and it is essential that you know what your story is. Where are you from? Who are your parents? Do you have siblings? What did you do for fun growing up? What were you taught that was of the utmost importance? These are just a few of countless questions that, when answered, give us all a peek into your life and who you really are. Know your own story and then share it as applicable to help people around you better understand who you really are, not just what they see. Do not be offended or suffer in silence, speak up and let others know who you are.

[Your Personal Values](#)

What are personal core values? Why is this important? We are all individuals and have our own thought processes. The Air Force prescribes core values to get us all on the same page, which is good; however, you will most likely find life more difficult if you do not know your personal values. Our personal values direct us on our path; they are what we were raised with and have come to solidify us as an adult. Your personal values are also crucial in developing your “**why**.” You do not have to figure all this out right now; I am only trying to expose you to opportunities for a full career and life.

[Your “Why”](#)

What is your “why”? Do you know what that means? Your “why” is what makes you get up in the morning, what makes you try, what keeps you from giving up, what makes you happy. Your why is like the fire that burns inside you and drives you when nothing else will; it is fueled by your values, and as some say, it is your spirit.

Now look, this isn't the end of the world if you don't know the answers to all these questions; this is a process. You don't need to figure out your entire life and future right now, as it will take a while to do that. I encourage you to seek to understand the concept and how it can apply to your life. This is about helping you learn more about yourself, which will, in turn, help you have greater fulfillment in life. **Good reference material for this concept: [Start With Why by Simon Sinek \(video\)](#)**

Be Confident

As you embark on this new journey, you will undoubtedly benefit from being confident in who you are. Confidence goes a long way, and if you are dialed in with your story, your values, and your "why," you will have the confidence in yourself that reflects well to all of those around you.

Know Your Worth

Knowing your worth is a little deeper than surface level and gets after your worth as a human and the diversity you bring. Know that your thoughts and ideas are important, valid, and worthy of being listened to. It is easy to see yourself without value if you are not valued. If you do not value yourself or know your worth, you will eventually be ok with others treating you this way.

Earn Everything Else

Now that you know what you enter the Air Force deserving, let's talk about the rest. You are not owed **anything**. Refrain from entering that mindset that you are owed something or will not have a good experience. There are no handouts in the Air Force. You **must** work hard to be rewarded for your efforts and accomplishments. **Earn** it daily if you want to go far in the Air Force. If you approach your career this way, nothing can hold you back. If you think you are owed something (**other than dignity and respect**) and do not get whatever that "thing" is, you will be mad, irritated, feel jaded, cheated, etc; and that will be **your fault**.

Do not judge your peers' accomplishments by face value. You may be tempted to think that they were "given" something (**an award, promotion, lighter or easier duty, etc.**) based on something other than their hard work and dedication. I caution you not to do this and to take a closer look (*if you must know*) and evaluate what they did to achieve their success. Lastly, you may never know how they achieved it, but in the end, you cannot control that, so focus on those things you can control. You can **100%** control the effort you put toward earning everything you want.

Character is Everything

Your character is judged daily and in every action you take. How are you displaying your character? Make sure that you are aware of how your character is being perceived. It may be different from how you intend for it to be perceived. When you disagree with the situation or leaders around or above you, you may be tempted to spread your discontent, instead of addressing it correctly. Do **not** do that. That reflects a selfish character trait.

Foster a Professional Culture of Growth

I have seen some astonishing comments on social media that do not reflect the culture the Air Force wants any of our **Airmen** serving alongside. We are a professional entity, our nation's example of what right looks like. Some in our family forget we are professionals when they enter social media. It is up to you to model and build a professional culture at the grassroots that highlights good character traits. Understand that our words and actions are constantly under scrutiny because we are **Airmen**, and there are some things that we should not say. Refer to [AFPD1](#) & [AFI1-1](#) for additional explanation and guidance. Simply put, it should pass the "3 gates" test before you say or post it; if it passes all three, you are most likely ok to say or post it.

Is it True | Is it Necessary | Is it Kind

Be Kind

What does kindness look like to you? Have you ever had someone do something kind to or for you? How did that make you feel? Have you ever done anything kind for others? How did that make you feel? What did it cost you? I know, a **lot** of questions. Sometimes, it may be something you physically do for someone (a gift, etc.), and sometimes it is just giving them five minutes of your time. You may never know what those five minutes or a simple smile will do for someone. You have no idea what someone is going through unless they tell you, and it is so easy to smile or stop and chat with someone.

We never know what someone is going through. Should they snap at you? No, but if you use that logic, how do you explain your fighting fire with fire? 99% of those situations can be diffused by asking them how they are doing and how you can help. You can't solve everyone's problems, but you can try to help; if nothing else, you can be kind. You do not have to like everyone you come across. Sometimes, our personalities are just too different for us to be friends. However, we will always respect our brothers and sisters as a family. Sometimes people do not listen to hear; they listen to respond. Listen and try to understand it from their point of view. You don't have to adopt their ideas as your own, but you can at least try to see it from their perspective.

Let's flip the roles as if you are the one who is trying to voice your opinion on something (*especially if it is perceived as controversial*). Your job is not to try and convince everyone to adopt your views. You are not trying to convert anyone and don't become defensive when someone asks you questions for their clarification. Ultimately, it is about you listening and trying to understand your teammates; hopefully, they can return the favor to you.

How does this help your success journey? It is easy because when you practice listening and try to see it from the other person's point of view, you will be quick to listen and slow to speak. This approach will pay dividends for you, as you will be seen for who you are: a person of good character who is a **unifier**, a leader who listens and deliberates before firing. You will be the competent, calm person who can identify the right target and then engage with precision fire.

Be Humble

Be humble because no one likes a prideful "know-it-all." Humility can go a long way in setting you up for success because it is such a likable trait, and others will want to associate with you because it is a sign of strength. If you get accolades, say thank you and praise anyone who helped you get those accolades. No matter what you may hear, even individual awards are not won solely on your merit. There are a lot of teammates on the team, so make sure you remember them and how they have supported you. Humility is **not** weakness; humility is a character trait we need more of, and it will benefit you well. Those standing right next to you are processing the agony of not being selected. Just be humble and kind.

Own Your Mistakes

I cannot stress this point enough! Look, if you make a mistake, own up to it. Do not lie about it or try to evade blame. No one likes that, and most of the time, your peers and supervisors can see right through it anyway. You will **never** receive additional opportunities if you cannot own your mistakes. From a leadership perspective, I will **only** give you leadership opportunities or greater responsibility if you admit when you are wrong. Just own it, then take whatever comes after that.

Run Your Race

You will have some peers like sprinters who blast off the starting blocks, and they may leave you in the dust; do **not** try to keep up with them. Everyone has different strengths and can peak at different times. I am not saying that you need to ignore your peers. No, learn from them (if you can), and it is **okay** to be inspired by them; do not try to be them. You will run your race, and when you focus on your values, your "why," and your goals, you will be fine.

If It's Worth Doing, It's Worth Doing Right

There will be many times when you are faced with a decision to do a job or task haphazardly or to buckle down and do it right. You may even think that the task you have been assigned is not worth doing, and maybe you are right, but perhaps you aren't. I advise you to ask someone about it. Ask your peers or supervisor for their thoughts. Sometimes, you will find that some tasks are done solely because that is what has always been done. You may uncover a secret, a way to do it better. However, if it must be done, do it better than anyone else.

It Has Your Name On It; It Better be Great

Everything you do has your name, so remember that. You **must** "own" your work and everything that it entails. I do not care if it is taking out the trash; you make **sure** you are the best trash remover on the base! When people hear your name, they must immediately think of excellence.

Keep Fighting and Be Hard To Kill

We must be physically & psychologically **Hard To Kill**. The following are the #H2K principles:

1. **Form your tribe & build strong connections ... talk often, your tribe helps you fight, especially when you can't.**
2. **Face and deal with your psychological & emotional scars...never stop fighting.**
3. **B + T then R: Breathe + Think then Respond or React: Don't become fixated on the 5-meter target and lose sight of past & future experiences and wins.**

There will be times when you want to quit. Never quit, keep fighting! It takes courage to continue the fight; there are undoubtedly spots that will detour you into uncomfortable and dangerous situations. These detours make you want to throw in the towel and call it quits. Don't do that.

Courage is standing up against the fear that you are experiencing. We all experience fear; some of us succumb to it, and some dare to fight on. When you are on one of these life detours and trying to find the courage, think back to your "why," your values, and your story. You have what it takes; you **must** fight on.

If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together. ~African Proverb

Find Your Tribe

You may think you do not need anyone and can do this yourself. I know because I used to think the same thing. I was looking at it all wrong. It was not about someone not treating me like an adult; it was simply that I could not be successful in a team sport as an individual. Yes, this is a team sport, and you will not succeed if you try to do it all yourself. Sure, you will have some "wins," but in the end, others who have found their tribe will pass you. They will pass you because they will have a much better support structure and a group of people to navigate this Air Force.

Now, when you are finding and creating your tribe; you are simply finding those people you can connect and grow with. The entire Air Force is a tribe; however, just like our society, there are sub-cultures and tribes within the Air Force. Some of them will look, believe, and act like you, but everyone in your tribe should not be the same. Your tribe needs some diversity so that you can (over time) eliminate your biases and blind spots. Find your tribe, take care of them, and they will propel you further than you could ever go alone.

Your Tribe Should Have

*Focus on having **positive** influencers in your circle and getting away from negative people. You do not need negativity in your life!*

The Inspired

Believe in themselves, and they believe in others. When they speak of their ambitions, it is with great passion, optimism, and enthusiasm. The inspiring person will find a way out when backed into a corner or a seemingly impossible situation.

The Motivated

Do what needs to be done without influence from other people or situations. People with self-motivation can find a reason and strength to complete a task, even when challenging, without giving up or needing to be encouraged.

The Passionate

Their passion is contagious. It is hard to be around a fiery person and not be caught up in their excitement, even if it concerns something you have never been interested in. Passionate people live every day anticipating great things.

The Open Minded

Are willing to actively search for evidence against their favored beliefs, plans, or goals and weigh that evidence fairly when available. Being open-minded does not imply that they are indecisive or incapable of thinking for themselves; it just means they are open to other ideas and will help you overcome your blind spots.

The Grateful

Do not expect life to give them everything they want or deserve. They realize that good things do not always happen to good people, and they have foregone the notion that life "owes them" anything. This type of person understands that humans should never expect anything for free and that being alive is something to be grateful for!

Don't Waste Time Looking for Shortcuts

There aren't any shortcuts, so don't waste your time looking for them. One in a million may win the lottery, but that is one in a million. Are you the lucky one? You will waste such valuable resources (*mainly time and energy*) looking for that elusive shortcut that will inevitably put you behind. While there aren't any shortcuts, there are more brilliant paths. If you try to do this all by yourself, you will fail.

Network vs. Accomplishments

The Air Force is full of opportunities, and some of those opportunities will lead to accolades, awards, promotions, etc. None of those things are bad in and of themselves; however, if you let these accomplishments, be your driving force, you will miss out on a **lot**. You will miss out on great relationships, and on future opportunities simply because you were more focused on these accomplishments.

There is nothing wrong with earning or winning, but that must **not** be your sole focus. It is easy to fall into the accomplishment trap and base your level of success on that, but that is the **wrong** way to look at it. Remember when we were talking about running your race? Well, this is another example of that. You will find success through your networks. As I stated in the intro, focus on the right target, and the other accomplishments (*promotions, awards, decorations, etc.*) will follow.

Keep an A+ Attitude

Reaching and maintaining your peak performance requires a combination of passion, focus, commitment, patience, and perseverance, which will ultimately lead to your success in the Air Force. To perform your best, manage conflicts, deal with adversity, and care for yourself and others, you must develop, maintain, and exude a positive attitude. A positive attitude is contagious. On our journey as **Airmen**, there will be plenty of opportunities and highs and lows. What keeps you going during those low times? Maintaining an attitude of gratitude will go a **long** way to ensuring that you have the right sight picture on your career and life.

Find a Mentor or Coach

Good mentors or coaches can provide you with the advice, guidance, candid feedback, and global perspective you need to progress personally and professionally. When choosing a mentor or coach, make sure that it is someone that you truly respect, based on their core values, and demonstrated character, and not just what they have accomplished.

Take on the Tough Jobs

Challenging assignments allow you to exercise your "leadership muscle" and sharpen your professional skills. You must have the courage and confidence to take any assignment that will challenge your abilities. These tough jobs often produce positive results and recognition, creating roadmaps and confidence for future assignments. How often have you heard someone say, "It is all about opportunities and timing"? Opportunities often appear like obstacles or challenges; the time is **now** to lace up your boots and get after them. I have **never** taken on a tough job and have been sorry. It has **always** been the opposite. I have grown so much and multiplied my confidence through these tough jobs.

Be a Lifelong Learner

To operate at your peak performance, you must be well-versed in the technical and professional aspects of your job. Read as much as possible about your primary duty requirements and become a communication, leadership, management, human connection, and relationship student. I challenge you to read and listen to books, watch videos, and listen to podcasts on these topics and other topics that you are both in agreement for and against; it helps broaden your perspective.

Focus on What You Can Control

Knowing what you can and cannot control brings freedom to a weary, tired, and unhappy soul. Your situation might suck, but you must focus on what you can control. My time in the military has taught me a **lot** about this arena and how to stay calm when it all goes wrong. Orient yourself to the situation and observe everything happening. Calmly assess based on your basic human senses; then decide on an action. **(B+T=®R)**

Knowing what you can control is essential to your happiness. When you are free from the worry, dread, and fear of the things you cannot control, you are better prepared and energized to focus on those things you can control. You always have a choice on how you respond. What will your choice be? Will you fold under pressure or unhappiness, or will you remember that there are some things that you can control? Do not let your mind be stuck on the repeat cycle of worrying about what you do not know or cannot control.

Be Credible

You must be credible. Your peers and superiors alike **must** be able to rely on and trust you. You build your credibility by doing what you say you will and by **always** giving your 100%. If your supervisors know they can trust you and believe you are credible, they will provide you with many opportunities to grow and lead!

Train For and Be Ready Anything

Never miss an opportunity to train. It could be the difference between life and death, winning and losing, and success and failure. You will often see people roll their eyes when someone mentions training, and you will enthusiastically embrace it because you know the why behind it. ***It is better to sweat (and bleed) in training than die in battle.***

Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance

People who do not adequately plan then blame their failures on something completely unrelated. Remember that blame-shifting reveals a character flaw; we have already discussed "***owning your mistakes.***" If you are unwilling to get into the trenches and grind every day (prepare), how can you expect to be ready when you get the "call?" Maybe that "call" is a promotion, an additional job responsibility, a highly visible project, etc. If you prepare correctly, then when your time to shine comes, you will succeed.

Difference Between Mistakes & Failing to Prepare

The "5Ps" take blood, sweat, tears, and sacrifice; not everyone will subscribe to the "5Ps," which is your advantage. It is frustrating when people say that they made a mistake when it is really a lack of preparation. We all make mistakes, which is acceptable; however, there is **never** an excuse for not preparing. When you don't prepare and fail, that is **not** a mistake but **failure**.

Be Your Best

In its most simplistic explanation, excellence is being the best in the world at what you do. You **must** take this mentality with **everything**. Work harder than anyone you know. Work harder than your peers and your supervisors, which may be the best advice I can give you. As Winston Churchill stated, success is not final, so keep working hard and pursuing excellence daily. **Never be outworked, ever!**

There is a world of difference between doing and trying. It is simple: you cannot be successful by going out there and trying your best; you **must** be your best. Do not look at your career and think that "trying your best" will get you the desired success, but it won't. You should incorporate this mindset with your career field-specific training requirements because the enemy hopes you **try** your best so they can defeat you. You should also apply this to your physical training. If you never prepare or train for your PT test, then you deserve the score you get. Don't try your best; **be your best!**

There will be times when you will have a decision to make. You will be presented with two options:

1. Take the easy road everyone else is on, which is indeed easy, or 2. Take the less traveled road, the one that only a few people are on, and it looks like there is much hard work ahead.

I challenge you to take the road less traveled and use the mantra of "**blaze your own trail.**" It is easy to take the first option and coast through that season of your life. Do **not** be fooled, though, option #1 is a trap that will take you off your desired course of success. Nothing in this life is free, and rarely are things ever easy to obtain that are worth getting in the first place. It may be difficult, but you learn more from life's difficulties than from the easy roads. You will learn what your "Grit Level" is and be able to amplify it. Your reward will far outweigh your imagination if you refuse to take the easy path and be willing to **work hard.**

Failure Is Unavoidable

Failure will find those that are brave enough to try. It is only possible to have a successful career with failure. If this upsets you, well, welcome to life. You will have to put yourself out there at times, and regardless of your preparation, sometimes it will just not work out in your favor. That failure is bitter, but not **nearly** as bitter as the failure because you did not prepare or even try in the first place. Following a failure, take a few days (3 max) to dwell on, be ticked off, disappointed, and in the dumps about your failure. Then get back out there, learn what caused your failure, and continue to try and grow.

No Substitute for Experience

There is no substitute for experience, and you must take risks to have the experience. You cannot read, study, and know the answer to everything, and there are many things that you must experience firsthand. Sure, you can have the "knowledge" about a task or mission, but if that is all you have, then you do not have experience. When you miss the experience, you lack true confidence.

Move Around for Breadth of Experience

The Air Force values breadth of experience. You can gain a breadth of experience through job rotation, where your supervision can rotate you and your teammates between the different tasks within your career field. This will undoubtedly help you gain more familiarity and competence within the various aspects of your career field; however, that needs to be more holistic. A change in assignment is a great way to enhance your experience.

Permanent Change of Station (PCS)

I do not know what you have heard about PCSing, but it is **great.** Sometimes, people are assigned to an area they love, close to family and friends. I understand, but I am here to help you have a successful career, and you will be more successful if you have a greater breadth of experience, which means you must move around. As you move from base to base, you will see different things (mission, task completion, etc.). Some are in your career field, and some are through leadership and management principles. You also get to meet new people, learn from them, and give them whatever knowledge you can pass on.

Deployments & TDYs

**TDYs are shorter than deployments and are considered "trips."*

Other excellent opportunity areas are deployments and TDYs. This has been one of the best aspects of my career and where I have grown the most. I know it is impossible for everyone to have these exact experiences, but don't automatically assume that you can't have these types of experiences. If you can deploy, take it (provided your other life situations can support that: family, etc.). If you are in a "**no ties**" situation, seek out those deployments and TDYs!

You (at most deployed locations) will be able to forget about, or at least not worry about, all the additional "fog" of base support requirements and focus on the mission. The deployments I have been on have had some of the highest morale (that and my overseas assignments) that I have experienced in my career. Also, in most career fields, you will get to perform more aspects of your job than you would back in a garrison assignment.

Be A Great Teammate

#1: **Don't gossip!** Don't view your peer's strengths as a threat; look at them as complimenting your weaknesses. Your supervisors are watching for the one who is also concerned about their peers. It takes an entire team to get the mission done. We all like to see the **MVP** of the season go to the player that was all about helping and encouraging their teammates while also killing it in their position. It is the same way here in the Air Force. You **must** be good at your job, but you should also be the one in your peer group trying to help them succeed.

Be Ready for Anything & Everything

How can you be ready for anything? It is mainly a mindset; of course, there are some physical aspects to it, but we have already covered the physical piece. Being ready is about processing what is going on, what will happen, and what steps you need to take to combat the threat and be prepared for the opportunity.

Certifications

Your primary mission is the most critical aspect of serving the Air Force. You must find out what certifications you can get in your career field. You **must** become an expert in your field, and certifications are another way to enhance your potential. When additional responsibilities, and potential leadership growth opportunities arise, your supervisors will look to the credible experts first.

Most of our career fields have dangerous missions, and we use dangerous equipment, resources, and materials to accomplish these missions. If I have someone constantly trying to grow and learn and asking for more responsibility, I will give it to them, **not** the person who is always just trying to get by. If you know of a certification that will help you, ask your supervisors if you can go. Consistency and persistence are key.

Professional Development

In my experience, we sometimes don't get the complete picture or reasoning behind professional development. As we exposed at the beginning of this manual, read the National Security Strategy, the National Defense Strategy, the Air Force Posture Statement, the Air Force priorities, and your Wing's mission, vision, and priorities: be informed. Most **Airmen** haven't, yet they ask questions that can be answered in one or more of these documents.

You do not have to memorize these documents, but if you want to see the bigger picture and be ready for anything in your career, you should be familiar with them. Volunteer to attend a sister service's professional military education (PME) course. Only a few people are looking for this opportunity. Here again, it is to your advantage. You will learn so much, probably more about yourself than anything, but you will also gain joint knowledge. The take-a-way here is to be grateful for and seek out opportunities for PME.

Advanced Education

I am not pushing you for college degrees for promotion requirements (*that is a thing for MSgts going to SMSgts*) but not for our junior **Airmen**. I am pushing you (**after everything** else has been taken care of) to pursue an advanced degree to allow you to grow and enhance your success potential. Pick something you are passionate about because you will have a life after the Air Force.

If you cannot decide on a degree plan, then it will be okay to complete your general education requirements first, which will give you some time to think about what you want to study. If you are still undecided, you can follow a path in business administration, organizational management, human resources, business leadership, or other degrees to help you understand more about yourself and help you prepare for leadership positions.

Opportunities Vs. Obstacles

Obstacles can teach us a **lot**; however, we often do not approach obstacles as an opportunity to learn. Most of the time, people look at obstacles as barriers that prevent them from being able to follow their dreams. We can learn much about what **not** to do as we go through a bad situation (obstacle), which is sometimes more beneficial than always seeing it done the right way. Imagine if you were to take every lousy situation or obstacle you encounter and look at them as opportunities.

Obstacles are great if you see them as an opportunity versus what they appear to be. Who is the only one who can honestly tell you that whatever you are facing is an obstacle or opportunity? Only you. Remember that we are all in control of our thoughts and reactions to what we experience in this life. Look at what you are facing: is this something you may fail at? Good, go ahead and give it a shot. Train and prepare to the best of your abilities, draw on all your other experiences, lace up your boots, and get after it. You may taste victory or defeat, but you will undoubtedly have grown through the entire experience. You never know where this experience and the lessons you learned will come in handy one day.

Be Inquisitive, not Confrontational

There is nothing wrong with asking questions; I even encourage that, just don't be aggressive with it. I made a career of asking the why. You do not want to question things, so it places the one you are asking the question of in a compromised position. When people feel compromised, they tend to go into a defensive posture; I assure you that as a junior-ranking **Airman**, that will not work out in your favor.

Sometimes, you can ask the question directly; sometimes, you must figure out a way to ask the question from another angle. If you approach the question from the perspective that everyone is doing and has done their absolute best up to this point and remove any connotation that you know everything, then you will find more success in gaining a legitimate answer.

Present your ideas and solutions to your supervisors and request a chance to champion your ideas (put them into motion). Sometimes, you will be granted your request, and sometimes, you will be shut down. Do not lose heart; keep moving forward. If it is a shutdown scenario, do not buck it unless it is immoral, unethical, or illegal (in that case, take it up the chain of command). Sometimes, you need to move or promote where you can influence changes.

Take a Break & Recharge

This is an arduous journey at times, and the Air Force can seem like a machine that will grind you up, spit you out, and keep marching forward if you let it. You are crucial as a human and an **Airman**, but you must take a knee occasionally. I have struggled with this my entire career and want you to learn from me.

Mental health is as essential as physical health, yet many do not think of it that way. We would always see a doctor about a broken bone; however, we seldom have the same sense of urgency to seek mental healthcare. You are essential but **not** the only thing keeping the Air Force running. However, sometimes we feel that it will not get done, or at least it will only be done right if we aren't there. Trust me; it will be just fine for a couple of weeks. What is **not** acceptable is losing you! **You are too important to lose you.**

Take leave and enjoy your hobbies. Do not let the Air Force consume you and your every thought. As you progress through the ranks, the time sacrificed to the Air Force only increases. If you start as a junior **Airman** by committing 100% of your time to the Air Force, you will never be able to take a knee once you are more senior in grade. By that point, you will be hard-wired not too, and the unforgiving pace will continually drive you further away from yourself, your family, and your friends.

One day, you will have to take the fabric of our nation (your uniform) off and let someone else take up the torch. Will your family and friends still be there? Only if you give them the time and attention that they deserve. Maximize your time and only spend it on those things that are the most important to you. Yes, we must work; however, we do not have to be chained to our work. Even when you are at work, don't waste your time on things that are not important. You must harmonize because "balance" doesn't explain it well enough.

You will never be able to give the same amount of time to those you love as you must provide for your profession. So, when you can be with them, they need to get **100%** of you, not 30%, and work still has the other 70%. Simple, take leave and take care of yourself. The rest of this will be here long after you are gone, so don't spend your every breath on something that is only temporary.

Taking Care of Yourself Physically and Psychologically

There is a **lot** that is said about what the Air Force could and should be doing regarding suicide. Suicide is a problem in our society and worldwide; however, I believe we have an opportunity and an obligation as **Airmen** to set an example of how to mitigate this tragedy. We can mitigate by focusing on connecting, coaching, and caring for **each other**, we can teach and model resilience versus just talking about it. When we do that, we will be better prepared for the challenges we will inevitably face and more comfortable discussing our issues and concerns. We do not have to solve each other's every problem, and most people don't want that anyway.

Most of the time, people like you to sit, listen, and try to understand them. Don't try to solve their problem, and don't share your "Well, this one-time I..." stories. They need you to see, hear, understand, and support them. Some people need or benefit from higher levels of care and inpatient treatment. You will **not** ostracize them or let anyone else get away with that. Once an **Airman** has completed their treatment and care, you will ensure that you treat them respectfully.

The bottom line is to connect with and care about **each other**. I do not want to over-simplify this serious situation; however, sometimes we simply don't spend time getting to know and connecting with our people. **People want to be seen, heard, and feel valued.**

Leave a Great Legacy

How do you want to be remembered? What does the term legacy mean to you? A legacy is something that you leave behind for others. You probably think, "Come on now, Chief, I am not dead yet!" You are not, but it starts now if you are to leave a good legacy.

Life and your career are so short, so make sure it is a life and career worth talking about over or around the "campfire," a legendary legacy. If everything in your life is "awesome," you have the most extraordinary stories, accomplishments, etc., and you did it without **showing respect and dignity**, then you failed at this thing we call life, plain and simple. We are **not** a coddling corporation and will hold each other to the standard, but we will do it with dignity and respect!

Final Reminder, our Oath

I, _____, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me, God.

Be proud to be an Airman, and always model being brilliant at the basics ... excellence!

I am proud to serve with you and contact me anytime.

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