INTERVIEW

Culture of Commitment, Climate of Respect

General Mark A. Welsh III, Chief of Staff, United States Air Force

Interviewed by:
Cadet First Class William Burnette, U.S. Air Force Academy
Cadet Second Class JayP Fullam, U.S. Air Force Academy

The following interview by two United States Air Force Academy cadet leaders, the Wing Honor Chairman and Wing Honor Non-Commissioned Officer, is a personal dialog with the United States Air Force Chief of Staff, General Mark Welsh. General Welsh, who graduated with the Academy's class of 1976, reflects on his early leadership and character formation, and shares his views on a wide range of issues important in the Profession of Arms. Their interaction is a journey that explores leadership, honor, competence, respect, values, pride, and military heritage. General Welsh emphasizes his view that, especially in an endeavor as large and complex as the Air Force, everyone matters—everyone has a story--and people want and need to know what leaders stand for. He describes his personal commitment to service and his own professional development, from being proud of being a pilot, to deep pride in being part of a distinctive Service. Speaking through his interviewers, he reminds all cadets: "You represent me, you represent the Air Force, you represent the nation every single day, even as a cadet."

General Welsh also speaks forcefully on the importance and meaning of the Air Force Core Values, the cadet Honor Code, and how the two are complementary. He reflects on the delicate relationship of personal faith to professional military leadership, and draws illuminating distinctions between tradition, culture, heritage and climate. He stresses that while values are immutable and define both individuals and organizations, innovation is critical to success in a dynamic world. Throughout the interview, General Welsh illuminates the meaning and importance of excellence, and why setting and upholding standards is essential to building trust and leading well.

Gen. Mark A. Welsh III is Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force, Washington, D.C. As Chief, he serves as the senior uniformed Air Force officer responsible for the organization, training and equipping of 690,000 active-duty, Guard, Reserve and civilian forces serving in the United States and overseas. As a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the general and other service chiefs function as military advisers to the Secretary of Defense, National Security Council and the President.

General Welsh was born in San Antonio, Texas. He entered the Air Force in June 1976 as a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy. He has been assigned to numerous operational, command and staff positions. Prior to his current position, he was Commander, U.S. Air Forces in Europe.

Cadet 1st Class Burnett: Good afternoon, I'm Cadet 1st Class Will Burnett. I'm the Wing Honor Chairman at the United States Air Force Academy.

Cadet 2nd Class Fullam: I'm Cadet 2nd Class Jay P. Fullam. I'm the Wing Honor NCO at the United States Air Force Academy.

Burnett: ***We're here at the Pentagon to discuss matters of leadership and character with the Chief of Staff of the Air Force General Mark Welsh.*** How are you, sir?

General Welsh: Good. It's good to see you guys.

Fullam: ***Sir, with the Air Force Academy being a place for leadership to really be taught and learned by cadets, what would you say was the single greatest leadership lesson you learned while you were at the Academy as a cadet?***

General Welsh: Let me give you two. The first one was that everybody matters. There were people I saw who were kind of ignored and as I got to know them I realized they were smarter than all the rest of us. They had more to offer and they had a better solution than any of us had. They just weren't cool. Which leads to the second lesson.

In the military, cool, however you define it, isn't. Just remember that when you come out the door. In the military people want to know what you stand for, they want you to show that you stand for it. They want you to take care of people who might not think exactly the way you do about things. So those are the two big things I took away from the Air Force Academy. I saw that there.

Burnett: ***Sir, how would you describe your personal commitment to service? In other words, what drives you?***

General Welsh: Pride. I've always been proud. I grew up very proud of my dad who was in the Air Force. I came into the Air Force because I was in love with the airplanes and I really wanted to fly them, but I was proud of flying them. I was proud of being part of the force that involved flying airplanes. Then I fell in love with the people and became just as proud of the group of people who serve this country.

I think pride underpins everything we do. If you recruit the best people, you train them and educate them like anybody else does, and you give them pride in what they do, who they stand beside, the job you do, the country they represent, amazing things happen. I think that's why our Air Force has been successful.

Fullam: ***Sir, what would you say would be the kind of culture of commitment you would like to see at the Air Force Academy?***

General Welsh: Be proud or be gone. I really don't have time for folks who aren't proud of what we do and proud of who we represent.

I think if every cadet at the Academy walked in the door as proud as they were when they found out they were going to be a cadet, and stay that same way through their whole experience and graduate, not only would the Academy be a better place, the Air Force would be a better place.

Somewhere in there you lose the pride in being different.

When you left your high school and you were going to the Air Force Academy, that was something different and you were kind of proud of yourself for being selected. At the Academy you kind of become one of the herd and you lose the pride. You go to class together, you go to formation together, who are you trying to impress? And you lose the pride of being distinctive, of being something different, of being separate from the crowd because you kind of forget what you went there to do.

"You're not at the Academy training to be a member of the Air Force, you're not preparing to be a member of the Air Force, you're in it. You represent me, you represent the Air Force, you represent the nation every single day, even as a cadet."

If everybody just remembered the day you walked in the door and you took the oath that you became a member of the United States Air Force. You're not at the Academy training to be a member of the Air Force, you're not preparing to be a member of the Air Force, you're in it. You represent me, you represent the Air Force, you represent the nation every single day, even as a cadet. The difference is the job you'll do after you graduate. Your job right now is to follow the rules of the Academy, learn what they're trying to teach you, do your job in school, do your job in athletics, do your job in learning the things that will prepare you to do your next job. But you've got a job and we're actually paying you to do it. Be proud of that. Don't act like the rest of your friends who are having a great time wherever they're having a great time. There's nothing wrong with having fun, but when that becomes the focus, you've just lost something.

Burnett: ***Sir, you were at the Air Force Academy as a cadet, an air officer commanding, and the commandant. How has your view of our honor code evolved over the years?***

General Welsh: That's actually a really good question. As a cadet it was scary. I was excited about it, but it was a little scary. I remember thinking about all the different ways you could violate it. What if mom asked me what my girlfriend and I were up to? What if dad asked me if I'd ever had a beer? All these things are ways you could easily violate the honor code if you weren't willing to really live by it.

As an AOC [Air Officer Commanding] I started to realize how hard it was to follow the code, especially for people who came out of this huge range of environments and social cultures and ways of behavior and family backgrounds that our cadets come from. It started to be clear how hard it was really to follow that honor code.

As the commandant, I realized how complicated it was. Some of that's just life maturity, some of its watching my own kids grow up. The honor code is a very, very difficult thing to fully internalize and fully live and to commit yourself to, and I don't think you really understand it until you're much older. How many angles you have on this thing, which is probably a good thing. Because when you're younger, it will be simpler. You don't lie, you don't steal, you don't cheat, you don't put up with it. You just don't tolerate it. You don't accept it. It's not okay. You don't turn the other way. You don't ignore the problem. You do not tolerate it.

If you could teach everybody in this country those examples at the age of 18-22 we'd be in a pretty good place. I just realized how complicated it was, especially the administrative part of it as the commandant.

I also have another view of it and that's as a parent of a cadet. When I started looking at it as a parent, I went back to being scared because I knew how hard it was to live the honor code, and the challenges my son would face as he tried to. So I've kind of come full circle.

Burnett: ***You spoke about how we all come from different backgrounds and it's a huge Air Force with a lot of different backgrounds. It's very diverse. How do we***

train integrity, service, excellent as core values for our entire Air Force when they come from so many different backgrounds?

General Welsh: That's a really interesting problem to have. If you look at it in terms of character and competence, when people come into the Air Force their competence is a funnel. Their competence funnel is about that wide [gestures indicating a small distance]. They really can't do much of anything that we want them to be able to do in the Air Force. They've got some personal skills, but that's about it. So we start by training and educating and training some more and giving them job experience and moving them around and giving them some breadth, and pretty soon, but soon being years down the road, we've got people who can perform at this incredible level, an incredibly wide spectrum of things they're capable of doing. So our competence funnel just keeps expanding.

On the character side, we draw people in from a huge funnel of character. A huge spectrum out here of how people behave, how they act, what their families think, what part of society they come from, all the things that drive people. So their character funnel's like this [gestures with arms outstretched] when they come in the door. Whether they're coming to the Academy or coming to basic training. Our job is to compress that into a character funnel that's about that wide [gestures indicating a small distance] -- the way we expect them to behave, the way we expect them to treat each other, the way we expect them to perform.

The problem we've got is you can't do that over years. You can't just train them, educate them, train them, and twenty years down the road you finally get them in the funnel. Basic military training we're trying to get to this in eight weeks. The Academy's got four years, really about a year before you expect them to follow all the rules and understand them. But then you're supposed to stay in that character funnel as you go forward. That's the goal, right? That's hard. It's really hard.

So the only way you can do it successfully is if institutionally you commit to everyone being part of the solution once you form the funnel. So if people are bouncing outside the funnel you can't ignore them. That's what happens to us today. There is behavior outside the character funnel. People know it, but right now in the Air Force, and probably at the Academy, it's still cooler to not rat them out than it is to not tolerate it.

I don't want to be in the Air Force with that kind of behavior, whether it's not treating each other with respect, whether it's not following the standards, whether it's not being proud of who we are and what we do. But where that character funnel defines who we are. Then people who go outside the edges, you don't want them to come back in. You just seal the hole and say see ya. You choose to play out there, you'll play somewhere else. If we get to that point, we've got the Air Force we want to live in. It's hard. It takes everybody being part of the solution and it takes a commitment to doing the right thing all the time. And not tolerating other people doing the wrong thing. If we can get there we can solve a lot of problems.

If I walked into your squadrons right now and I sat everybody down and I said "Okay, be honest with me. Tell me who the next person to get in trouble is going to be." You guys both would know who it is. You can narrow it to three, four or five people. You know exactly who they are. The ones who go out and binge drink on the weekends and slap some young lady on the rear end at a party, or they get in a fight downtown, or they just start screaming at somebody in the squadron, [because they] get in their face and threaten them if they ask them to clean a room again. You know these people. They've been behaving like this since you met them. [Too often] at the Academy, people don't stop them. It doesn't change in the Air Force, by the way. We have the same problem in other places.

The idea is, once we define the character funnel, we enforce it. We enforce it. It's not the Chief of Staff of

the Air Force, the commander, the first sergeant, it's everybody's job. If we ever get to that point we're in good shape. That's where we're heading. That's where we want to go.

Fullam: ***Sir, earlier you mentioned fear of the honor code as a cadet. How do you instill that culture of commitment when there's an aspect of fear behind something? Because fear instills a sense of compliance because you're scared of getting in trouble by it instead of being committed to keep the code.***

General Welsh: Well, this is a small nuance but it's important. I didn't say fear, I said the Honor Code was scary. I don't think that's a bad thing. I don't think fear is a bad thing to get people into a habit of behaving in a way you want them to behave. I'm not talking about physical fear, but realizing that there is a real implication of breaking a rule or not following a code when you've never followed one before. It's not a bad way to get somebody into a mindset of I really have to pay attention to what I'm doing and thinking here, with the idea being you grow into understanding the necessity.

I'm not even close to naïve enough to believe that everybody who walks in the door at the Air Force Academy walks in and says oh, the honor code, this is what I want to live under my whole life. That's just not true. But it's something that you put there and you say this is the standard that you will meet here. This is how you will behave. Whether you embrace it or not, this is the standard we live by. And I think the people, that's a little bit scary because they're thinking about the white lies they told all through high school, or they think about sharing answers to tests in their home room, which a lot of people do. It's part of the culture in some places. It's not really seen as an evil, really bad thing, it just happens. We need to make sure they understand it doesn't happen here.

So a little bit of nervousness about that code, "is [asking oneself, is] it going to be tough for me to live up to, is not a bad thing to get you started.

Then I think the Academy does a good job of training people and teaching people about why. When you do your honor education, the intent is to explain to people, why is this important? Why does the code matter? How will it affect you the rest of your life? Why does it establish your personal credibility in the recognition you get from people? Why does it make you credible?

That's what you do at the Academy, you're widening the competency funnel. And part of that is acting like a leader of character all the time.

I don't think we all walked in the door that way. I didn't. Maybe everybody else did.

So I wouldn't call it a fear, but I think that thing being a little scary to me was actually helpful. I paid attention to the honor code as a cadet. I listened when people started talking to me about it. I think that helped.

Everybody compares everybody else to themselves. I grew up with the most honorable man I've ever met, my father. He was unbelievable. [He] treated everybody exactly the same. He was brutally honest but he did it in a way that didn't make you feel bad, but he never shaded the truth. But even when I was at the Academy I thought oh, man, I don't know if I can meet that standard. I was worried about it. I think if we all just admit that and move on we're better off.

Burnett: ***Let's talk a little bit about respect. You talked a lot about our climate of respect in the Air Force Academy, and the Air Force as a whole. There's a certain historical tradition that comes along with a flying squadron, sort of a flying squadron mentality in the Air Force sometimes. How do we keep that morale, that persona of the flying squadron alongside the climate of respect?***

General Welsh: I go back to my dad. My dad had 9,000 fighter hours. He flew in three wars. He was a fighter pilot his whole career. I never ever heard him say something disrespectful to anyone, and certainly [never saw him] act disrespectfully to anybody.

Anybody who uses culture as an excuse for lack of respect is in the wrong place. The two are not related.

The things that we do that show lack of respect for people in our fighter squadron sometimes are reminiscent of a culture that's just old school. It's gone. But it wasn't always part of the culture.

I'll give you an example. I wanted to show my dad one of my squadron song books, the song books that the fighter squadron sang. My dad had never seen one before. When he looked at them he went, why would anybody sing this? He said it's just crude.

Now those things started in the Vietnam era. Not way back when fighter aviation started. And they were perpetuated for a while. It's time to change them. We thought we got rid of them ten to fifteen years ago but they were still drifting around. But that's a piece of culture. It's not part of our heritage. Heritage is what you celebrate, not culture. Heritage is different. Heritage is not those kinds of song books. Heritage is Dick Jonas songbooks about fighting and flying and taking care of your brothers and sisters in battle. Its different kinds of singing. Let's write those thoughts. We've been fighting for the last twenty-two years, let's write songs about that. We can all sing them.

We just have to get over this connecting of [any particular kind of] to respect. If you don't have a culture of respect you're going to fail. That's the bottom line. Everybody in this business, everybody, is critically important to what we do and they deserve to be treated that way. It's that simple. If you don't treat them that way they won't feel fully empowered, fully enabled, and feel like a full contributor to the team. And if they don't, we're not as good as we could be. If we're not as good as we could be, we're not doing our job. Our job is to fight and win the nation's wars. If you don't do that well, more people die than should die. Now you're back to an ethical dilemma. How can I face myself if we're doing that? Don't let people compare the culture with lack of respect. It's behavior that breeds lack of respect. And over time behavior can create a temporary, (hopefully), culture in our organization where everybody shows lack of respect, or fails to stop [disrespect] when they see it. We have that problem and we've got to fix it. But again, it's not an Air Force program that is going to fix it. Airmen are going to fix it.

Fullam: ***Speaking of doing our jobs well, how do you personally define excellence?***

General Welsh: I do my best. Excellence as a service comes about when you get the best people, you train them as well as you possibly can, you educate them to do their job, you give them the tools they need, the training they need, and you give them the people around them to get it done, then you give them the right tasks. If you do that, you should see that's excellence. If they do it and they fail, then you didn't do something excellent. But they did their best. I let them down.

So all we can do, I think, you do your best at your job every single day. You try and get better every day. You try and take care of people. If you do that, I think that's what we're talking about with excellence. Don't tolerate less than what you can do successfully. If you're accepting less than your best performance then you're not achieving this goal of excellence.

Excellence for you [may be] a much higher level of performance than is excellence for me. You're just more talented, better looking [and] more athletic. All the things that I really hate you for [chuckles]. But your excellence level is not the same as everybody else's, so don't hold other people to yours, it's just yours. And then try and exceed them. That's how I see it. I just do my best. On the days I don't, I know. I know I didn't. And I kick myself and try again tomorrow.

Burnett: ***Sir, what do you think are the best ways to promote religious tolerance, appreciation for diversity,***

respect for human dignity as embodied in the U.S. Constitution, when there's such a divisive debate in the nation?

General Welsh: Again, you do your best.

Here's what we need inside the military as far as -- There are two big areas inside the military. One is religious persecution and one is religious expression. They're two very different things in my mind. People bring them together [in discussion] all the time. But from a perspective of managing an environment and creating a climate, they're two different things.

Religious persecution to me implies that people are not free to practice the religion of their choice. Or not practice a religion at all, if that's what they choose. We actually in the Air Force do a pretty good job of not having religious persecution. Generally, I can't find examples of people who don't feel they can practice their own faith. We've talked to every Air Force chaplain. Our Air Force chaplains don't believe they're restricted from helping people practice the faith of their choice. I think we're doing fine there. So religious persecution is one thing.

Freedom of expression is a different thing. It's a much more obvious thing. When we have issues that come out in the press and in other places, it's typically from issues about freedom of expression. Is a Bible verse on a whiteboard okay or not? Is a picture of a crusader in an Air Force dining hall okay or not? Is a Bible on the POW/MIA table okay or not? Is a menorah on the CQ [Cadet in Charge of Quarters] desk at the Academy okay or not? Those are the questions that we tend to get into, and then there is a greater debate in the nation so we get in the middle of that debate with one group of people saying you're too religious and another group saying you're not religious enough.

So from a military perspective, from a commander's point of view, whatever required policy you have in place has to support the law of the land and it has to have enough clarity that you can actually implement it. It's got to be practically executable. So the real question for me is where do you draw the line? You can draw a very simple line and say if you're in a military organization you can write anything you want inside your room. So you can put a whiteboard in your room and write anything you want on it. Bible verses, Quranic verses, words from the Torah, whatever. But you can't put it in the hall because that's a government building and it's a public place. There are many many people who say that's restriction of religious freedom. Now the same people, if you put outside in the hall on the whiteboard and the guy across the hall drew a menorah on his door and the guy next door drew a wiccan prayer circle in the middle of the alcove, and the guy down the hall sings his morning Islamic prayers from the corner of the hallway, they wouldn't like that. That would go too far.

So the question is, where is too far? That's the problem. So right now everybody's trying to interpret what is okay and what isn't okay. How far down the spectrum can you go before you go okay, that's too much expression. In most cases the groups are looking at it from the perspective of their faith or their non-faith. So to some people, any religious expression is too much. To other people well, it's great, as long as it's this faith or that faith. But you really can't use symbols which are the words of some faiths. So where do you draw the line is the trick for us. And to me, it's just a matter of understanding the problem's hard, it's an emotional issue; and people have got to rise above this.

Along with our chaplains, lawyers, constitutional law experts, and others, my goal is to make sure that we have policy that is within the law for the Department of Defense, and anything the Air Force puts on top of that is to simplify and make our policy practically executable. So that we don't have everybody in the Air Force, from an eighteen year old cadet to an almost eighty year old general trying to interpret these things and know the nuances of the law and the policy. That's never going to work. With everybody staring at you with binoculars waiting for

mistakes so they can declare victory. No matter which side of the argument you're on. That's the problem.

Do I believe in freedom of religious expression? Absolutely. If somebody asks me about my faith I tell them everything. I'm proud of my faith. I always have been. But if they don't ask me when I'm acting as a commander, I don't assume they want or need to know because the answer usually is they don't want either.

The behavior is actually fairly straightforward in my mind. Wait until somebody asks and then tell them everything they want to know. If they don't ask, just celebrate it yourself. That's what you're free to do.

But that's the fine line. Everybody's faith requires them to do a different level of activity with others in expression, and, when they meet in the middle, it's tough for you guys to figure out what the rules are. So the question is, do we keep it really simple and keep it all in the public view or do we allow freedom of expression in the public domain and then figure out where too much is, which is hard. That's what we're in the process of doing. The Academy is going to have to do the same thing.

Fullam: ***Sir, with today's airmen entering a service that's facing significant force reductions due to the economy and the withdrawal from the war, and knowing historically that there's a fluctuation with funding and personnel commitments and future conflicts, how do you go about encouraging commitment from the brand new lieutenants or the young airmen?***

General Welsh: Relative to the reasons they come into the military, nothing's changed. My big comment to them is don't get distracted. Do your job. Be really good at it. You're going to have the resources to do that. The jobs we continue doing, we're going to be really good at. We may have to cut some jobs. We may have to not do as many things because we're not going to have as much horsepower, as much firepower, as many resources, but we'll be really good at what it is we do. So whatever job you're doing, commit yourself to it. The people are still going to be the best on the planet. You're still going to be doing cool stuff. You're still going to be doing stuff that's really important to the nation. So if you're worried about resources coming in affecting your commitment to the job, then I would start by questioning your commitment to the job. Don't' get distracted.

By the way, it's easier said than done. I understand that. When I visit Air Force bases right now, in the year and a half I've been in this job until two weeks ago no one had ever asked me at an All Call (including the hundreds, sometimes thousands of people in a room)--no one had ever asked me a question about the operational part of our Air Force. Nobody ever said, "when do I get a better radar, when are we going to get a new missile, when are we going to get new tools?" All they ask about are retirement plans, resources, force shaping, that's all I've been asked about.

That's not a good data point. It's about the mission. If everybody at the wing level and the squadron level are just focused on doing the job the way they're capable of doing it we'll figure out the resource stuff. I understand it's a big distraction, but the commitment has to be to the mission. It has to be to what you stand for. It's got to be the nation you held up your hand and swore to. That's why we come into the military. All the other stuff is going to be fine. They pay scales are good. The retirement plan's going to be good, no matter what it looks like. It's changed three times in my career. It's a great retirement plan. So why all of a sudden do we think it's going to change and be horrible? That's just not going to happen.

So trust the leadership of the Air Force a little bit to take care of you. We're not going to let bad things happen to you. It's not what we do. Despite what the blogs seem to think.

Burnett: ***Sir, you mentioned persecution versus expression. Sorry to go back in time, but you mentioned persecution versus expression in religious tolerance. I'll be a lieutenant in May. I will have people under me for***

the first time in my life. For me it's always been my faith that's upheld me through things. If an airman comes to me who's having problems, mental problems, family problems, the best answer I have in my mind is my faith. Am I expressing it in the right way there? If I mention it?

General Welsh: I understand what you're saying. [As a commander, think about what's best for him. Is what's best for him your faith or his faith?

Burnett: His faith.

General Welsh: Okay, that's a completely different discussion than talking about your faith.

If an airman comes to you and says, if an airman came to me and said I'm really struggling, I just can't seem to get my bearings, I don't know how to get back on the right track. I would not even hesitate to say well just tell me what sustains you? We talk about pillars that we lean on. One of the pillars that we talk about all the time is the spiritual pillar. It's not faith specific, it just means there's something you kind of lean against when times are really tough. It may be religion, it may be your family, it may be your love of music, but there's something that gives you a spiritual foundation that supports you and the people who have that spiritual pillar, however they define it, are people who tend to be able to weather storms better, and there's all kinds of research in this area.

So I would try and figure out first, what is their pillar? Then enhance that. If in the conversation the individual says well, sir, what do you lean on? I'm not connected to my faith, I don't feel it. What do you do? I like the way you act, I like the way you treat people. Tell them.

The point is, you cannot transmit your values to them in the area of religion. That's what our restriction is. But if they ask you, tell them everything. Once you've told them, they then have a choice. They can choose to ignore it or they can choose to embrace it. They can choose whatever they prefer. You just can't try and influence that because that changes, that's proselytization. You can't do that as an officer in the Air Force, in uniform, with people in uniform. Some faiths believe that proselytization is part of the faith. Fantastic. Take off your uniform, walk out the gate, there's an entire world out there. Go convert. But not in uniform, not using your position as a lever, and not with other people in your unit. You just can't do that. That's where the line is drawn for us.

Make sense?

Burnett: ***Yes, sir. Thank you. When the Air Force Academy was founded we didn't have our core values of integrity, service and excellence. If they had been in place at that time how do you think that would have affected our honor code?***

General Welsh: I have no idea. I hope it wouldn't affect it at all. I don't see them as competing, I see them as complementary.

The Honor Code is something specific that you can set as an objective -- integrity, service and excellence to me are kind of these great goals. That's where you're working toward them your whole life. It's like the guidelines, you're kind of walking through life and in the distance there's these hedges. The integrity hedges and the excellence hedges and I'm going to stay there. I'll learn as I go. The hedge is a little closer to me some days than it is other days, but I'm going to stay in there, that's the goal. The Honor Code is much more specific than that. It just tells you you will not do this, this and this. I am committing that I am not going to do that. I'm signing up to this. I don't take an oath . I don't take an oath to the core values, I just try and live them. They're what I stand for. The honor code is the way I behave. It sets the standard for me and everybody around me because I'm telling them right up front that I will not tolerate you not following it. And by the way, I'm raising my right hand and I'm swearing that I'm not going to tolerate you doing it. So to me the honor code is credibility.

One of the things in this business you've got to be is credible. When you say you're going to do something as an officer in our Air Force, you better do it. Everybody that works for you is watching. If you don't do it, you've just lost yours. You get one chance.

So in my mind, when you as a young person raise your hand and say I will not lie, I will not cheat, I will not tolerate it, your credibility is on the line from that second forward.

One of the reasons we have a probation program is because your credibility is now gone. You didn't live up to your word. You didn't follow the oath. So the question is, can we trust you to ever do that? And the decision was made a while back that we believe you're young enough, it is a little scary, people do come from different backgrounds, so we're going to give you a chance to see if you can self-reform. Essentially, is what the probationary period is. And embrace this code as a thing that you're going to live by, you're going to live up to. And the people who can convince the people, as you know, in the honor system that they do get themselves to that point then they'll be reinstated, they'll retake the oath essentially, and move forward. The ones that can't go home.

> *"I don't take an oath to the core values, I just try and live them. They're what I stand for. The honor code is the way I behave. It sets the standard for me and everybody around me because I'm telling them right up front that I will not tolerate you not following it."*

Fullam: ***Sir, what would you say the greatest obstacle in instilling this climate of excellence would be, both for us as cadets and airmen in the Air Force?***

General Welsh: People. People complicate everything. They don't intentionally complicate this but they do because they're different. People add a thousand factors to every equation because they're not the same. Nobody's the same. Nobody has the same background, the same personal values, the same social values, the same moral values, the same experiences. Nobody does. They're all different. Everybody's got a unique story, and every airman has a story. So I think the hardest part is for our commanders and supervisors in an organization to work hard at learning what all those stories are.

If you can learn the stories you can actually help the airman get to a point where they are following the values and the behavior you expect of them. I completely believe that. If you don't take the time to know your airmen well enough they will go in different directions because they care about different things than you care about. They just do. They're human. They've got different things driving them. Sometimes those things are distractions, sometimes they're motivations, sometimes they're bad habits, sometimes they're really, really honorable things that you aren't going to be able to live up to, but if you don't understand what they are, you really don't know exactly what's motivating or pulling that airman in the right or the wrong direction so you've got to know that. You just have to understand that.

There are people around you for your whole career who are hurting, there are people around you who are frustrated, there are people around you who are mad at something or at somebody, there are people who feel unbelievably limited in what they're allowed to contribute because they don't think people recognize what they can offer. They're all around you. They're around you today. They're in your squadrons at the Academy. You just don't really know that yet. Or I would argue that you probably sense it, you just haven't taken the time to figure out what it is about that person that you sense is not right. Talk to them. Sit down and ask them. Just every day check in and say how

are you doing? You'd be surprised what they'll tell you after a while.

Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force [James A.] Cody has a great drill he runs at bases when we visit. We have this kind of conversation and he'll say you know, where's your best friend here in the audience? He'll be in a big room of people. They'll point usually to the person next to them. They'll say okay, great. This is your best buddy? I'll tell you what. In ninety seconds I bet I know more about him than you do. Then of course everybody's yeah, right. Then he'll just start asking questions. And it's really simple stuff. Do you have any pets? How many pets do you have? What was your favorite pet? Do you have brothers or sisters? What do they do? Are they famous for anything? Are they actors? What do they do? Are they really good musicians? How about your grandparents? Are they still alive? Any divorces in your family? Is the family split up or is it still pretty much a nuclear family? Where does everybody live? What do your mom and dad do? And about halfway into this, you are now looking at him and going I didn't know that. It just continues. It's really remarkable how little we know about each other even when we've been side by side for four years.

Every airman has a story. If we can get everybody to just learn the story the world changes. It just does. People respond to that. They'll perform in ways that you can't even imagine. They will drag you through every challenge that you run into. They're really, really talented. You can't be an officer in our Air Force without understanding you're not as good as your people. They're much better than you are, and they will carry you over every hurdle. All they want to know is that you care. And to me that's the same thing with establishing a culture of commitment, a culture of caring, a culture of respect. If everybody cares, it's easy. It's just easy. The ones who don't care, you don't tolerate them. We don't have a code for that except the code of common sense. And the code of leadership.

> *"Every airman has a story. If we can get everybody to just learn the story the world changes. It just does."*

Fullam: ***Sir, how do you make the balance between getting to know your people and remaining approachable as a commander by also holding them all accountable to that level and getting rid of the people that you don't necessarily want or need in your unit?***

General Welsh: The key to accountability is not the commander. The commander has to hold people accountable. The key is everybody else holds them accountable. If you can do it at every level, the organization is completely different than if you have a commander who keeps all the standards.

I tell every commander, squad commander, group commander, wing commander, everyone I've ever spoken to, I have a slide I actually use in presentations I show them. It's a light house in the middle of the surf that's crashing all around it, and I tell them you've got to have a buffer zone. You can be friendly with your people, you can be close with your people, you can be really well connected, but there's got to be a little bit of a buffer around that light house as the storm is crashing on it, because commanders have to make tough decisions and sometimes you've got to make them about people you consider your best people or who are closest to you. I've had to take action against vice wing commanders. As a wing commander I had to take action against command chiefs when I was a commander. People will surprise you with the things they do occasionally. So you've got to have the ability to hold everybody in your organization to the same standard. But the key to getting accountability and performance at every level is by having every supervisor feel that way.

Your young staff sergeant/supervisor can't be best buddies with an airman first class that he is rating. It's a little

tougher for him to understand that because he just was one not too long ago. Then he became a senior airman, and the next day he's now supervising three senior airmen and two A1Cs [Airmen First Class]. We've just got to teach that to our people and hold them accountable.

At the Air Force Academy it's really clear. You've got "Firsties" [First Class Cadets/Seniors] leading the squadrons, and then you've got two degrees [Juniors] trying to make things happen, but people kind of going off, and three degrees [sophomores] who don't know who they are yet. That's kind of how it works. Some squadrons are better at it than others. It depends on the climate in the squadron, and it changes as leadership changes. The same thing is true in the Air Force. It is all about leadership.

The more we get leaders to understand that at every level they have to hold this standard, the better off they are. At the Academy if all leaders were enforcing every standard, then being squadron commander would be a lot of fun. You could learn a lot. As it is, the squadron commander's trying to enforce every standard and everybody's fighting it. It's just the way it is, it's the way it's always been, which is why I would change the system. But that's the way it's been.

So I think we're getting cheated a little bit on the leadership training side of the house because we're not really doing peer leadership. We're doing peer influencing. Or not. Depending on how successful you are.

I think that's the key. The key is everybody's got to be accountable. Everybody at every level.

If you get a culture where people just expect to be held accountable, amazing things happen. I am a huge believer that people will perform to expectations. If you pick the right people they will perform to expectations. Those who don't are just obvious to everybody. But if you allow an expectation to be that you can get by without really performing well, then they won't.

I was not a good cadet for the Air Force Academy and I was because [being that way] was okay. I could have, I just didn't have to. It wasn't an expectation I felt I had to meet to be successful.

I got to my first squadron, [where] I was a T-37 instructor at Williams Air Force Base [formerly located in Mesa, Arizona, thirty miles southeast of Phoenix]. I finished the instructor program down at San Antonio, [and] did pretty good. I was top graduate down there so I was God's gift to aviation. I got back to Williams Air Force Base and walked in the door expecting everybody to "Ooh, he's here. The world's looking better now." I walked into the office of my first squadron commander. I'd finally reached the real Air Force. His name was Duane G. Divich. I'll never forget his name. It's the only place I ever saw him,

I never saw him again. His name was outside his door. Duane G. Divich, because I looked at it on the way out after he chewed my ass for not understanding what the personal appearance standards meant in the Air Force. He didn't care about my flying. He didn't care about how brilliant I was as a young instructor pilot. He didn't care about anything. I just looked like a slob. He didn't tolerate that in his squadron because "You can't influence students the right way if you look like a bum." Quote. I'll never forget it. My first day on the job and Duane G. Divich changed my life because he set an expectation very clearly about the way I was going to act. And it affected everything that happened to me -- Let me give you a brief rundown.

I became a recruiting poster kind of guy. I shined my boots. Nobody shined their boots every day back in those days. I spit shined my boots. It was obnoxious. I always had a flight suit that wasn't wrinkled. I just paid attention to it. He was going to beat me if I didn't. I knew that.

Along the way I got a couple of jobs because I looked sharp. Not because I was great at flying airplanes or instructing, but because somebody liked the way I looked.

I went to fly the A-10 after my days as a T-37 instructor and I got to Europe and all the people in my wing were leaving about a year after I got there because they stood up the A-10 wing in '79, I got there in '81, so a year after I got there, all the old guys were leaving and they needed somebody to upgrade to instructor pilot in my squadron. There were about four of us who were pretty new, but kind of in a queue. And no kidding, the squadron commander told me look, the 3rd Air Force Commander was coming in in about six months, and he's going to need an instructor pilot (IP). You shine your boots every day so I'm upgrading you to IP now. So I upgraded to IP so I could go be the 3rd Air Force Commander's instructor pilot. Was I the best pilot out of those four guys? Probably not. I like to think I was, but probably not. But the other guys were kind of like I used to be. About a year later all the flight commanders were leaving. They were all seven or eight years older than we were in age, because they were all F-4 guys that had gone to A-10, so they said well, we need a flight commander and the only requirement is you've got to be an IP to get flight commander and I was the only instructor in my squadron who wasn't a flight commander, so I was the flight commander. So I was the youngest flight commander in the wing, big wings -- 125 A-10s. And I was the youngest flight commander by seven years.

My next OPR [performance report] said "number one captain in the biggest fighter wing in the Air Force." That was endorsed by the USAFE [US Air Forces Europe] Commander. And I got promoted to major three years below the zone because I shined my boots. Because Duane Divich kicked me in the rear and told me what standards are about.

Guys, it's that simple. There's nothing magic that happens in the world. It's about telling people what you expect, then setting the standard and holding them to it. We can do it at the Air Force Academy, we can do it in the Air Force. People actually like it. They know what to expect. They know what the goal is. They know when they reach the standard they're proud. Now we're back to the pride thing.

Sorry, long answer.

Burnett: ***No, sir. That was a great answer. Speaking of holding people accountable, the recent issues at Malmstrom as well as in the Navy and Army, how do we react to those issues? How do we learn from it? What do we do as a result?***

"There's nothing magic that happens in the world. It's about telling people what you expect, then setting the standard and holding them to it."

General Welsh: The first thing you react to an issue like this by taking it head on. Don't duck it, don't fail to acknowledge it, don't minimize it. Find out the facts first. Once you have the facts, figure out what the solution is going to be.

We've done a lot of studies in the nuclear business over the last six or seven years. In fact we've done about twenty of them. We have over a thousand recommendations that came out of those twenty studies that we've already implemented completely. We're done with them. We made it better. But none of those studies mentioned the cheating as a problem.

So the first thing you do is figure out why. Where did it come from? How long has this been around? Is it pervasive? What's going on? That's part of the investigative process. That's all been done. And pointing to a number of things that were culture things that had changed inside the nuclear community over time, especially the community at Malmstrom.

Some of it was individuals who were just bad, who kind of took it to another level and brought it over the last couple of years to a really bad place. But there was also a culture of behavior that kind of came to be accepted. Sharing information on tests. Helping each other out. A deputy crew commander, before they turn in their answer sheet on Monday's test was showing it to a crew commander. The crew commander didn't tell him what the answers were, but they'd just say something like well, you might want to recheck number seven. That's not really cheating, is it? Then they'd go back and take a look at seven and they might change their answer. Or they might not. They didn't give them the answer, they just pointed out that you may want to look at that one again.

Some people described it to me as "We're just sharing the 'gouge'." "Just taking care of my deputy." [or] "Getting our young guys through." Those are the phrases that kind of came to be normal, from the crew force. That to me sounds like cheating. A lot like cheating.

So where did we cross the line? Because these are not evil people. They're not bad people. They're young people who came into this culture that had kind of gone leaning that way and they just went with it. They were even told in training, you're going to see some things in the testing program at the base that you might feel a little uncomfortable with but just go along with it. They'll get you through this. That just became normal over time.

So the first thing you do is try and analyze exactly what you've got. Admit what you have. Then figure out how you change it.

We started by removing every leader in the operational chain in the wing. The wing commander retired. The wing commander, by the way is a great officer. He's a great officer, he's a great human being. If you haven't seen the note he left with his wing when he resigned, you should read it. It was an email, he sent it out to the whole wing. It was spectacular. But you read that piece of paper, you know Rob Stanley. That's who he is. But he'd been there for two and a half years. Nobody had picked up on this and he hadn't either.

We removed every squadron commander because about 40 percent of each squadron was involved. How do you not know that?

The group commander went, the deputy group commander went. How do you not know if 40 percent of your ops group is involved in doing these kinds of things?

And the question really is not "Are they bad people?" Because they're not bad people. The question is how did they get disconnected enough that they didn't know what was going on? Now we come back to leaders. What is the leader's role? What is the commander's job? Is it to just be a person of integrity yourself? Is it to meet the standards yourself? Or is it to ensure your people are meeting the standards and your people are examples of integrity? In my view that's what commanders do. Until you can do that, you can't be a commander in our Air Force. You've

got to figure out how to know what your people are doing, you've got to connect with them enough so you know what's driving them -- back to everyone has a story -- and you've got to let them know what your standard is and demand that they meet it.

If you say my standard is that we're going to score 100 percent on this test, do you guys understand that? How do you think they're going to interpret that? As opposed to saying I want everybody in this group doing the best that they possibly can. If I don't think you're performing to your best, we're going to talk. But if you're giving me everything you've got and your standard is 92 percent, I love you like a brother. It's about the standard you set, but commanders have to set them. That's the kind of things you're supposed to be practicing when you're at the Air Force Academy.

Until we have a system that allows you to really do that, try, fail, adjust, then we're not quite right yet. I expect cadets to live up to standards too. Want to hear personal frustration? I hold airmen in the Air Force to a higher standard than we hold the cadets at the Air Force Academy when it comes to behavior. I can give you a million examples. Unacceptable. Just unacceptable. How do we change that?

Fullam: ***Sir, how do we as an Air Force live with traditional military values while also being innovative in how we train and equip to fight and keep up with the challenges in the changing national security landscape that's out there right now?***

General Welsh: I don't think values and how we train and adjust the fight, I don't see it changing at all. The values don't change. The values are the bedrock. Whether it's the core values of the Air Force or your personal values and the way you approach a problem, they don't change.

The important thing I think is that -- First of all, the mission of the Air Force will constantly evolve. We've done the same mission since the day they set it up as an Air Force. They haven't changed at all. We added space superiority. Other than that it's air superiority, global strike, ISR [reconnaissance], airlift, command and control. That's what they've been since 1947. They're still those things today. We added space to the air part so we have air and space superiority. We're trying to figure out how to do all those missions in new domains now. We did them the air before. Now we're doing them in the space domain. And we're doing them in and through the cyber domain. But the mission's the same. We're just doing ISR through cyber, or ISR through space, or command and control through space, or command and control through cyber. It's still command and control. It's not some new cosmic mission we've come up with.

So the trick for us is figuring out how do we adjust the way we think about the mission so that we become more efficient over time and more effective over time. Even with limited resources. Can you take the strike mission out of the air domain and put more of it into the cyber domain so it's not non-kinetic strike, but it has at least equal if not greater effect particularly against targets you can't access easily, particularly through the air domain. If you can do that, there may be a way to balance this with lower resources where you're even better than you were before. But it requires a completely different way of thinking about things. So part of it's just training ourselves to look for opportunities. This is where our young folks are tremendous. They're not tied into the same ideas I'm tied into. So if we can give them general guidelines and say hey, operate with these lines, go figure out a better way to take out the water bottle, they will. They'll figure it out. But we've got to be willing to listen to them once they figure it out, and maybe try sometimes the things that don't work and adjust until we find the things that do. That's where this innovation idea comes into the Air Force. It is essential for our success. I don't want people innovating with their values at all, ever. I want them walking in the door, understanding the core values, living by them their entire time in the military and

afterwards, and I want them understanding that those values make us more committed to what we do and make us more trusting of who we do it with and tie us closer together. That's what values do.

Values are part of the fabric of an institution. They're not part of the task of an institution. They're much deeper than that. So I just see our core values as who we are. As soon as we quit meeting those core values we have got a major issue on our hands. So when you see something fairly significant happen like at Malmstrom, back to the question itself, you've got to worry about core values. At least in one area, we lost them. We just did not follow our core values. And I'm not naïve enough to believe that only the people at Malmstrom are capable of going there. So we've got to figure out what happened and make sure we kind of get that under control, change the leadership, change the environment there, and then re-spread the thing that's most important for keeping this from happening which is core values. So we're onto another core values campaign in the Air Force. We're just going to remind everybody what these things mean to us.

One of the things you have in big institutions is when you train people in training pipelines; you can throw a lot of stuff at them. It can be core values training, honor training, sexual assault, even respect and dignity training, diversity training, all the stuff you get. All that training actually brings up somebody out of a pipeline who pretty much understands how we're supposed to be doing things. But when they hit their first operational unit if they don't hear the same stuff and see the same behavior, they go right back into that huge funnel of behavior they came out of. So we just compress them down and then they do this again. That can't happen for us to be successful in this arena. It just can't.

I'll give you an Academy analogy. When I was the commandant I asked every class that came through while I was there the same question, and I asked at a couple of points. The first time I saw them was during the 4th of July fireworks. We'd bring them in to Arnold Hall [student union] to watch 4th of July fireworks off the deck there in the back of Arnold Hall. That was kind of what we did when I was there. I don't know if they do now. But I talked to them right before that in Arnold Hall Theater.

The first question was, how many of you came here because you saw the Academy as this shining place on the hill, some place that would make you better than you were before, that would kind of drive you to the live you really wanted to live, that made you part of something special? Every hand in the room went up. I said okay, you're here now, you've been here a couple of days. It's hard. How many of you still feel that way? Every hand in the room stayed up.

At the end of BCT [Basic Cadet Training] I talked to them again, Arnold Hall again, part of their closing ceremony, and I asked them the same two questions. Every hand was still in the air.

I met with the Doolie cadets during the academic year the first time in the middle of September. I wanted to meet with the four degrees [freshmen], to kind of talk to them about the academic year, what can we help with, those kind of things. I asked them the same two questions in the middle of September, so we're a month and a half later. Every hand was in the air when I asked the first question. When I said how many of you still feel that way, two-third, maybe three-quarters of the hands came down.

> *"This is where our young folks are tremendous. (...) But we've got to be willing to listen to them once they figure it out, and maybe try sometimes the things that don't work and adjust until we find the things that do. That's where this innovation idea comes into the Air Force. It is essential for our success."*

Now only a quarter of them still feel proud to be there at this shining place on the hill.

Why is that? What happened to them during that time period? I went and asked a bunch of them. Do you think it was academics that did it? It was living in the squadron. It was other cadets that did it. All of a sudden they saw cadets the way cadets really behaved and talked. That wasn't what they saw with this shining place on the hill. How do we fix that?

Burnett: I was about to ask you.

General Welsh: You get back to setting the standard.

One of the things that I've seen in all my experiences at the Academy is that you've got a core group of cadets, two of them are sitting right here [referring to interviewers], who try to do the right thing all the time. You're there to learn. You want to be good at what you do. You're proud of being an airman. You move forward and you want to be good in the Air Force. You're excited about the opportunity. You're trying to prepare yourself. You just do the best you can. Every now and then you're allowed to act twenty, but most of the time you don't. You act much older and you do much more than people like me ever thought possible at your age. You're just talented and you're aiming at all the right targets.

Then there's another group that, probably about the same number of people who really don't care that much and they're living in a parallel universe. They live in the alcove at the far end of the squadron as far away from the AOC's desk or the MTI's [Military Training Instructor, subsequently renamed Associate Military Trainer] desk as they can get. And they live there because nobody bothers them down there, and there's usually an alcove or two of them. They band together pretty quickly. Usually by the second cycle of rooms, they're together. They live on a different planet. They're not being governed by any of the rules of the squadrons. The chain of command kind of avoids going down there. They will tell you they'll kick your tail if they come in their room again. It's that group of people. I know about it. I was one of them. It's real. It's in every squadron and you know their names. So does the AOC. Why are they still there?

"Values are part of the fabric of an institution. They're not part of the task of an institution. They're much deeper than that. So I just see our core values as who we are."

And in between those two groups there's the great unwashed middle that doesn't really know which way to go. So that group in the middle just kind of rolls along. They get through, but they're not committed one way or the other. That's kind of how I see the cadet wing. Not a lot of people disagree with me, but that's how I see it. I've looked at it from lots of angles. My son will tell you he sees it the same way. I can tell you a lot of people who see it the same way.

So how do you change the behavior? Let me tell you an option, there are lots of options by the way. This isn't the only option. Let me just give you a couple of things you can do, and you tell me how they would change the game.

What if we started using aptitude probation as something completely different from conduct probation? And as somebody who started their three degree year, if you watch them their three degree year and you didn't think they really were interested in being an officer, they were just interested in having a good time in college, if they were put on aptitude probation and by the end of the three degree year they hadn't proved they wanted to be there and were proud of what they were doing, and then in your three degree year there actually is a choice made not just by the cadet to come back for a commitment, by the Academy to commit to them. We don't owe any cadet anything. Nothing. We're paying for your education, for goodness sake, we're giving

you incredible opportunity. We owe [you] nothing. So what if we just made that commitment a two way street. Would behavior change in the three degree year? Probably. What if once you committed and came back we wrote a performance report on you your junior and your senior year that stayed in your record until you made major, or not? Or captain? But you were rated, just like an officer performance report, and it went with you into the Air Force. Just that would change behavior. What if we quit having cadet squadron commanders and we had AOCs as the commander? I think that's how every other position except the senior enlisted position, was the MTI in the squadron. If they were the commander and the superintendent of the squadron and they drove activity in the chain of command so you saw how you were really going to have to act as a young lieutenant in a squadron, because they'll hold you accountable for it and then they write a report on you that would stick with you after graduation. That would change the game instantly. If you didn't live up to standards, they'd kick you out.

We don't have to tolerate a graduate coming out of the Academy with [a bad] attitude. We don't and we shouldn't. That's my view.

We need [a] Duane Divich to be a second class flight NCO at the Air Force Academy, or a firstie element leader. And set the standard right then for 20 percent of the officer force that's coming into our Air Force. We would change the game. But we don't have to tolerate what we're living with today. I make it sound much more horrible than it is, but you know what I'm talking about. We've never changed it. We've known about it since I was a cadet. This is nothing new. But we haven't been willing to change the system that we hold up as being so great. It's not that great. It just isn't.

Cadet disciplinary system, on your third late to work, late to class, what do you get for punishment?

Fullum: Form Ten of some sort.

General Welsh: If my staff sergeant, my NCOIC [Noncommissioned Officer in Charge] of the admin office today is late for work three times in a row, it's a verbal counseling, a letter of counseling, a letter of reprimand. The fourth time, she's gone. Gone out of the Air Force. How is that compatible with how we're treating cadets? So what's the cadet learning? It's what I learned. "Okay I can live with five and five." [conduct punishments] I've got on my demerit total this month. Five demerits? Not a big deal. I don't start serving confinements until I get eight more, so I can live with this one. It's a different standard we're setting that creates a different behavior, creates a different mindset. It creates cynicism. And it's alive and well. I just don't think we have to tolerate it.

So be careful, because neither does [General] Michelle Johnson [current USAFA Superintendent].

> *"One of the things that I've seen in all my experiences at the Academy is that you've got a core group of cadets, two of them are sitting right here, who try to do the right thing all the time."*

Burnett: ***Sir, our Commandant talks about that. He calls them [the] transactional mindset. I can take five demerits so I'll take the risk. You are proof that a cadet like you can be one of our greatest officers in the Air Force. What do I say to a cadet like that?***

General Welsh: You don't want to learn the lessons the way I learned them. One of the lessons I've learned. I was lucky. Really lucky. Let me give you an example. I didn't do well in academics. I'd like to get a PhD someday. So what I've got to go do when I get out of the Air Force is I've got to go build academic credibility somewhere so they will accept me into an in-residence program. I've got to back up and I've got to go back and create academic credibility. So forget what I've done in the Air Force.

That's not going to convince an academic institution I can handle their curriculum. I've got to go build credibility again because I didn't take the time to do what I was capable of doing as a cadet in class. I cheated myself out of information and experiences and learning that could have vaulted me ahead years ago. I just let myself down. That's what it is.

I've been extremely fortunate. But as I said, the only reason it changed for me is because I met Duane Divich. I'd have done the same thing as a young officer. I'd have put myself in the same hole and had a great time doing it and been out of the Air Force really, really early. Which is what my dad thought I was going to do. I was disappointing him the whole time. He just loved me too much to tell me.

So you've just got to tell people, don't cheat yourself. You are closing doors. Every time you don't do your best you are shutting a door in your face. To me it was academics. It was also, by the way, jobs out of pilot training. I wasn't at the top of my pilot training class. I flew as well as everybody else, but I wasn't at the top of the class, because I didn't want to study that hard for the tests. I knew I would get by. You've got to be kidding me.

My son was exactly the opposite. He worked his butt off in everything when it came to pilot training, and it showed. He came out of pilot training and he had options. I closed those doors. It affects you. It will affect you.

If you look at one guy and say well look, he was Chief of Staff of the Air Force. You don't want to learn what I learned the way I learned it, when you can learn it easily as a cadet at the Air Force Academy. Just do what the program asks you to do. It will make you a better person. It will make you a better performer. You can do everything you want to do. Take advantage of it. I can tell you a hundred stories of people I know who didn't end up as Chief of Staff of the Air Force who ran with me at the Academy. Great people, but they'd go back and do it different too.

Burnett: ***Sir, we're almost out of time. What kind of parting words can you give us?***

General Welsh: Life's good. The Air Force rocks. Be good at it. Just be good at it. Whatever you're doing, be good at it. Don't be afraid to be the best you can be. Nobody appreciates a half-ass anything. Pick a career field, do your best.

Ultimately the only person you're going to have to look in the mirror in the big assessment-- depending upon your faith belief--the only person you're going to have to really worry about assessing is you. You can't fool yourself. You just can't do it. So just keep asking yourself every day, am I giving this my best shot? If the answer is yes, you will die as a happy man. I don't care whether you're talking family life, personal life, professional life. You give it your best shot, you will be happy. I'm close enough to see that spot, so I'm telling you, you'll be happy, guys.

If you look back and you go oh, man, I wish I'd just tried harder. I wish I'd given that my best shot. You will regret it. You just will. Every now and then it's good when you're younger to listen to people who have screwed stuff up and learn from them.

By the way, the other thing you give up, I didn't mention this before, value relationships. Some of the things I gave up at the Academy, people I greatly respected later in life who I didn't really know or didn't want to know or didn't want to know me because of the way I behaved at the Air Force Academy were people who I was cheated out of having as friends and mentors and advisors in the course of my career. They didn't want to be around me. Because they remember me from the Academy.

I thought I'd change, they didn't know that. There was this gulf, I was not able to cross that for a long time with some of them. With some of them, never. So to some extent I think I'm driven a little bit by trying to live up to their model still, their expectations still. I hope now

that they will accept me. You don't want to do that. You just don't want to do it. You're cheating yourself. Life is good. The Air Force does rock. I promise you, you'll enjoy it.

But you're in the Air Force now. Don't forget that. The Academy's a great part of the Air Force. It's just a different part. Every part is different. It's different everywhere. But the real Air Force lives at USAFA. You just aren't recognizing it yet.

All of us who go back and see [the Academy], we go man, this is great. It's fantastic. What a great place. What a great opportunity. How do we get cadets to realize that after BCT. That's the trick.

Okay, guys, listen. Thanks for what you're doing. This is a fascinating subject.

[Discussion about post- graduation.]

Thanks for setting an example. Thanks for being excited about what you do. Clearly you are. Thanks for taking on this challenge. This is important stuff that we need to pay attention to.

Just one. Just get one to pay attention. Do the same thing when you get out in the Air Force, just fix it one day, one person at a time. It will work that way. It just takes a while, but it will work. The only way it doesn't work is when you give up. Don't get frustrated.

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