

## BOOK REVIEW

# A Review of “Aiming Higher: A Journey through Military Aviation Leadership”

Chris Stricklin, Robert Teschner, Jason Harris, Kim Campbell and Daniel Walker, Chesterfield: RTI Press (2022)

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When five Air Force pilots in different phases of transition from military life come together to share and reflect on military and professional experiences, it yields a treasure trove of relatable and relevant leadership principles. *Aiming Higher* provides a glimpse into the authors’ lived experiences and the lessons they drew from these experiences. From the perspective of a fighter pilot to a transport pilot, they all faced challenges, they all failed, but they all grew. That is the reoccurring theme throughout the book—failure will happen, but it is how you evaluate and reframe as you continue to grow that develops you as a leader.

Forming a coalition named “Military Mentorship Mastermind,” these authors came together to continue to challenge each other as they led in new ways and new areas. Their shared purpose was to deliberately reflect on their challenges and push each other to develop into their best possible selves. In this compilation, they share leadership lessons but do so through story and in a relatable way. Not only do these stories get the reader thinking about similar challenges in their own lives, but the book offers “points to ponder” that provide a deliberate guide to this type of reflection. This encouragement of reflection transforms this from a leadership book with good stories to a helpful tool that readers can use daily in their lives and their particular contexts.

The authors point out the tenets of being a good leader. Not surprisingly, principles like trust, accountability, reflection, purpose, and credibility surface through each story. A unique element that was unexpectedly highlighted is

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how aviation training principles, in essence, are leadership principles. As an example, Robert Teschner tells the story of the unexpected discovery of a tumor. Adversity is undoubtedly something most readers relate to, yet he details how his Air Force training took over to guide him through this crisis. “Maintain aircraft control, analyze the situation and take appropriate action, and land as soon as conditions permit,” he writes (p. 99). The connection of these training elements to his situation is not initially apparent. Still, he links how he was able to center himself, process information, make plans, and accept those alternate plans in the face of unexpected adversity. This is particularly salient as many followers will remember leaders most when they lead them through times of crisis or uncertainty.

As another example, Kim Campbell frames her stories around the U.S. Air Force Academy’s Leader of Character framework and ties each experience to one of its three pillars. The importance of Living Honorably is tied to accountability, Lifting Others to challenging,

motivating, and influencing, and Elevating Performance to the relentless pursuit of growth. The simplicity, yet power, of these stories makes it difficult for readers not to see the relevance of these principles in their daily lives. Like Teschner’s use of Air Force aviation training elements, these applications continue to enhance the credibility and relevancy of these lessons to all readers in all contexts.

Daniel Walker writes, “at no stage in my life was I ever talented enough to completely avoid failure” (p. 108). The truth is that no one is. The problem, however, is that some leadership books make you feel as if the author has all the answers and you are “doing it wrong.” It is hard to connect when you feel like you are so far away from the leader you want to be. That is the beauty of *Aiming Higher*. Core to the book is that each of these Air Force pilots and leaders failed. They failed hard, and they failed often, but those failures were essential to their growth. Failure is vital to our growth, and in the words of the authors, we need to “embrace failure.”