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FROM THE EDITOR

The Power of Conversations

Dr. Douglas Lindsay, Editor in Chief, JCLD

We have conversations every day. Some are perfunctory and others are much more intentional. What we often fail to realize, is the profound impact a conversation can have. It is often upon reflection, if we allow ourselves that opportunity, where we synthesize and understand the influence of those conversations. In fact, many of us can think back in our lives to critical conversations that we had with a parent, coach, mentor, boss, friend, etc., that had a direct and lasting impact on our lives. All because someone took the time to talk with us.

For leaders, the power of conversations goes well beyond the basic communication of ideas, intent, or expected behavior. It is much deeper than that. It is about things such as making a connection, showing value, allowing transparency, and giving time. What we know about effective leaders is that they take the time to have, and put a priority on conversations.

The interesting thing about conversations is that they differentially impact both parties. If we view this from a leadership perspective, it can have important implications. For example, let's say that a leader is walking down the hallway and passes one of their subordinates. The communication that occurs (and occurs even without words) will have various implications and impact. If the leader walks by and says nothing or fails to even acknowledge the individual, then even with a lack of words, a message is conveyed. If the leader acknowledges the individual, a different message is conveyed. Finally, if the leader stops to engage the individual, even for a brief conversation, that results in a different message. The important thing for leaders, and those learning about leadership, is that in all

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three cases, a message is conveyed to the follower that is directly influenced by the leader.

While the leader cannot always control how the message is perceived, they do have more of an impact than they may realize. When we understand that leadership is about relationships, and conversation is a way to grow and develop those relationships, the influence that can be had is significant. This influence can be magnified as the levels between the employee and the leader increase. In an organization where there are few employees and the leader is seen on a near daily basis, conversations are more frequent and possible. The employee also has access to a wider range of leader interactions and behaviors where they can directly experience the leader and their leadership. However, in

effect. Why this is important to consider is that the even short conversations between leaders and followers can have lasting effects that impact the leader/follower relationship.

In This Issue

What we hope to do with this issue of the Journal of Character and Leadership Development (JCLD) is to give access to leaders, through conversation, to get a sense of how they think about and approach their leadership and their development. It is hoped that these glimpses into their thought processes will highlight some important factors that will aid in your own personal leadership development.

What we hope to do with this issue of the Journal of Character and Leadership Development (JCLD) is to give access to leaders, through conversation, to get a sense of how they think about and approach their leadership and their development.

All individuals who have even dipped their proverbial toe in the leader development space have come across interviews, biographies, autobiographies, or blogs/podcasts from recognizable leaders. This is of no surprise since if you want to learn about what effective leaders do, you go to those who are effective and talk to them about it. Interviews can be helpful

in hierarchical organizations (like the military), it is quite common for an employee to rarely see those higher up (even a level or two) in the leadership structure due to factors such as protocol and distance. In these cases, the interactions (or in the case of the current discussion, the conversations) that a leader has with employees further down in the organization can be magnified. What I mean is that if your sample of behavior with a leader is limited to a few short interactions, it is possible for the individual to over sample, in their mind, what the leader is like. Due to what we know about human behavior, this should be of no surprise. If the first interaction or conversation is positive, then that can create an anchor effect in the positive direction toward the leader. If it is negative, you can have the opposite

effect. Why this is important to consider is that the even short conversations between leaders and followers can have lasting effects that impact the leader/follower relationship.

Biographies can shed a different light on the leader, but by definition are written by someone who isn't the individual in question. Therefore, there are generally assumptions that are made based on things such as the author's interactions with the leader, available information about the leader, and even personal

opinions and biases. Again, this isn't necessarily a bad thing since it gives a much deeper glimpse into the individual's life than is generally available to most individuals.

Autobiographies can also be useful since they are told by the leader themselves. The limitation of such an approach is that the reader is limited to what the leader wants to share (impression management) that they either think is important or might help sell the book. Again, not a bad thing necessarily but certainly gives glimpses into the leader that has been vetted by some standard by the leader.

Finally, blogs and podcasts tend to be in a much more raw form by the leader, and therefore can lean more toward a current topic or an event that is timely, versus what the listener may want to know or understand about that particular leader. Each of these options have their plusses and minuses and get us a little closer to understanding the story, experiences, and characteristics of the leader of interest.

With this issue of the JCLD, we take a little different approach than those listed above. Our goal was to have a conversation with leaders focused specifically on the leader and their character development, but let the conversation drive the content versus a set of scripted and vetted questions. Some might critique this approach as being risky as the conversation could drift to topics outside of the interest area of the JCLD. While that possibility could occur, what we find is that the richness and direction of the discussion enhances the context of the conversation and leads to insights that aren't often available through other methods. For example, it is not hard to pick up just about any leadership book and find a list of things that we should be doing and not doing based on whatever the author deems as important. Sometimes, the book will even give a little context as to why those are important topics to the author. However, if we were able to discuss such a list through a guided conversation, we can get added

depth and context as to why those items are salient to the individual. This can help those of us who are continually developing as leaders (which should be all of us) a greater richness and material to study. It can also shed some light on the individual's thought process and why they deem certain things as important. The JCLD wants to intentionally be in the space of creating meaningful conversations around leader and character development. Not just within the context of the Journal, but also in the conversations that are spurred because of the Journal. It is directly in this space that the current issue of the JCLD is aimed.

The balance of this issue is a series of such conversations with leaders representing different domains. I highlight different domains as it is instructive to examine approaches to successful leadership from individuals who lead in different capacities. While the research on leadership tells us that things like communication, self-awareness, and conscientiousness are important factors related to effective leadership regardless of domain, we also know that the context in which leadership is enacted is critical to understand. For that reason, leaders from the domains of the military, business, academics, sports, consulting, and nonprofit have been included. While it is impossible to survey every different domain, it is hoped that the reader of the JCLD will be able to examine both the similarities and differences in the included approaches and how they could be relevant to your own development.

The first domain that we examine is the military. The five conversations in this section give a broad range of senior leader perspectives on leadership and character. The first conversation is with the President of The University of Texas at El Paso and former Secretary of the Air Force Heather Wilson. She shares thoughts from her time as the Secretary of the Air Force, the impact that USAFA had on her, examples of effective teamwork, what she sees as some of the future leadership challenges, and why she chose to go back to academia as

a university president. It is a rare opportunity to learn about leadership from one of our nation's top leaders.

The second conversation is with the Dean of The Bush School of Government & Public Service and former Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General (Retired) Mark Welsh. He reflects on his time at USAFA, several critical things that he learned about leadership along the way, reflections on his time as Chief of Staff, and why he chose to move into a different domain – academia. This conversation tells a story of how you can be successful, but also truly enjoy the journey.

The next conversation is with the current Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, CMSgt Kaleth O. Wright. This conversation took place before and after the National Character and Leadership Symposium (NCLS) that occurs every year at USAFA. Chief Wright shares his thoughts on NCLS, reflects on his journey in the Air Force, the strength and value of the enlisted force, and his thoughts about leadership. This conversation reflects the power of knowing ourselves, developing trust, and how critical it is to never stop developing as a leader.

The fourth conversation is with the Air University Commander and President, Lieutenant General Anthony Cotton. Through the conversation, he shares about his journey, lessons learned along the way, improvements that are being made regarding professional military education and his perspectives on leadership. He does this by sharing his thoughts regarding four key elements of leadership that he has experienced throughout his career: competence, commitment, composure, and compassion.

The last military conversation is with former Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower, Personnel and Services, Lieutenant General (Retired) Gina Grosso. In this conversation, she shares about her journey in the Air Force, how the Air Force prepares people, some of the changes initiated with respect

to Air Force personnel, and where we are headed. It is a great conversation at the organizational level of leadership in terms of how we prepare, promote, and take care of our personnel.

The next domain is that of professional sports and features a conversation with National Football League (NFL) Hall of Fame Quarterback Kurt Warner. Though the conversation, Mr. Warner shares about his journey to and in the NFL, the importance of leadership, the power of faith, and his legacy. He also shares about giving back through a foundation that he started, First Things First. It is a great discussion about the journey, how not everything in life is fair, and doing your best.

The domain of academics is examined next. The first conversation is with Dr. Barbara Kellerman, who is the James MacGregor Burns Lecturer in Public Leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School. In this insightful conversation she shares about the field of leadership, where our weaknesses are, how we might fix them, and how we need to keep improving. She shares her thoughts about looking at leadership as a system instead of an individual focused construct. Through understanding the leader as part of a larger system, this allows for a deeper understanding of what leadership is, and what it is not.

The next academic conversation features Dr. David Day, who is a Professor of Psychology, Director of the Kravis Leadership Institute, and the S.L. Eggert Professor of Leadership at Claremont McKenna College. Dr. Day shares his thoughts about leader and leadership development, the state of the leadership field, how leaders develop, and identity. Through this conversation, he talks about how we should be looking at leadership capacity and why some people stand in their own way of developing as a leader.

We next jump to the domain of business where there is a conversation with Mr. Howard Behar who is the

Former President of Starbucks North America and Starbucks International. In this conversation, hosted by Dr. Josh Armstrong of Gonzaga University, Mr. Behar talks about the culture of Starbucks, the role of character, his leadership philosophy, and advice for new leaders. This conversation gives a glimpse of what it is like to set the culture in an organization.

The next conversation is with Dr. David Altman who is the Chief Operating Officer at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL). Dr. Altman shares how his journey led him from the field of public health into leadership development. He discusses how he leverages both fields to make a difference and the power of interdisciplinary approaches to leadership development. Through discussing what CCL is and isn't, he shares the vision of CCL in not being a traditional consulting company, but an organization whose mission is to benefit society worldwide.

The final conversation in this issue gives a nonprofit perspective from Dr. Anthony Hassan who is the CEO and President of the Cohen Veteran's Network. He talks about his journey and how that journey helped shaped him into the leader that he is today. He uses the construct of "hustle" to talk about what successful leaders and teams do. Through sharing about the growth of his organization, he talks about leadership, development, and what future leaders need to be thinking about.

We wrap up the issue with two book reviews highlighting several works directly related to leader development. The books are *Leaders: Myth and Reality* and *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations*. The reviewers (Douglas Kennedy and David Houston, respectively) describe the essence of the books and how they relate to leaders and leadership development.

Looking Ahead

The next issue of the JCLD will focus on the theme of the upcoming National Character and Leadership Symposium and Air Force Academy's Outcome of "Valuing Human Conditions, Cultures, and Societies." If you have any ideas or thoughts regarding a potential article for that issue or an interview that you would like to see in the JCLD related to that theme, please let me know. Also, if you have any feedback on how we are doing or how we can continue to examine leadership and character development, please feel free to reach out at jclld@usafa.edu.

MILITARY

A View From the Top

Heather Wilson, The University of Texas at El Paso

Interviewed By: Douglas Lindsay

Lindsay: As a graduate of the Air Force Academy, how well do you think the Air Force Academy set you up for success?

Wilson: The Air Force Academy opened doors for me that I didn't even know were there. I went there as a 17-year-old kid from a family that never had someone go to college. The Academy gave me an exceptional education – a very broad education with a foundation in engineering and science but also in the liberal arts. The Academy also helped me develop as a leader. The Academy is a leadership laboratory to prepare lieutenants to take on the responsibility of leadership. So, I benefited from it tremendously. The one thing I would highlight particularly that I think is important, is the Academy's emphasis on the Honor Code and values-driven leadership. A foundation of values is central to what every leader does. Understanding what your values are and creating relationships of trust based on those values is an essential part of leadership.

The Honor Code at the Academy, is explicit and foundational. It is the core of what it means to be an Air Force officer and a leader.

Lindsay: With that in mind, how are we doing with respect to setting up our young men and women for success in leadership?

Wilson: I think the military services have more of a focus on training, education, and leadership development than almost any other element of our society. The Air Force as a whole does a good job developing leaders of character.

Lindsay: One of the goals of the commissioning sources and all of the training and education programs is to set them up for success to lead now and into the future. From the perspective that you had as a former Secretary of

Dr. Heather Wilson is the President of The University of Texas at El Paso. Previous to this position, she served as the 24th Secretary of the United States Air Force, a member of Congress, President of the South Dakota School of Mines & Technology, and as an Air Force Officer. Dr. Wilson received her undergraduate degree from the United States Air Force Academy (1982) and her Master's and Ph.D. as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University. She has over 35 years of experience in higher education, government, military, and the private sector.

the Air Force, what are some of those future leadership challenges that our young men and women are going to face in the military?

Wilson: There are two big challenges the next generation will face. The first is the rise of China and the resultant shift in national power in the Pacific. The second is rapid technical change. The pace of innovation is accelerating. Young leaders are not only going to have to cope with rapid change, they are going to have to drive change. One of the things that I was concerned about as the Secretary, and more generally as an American, was a declining focus within the service on technical expertise. We remember Jimmy Doolittle for the Doolittle Raid. He was also the first Ph.D. Aeronautical Engineer to graduate from MIT. I don't know how it happened, but there are fewer Air Force officers with advanced degrees in science and technology than perhaps there were in the past. I think that limits us.

Lindsay: Limits us in the ability to stay relevant and current with technology?

Wilson: It limits our understanding of the parameters of what is technically possible. There has always been a symbiotic relationship between the industry that builds our equipment and the Air Force that uses that equipment. You need to be a savvy customer and you need to have enough people that understand the technology and the science. I worry that we may have lost our technical edge as a service.

Lindsay: How might we address that? Is that something that we need to do more on the front end or can it be addressed with more advanced degrees?

Wilson: Gen David Goldfein (current Chief of Staff of the Air Force) and I did expand the number of sponsored Master's and Ph.D. slots for Air Force officers. We created the Ph.D. Management Office

under the A1. We would have people get advanced degrees and then we weren't managing their careers as if they were highly valued assets, which they are. And this summer, the Air Force is getting feedback on new promotion categories so that we don't punish people who get advanced degrees.

Lindsay: It is a long term investment to take those officers and integrate them back with intentionality once they have that increased education and competency.

Wilson: Yes. Under the current system, Lieutenants, Captains, and Majors are often discouraged from getting advanced education. With wider promotion windows, and different categories for promotion we don't have to try to make an acquisition officer's career look like a logistics officer's career path. That opens up more opportunities to develop people so that you have really high performing teams at every level in the Air Force.

The pace of innovation is accelerating. Young leaders are not only going to have to cope with rapid change, they are going to have to drive change.

I interviewed every 3-and 4-star job in the Air Force for two years. We always had exceptional candidates for 3-and 4-stars in operations. But we are desperately short of expertise in science, technology, engineering, research and development, and in some cases, logistics and maintenance because we don't promote or reward people in those fields.

Lindsay: Implicitly I think we value that education, but explicitly it doesn't always line up with who gets promoted and where people see growth opportunities. As someone who has directly benefitted by the

educational opportunities though advanced degrees in the Air Force, I can attest first hand to their value and developmental growth.

Speaking of your time as the Secretary, when you think back to that time, what are you most proud of?

Wilson: Probably the focus on restoring the readiness of the force to win any fight at any time. The second would be advocacy for increasing the budget of the Air Force. Dave Goldfein and I spent a lot of time trying to tell the story of an Air Force that is too small for what the Nation was asking it to do, and securing the support to restore readiness and expand the size of the force.

Lindsay: In those endeavors, were there any surprises or unique challenges with the position of Secretary that you had not anticipated?

Wilson: There were surprises every day! I had never worked in the Pentagon before so some of the processes in the Pentagon were completely new to me. The thing that I think I realized once in the job was that, in our structure of government, the Service Secretary has almost all of the authority to run the Service. The Chief of Staff has almost all of the influence. If you work together, you can get a heck of a lot done. If you are at cross purposes, neither of you can get much done. Dave Goldfein is one of the best leaders that I have ever had the opportunity to work with. That strong professional relationship between the Secretary and the Chief to advance the Air Force was one of the real joys of the job. I have tremendous respect for him and his leadership ability. We were able to work together better than any team in recent history of the Air Force. Part of it may have been that we were sworn in on the same day and at the same place at the United States Air Force Academy Field House. So, we had a strong common foundation of values. Our professional paths took different routes. He became a combatant officer and I went into public policy and higher education. But, I

think there was something about having had that early experience of professional life in the Air Force that made it very easy to work together.

Beyond the common set of values, we maintained near constant communication. There is an obligation for military officers to give their best military advice to the civilian authorities appointed above them. However, there is no obligation for the civilian authorities to ask for that advice. But if you ask for advice, it is freely given. There is almost no major decision that I made that I didn't ask Dave Goldfein what he thought. While we didn't always agree, if it was really important, we probably spent some time talking it through. It takes near constant communication and a level of trust that you build every day.

Lindsay: I would also assume having the humility to accept that counsel of those around you?

Wilson: Dave Goldfein made me a better Secretary. I think he would also say, if you ask him, that I made him a better Chief of Staff. That is evidence of a really effective executive relationship. We got to the point where we could tell each other's jokes and finish each other's sentences. But it wasn't just the two of us. The top four or five of the leadership team were quite close. If I had to be somewhere and couldn't cover something, we could look around the table and say, Gen Steve Wilson (current Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force) could you cover that one? It was that good a leadership team.

Lindsay: It is important to see such an example because we can all come up with too many examples of where there isn't effective teamwork. The ability to go back and forth and challenge one another professionally to help make the team better isn't seen often enough.

Wilson: We often disagreed but it was productive disagreement. We made each other think and we came from different perspectives. That was really useful.

There was also a respectfulness about it. We were classmates at the Academy. But in the two years we worked together, from the day I was nominated to the day I stepped down, he was so focused on the importance of the symbolism of his office, he never once called me by my first name. We are classmates. But we both had a roles to play under the Constitution and we were respectful of those roles for the Airmen that were watching us and looking to us. While we sometimes disagreed, I don't think we ever publically disagreed and we never sought to undermine each other if we did disagree. That also helped to create trust. I knew that if I was really struggling with something, frustrated with something, or couldn't understand something, I could talk it through with him.

Lindsay: Without that trust, you really can't have those types of conversations because you would be worried about motives or agendas.

Wilson: The motive of Dave Goldfein was clear. He was all about making the United States Air Force better, accomplishing the mission, and developing the next generation of Airmen. He was mission focused. As a leader, I tend to be values-driven, mission focused, and people oriented. I would say that is probably true of Dave Goldfein as well, which is probably the reason why we worked so well together.

Lindsay: What a great team and example. Switching gears a little bit. I know you have some history in academia, but why the choice to go back to being a University President after being the Secretary of the Air Force?

Wilson: I'm hoping the Airmen won't take offense at this, but the best job I have ever had was being a

University President. Former Secretary of Defense James Mattis knew when he recruited me to be the Secretary of the Air Force that eventually I wanted to go back to higher education somewhere in the West. When the University of Texas called, I listened because it's a pretty special place and is in the West where we wanted to be. Higher education matters to the future of this country and it needs great leaders too. It came a little bit earlier than perhaps I expected but the last time this college presidency turned over was 30 years ago. It doesn't happen a lot.

Lindsay: Timing certainly is important. There is one last question I wanted ask. As you think back over your career, do you have any advice for young leaders who are just starting out?

Wilson: Two things really come to mind. First, always focus on building relationships of trust and keep widening the circles of relationships of trust

Always focus on building relationships of trust and keep widening the circles of relationships of trust that you have as a leader. You never know when those relationships will turn up back in your life.

that you have as a leader. You never know when those relationships will turn up back in your life. The second would be to keep sharpening your saw. More than my generation, this generation of leaders are going to be living in a time when they have to constantly be developing themselves and learning new things. It will be a spiral of learning throughout their lives. It wasn't like that for my parent's generation. It will be different for them because the world is changing so fast. So, they have to commit themselves to always be learning.

Lindsay: That applies not only on the technical side, but as we become more connected and global, they have to think about their interactions with others as well.

Wilson: Absolutely. So, what did I spend my summer doing? I actually took a break between leaving the Air Force and arriving at the University of Texas at El Paso. I spent a month in an immersion Spanish language class in Mexico. I requalified on my airplane and studied up on atmospheric science and weather. Yesterday afternoon I went to the gym and was listening to David Brooks new book, *The Social Animal*¹, as I worked out. You have to continuously learn. For the next generation of leaders, learning must be a lifelong habit.

1 Brooks, D. (2012). *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement*. Random House Incorporated.

MILITARY

Proud, Honored, and Humbled

Mark Welsh, The Bush School of Government & Public Service,
Texas A&M University, General (Retired), USAF

Interviewed By: Douglas Lindsay

Lindsay: Would you mind sharing a little bit about how you feel the Air Force Academy set you up for success in the military?

Welsh: I think the biggest thing that the Academy taught me, and it taught me almost instantly, was that I was probably never going to be the best at anything. For most of us, you walk into a much bigger pond than you came from. There is just a ton of talent that walks into the door with you and it doesn't take long to figure out that you aren't the best looking, most athletic, smartest...you really aren't the best at anything. Not that I thought I was the best, but it became very clear to me that I wasn't when I arrived. The good news about that was it reinforced some of the things that my father told me. What my dad told me when I was very young was that I probably wasn't going to be the best, but no one could try harder than I could. He also mentioned to me that no one could care more than I did and because of that, I need to respect everyone. When you think about the fact that everyone you try to lead is better than you at something, it changes your view. If you realize that many of the people you lead are much better than you at a whole lot of things and some of them are better than you at everything—including leadership—it is a little sobering. But it shouldn't be sobering really, it should be empowering. All of a sudden, you have an IQ you didn't have yesterday. You have new perspectives on problems. You have tools to create solutions that you probably couldn't create on your own.

Mark A. Welsh, General, USAF (Retired) is the Dean of The Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University. Previous to that position, he served as the 20th Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force. He is a graduate of the United States Air Force Academy (1976), command pilot, and has held numerous command and leadership positions ranging from the Air Force Academy to the Central Intelligence Agency.

For example, I laugh a lot when people talk about becoming more innovative. I don't get any more innovative because I think harder. I get more innovative because I listen to other people's ideas. I think the same thing is true about leadership. Accept the fact that you are good enough. Be confident in the people that put you in the position. Whether that is as a cadet at the Air Force Academy, as an officer commanding men and women in the Air Force, or running a branch at a bank leading the people in that endeavor. Somebody hired you because they believed you are good enough so if you don't have confidence in yourself, at least have confidence in them. Then, do the three things that dad pointed out. Work your hardest to do your best every day. Respect everyone that you come into contact with...respect them, their ideas, and their input. Care more than anyone else does about your people, about your job, and about the organization that you are a part of. If you do those things, everything kind of takes care of itself.

Lindsay: How long did it take you to appreciate what your dad was saying about those ideas?

Welsh: For me, it was after I left the Academy. I was immature when I got there. I was focused on other things besides personal development unfortunately, which I have been very open about. As a result, it slammed doors in my face. There were opportunities that I did not have until later in life because I had not worked hard enough at the Academy and taken advantage of that incredible opportunity. But the idea that you don't have to be the best and you can still accomplish things, I learned that there. I also learned that there are a whole lot of people who also cared like I did about the corny things in life. About pride and patriotism, about faith, family, loyalty, and respect. The things that matter to us individually. I learned when you have a number of individuals who feel the same way, the team tends to embrace those values and that is what I found in the Air Force. I had hoped that I would find that and it was absolutely true. I grew up

in an Air Force family but it is a little bit different being a dependent than it is being in the workplace.

Lindsay: With that in mind, if Dean Welsh had the opportunity to go back and talk to Cadet Welsh, what would you tell him?

Welsh: Do your best at everything and not just baseball. My problem was that the things I chose to do well, I did well. The things that I wasn't excited about, you need to make sure to work hard at those things too because that is really where you need to develop. I was a very righteous young guy so I was quick to point out flaws in the system from my perspective. I was that way until I was probably a young Captain. I had a couple of bosses early in my career that made me realize that I was kind of an idiot. For me, quite frankly, it didn't come full circle until I was a Squadron Commander. I was standing in the front of the room and I heard "myself" in the back of the room. One of our Lieutenants made a comment in a Squadron meeting and my blood pressure immediately went up, I know I started to turn red and then it hit me. That was me talking. It sounded exactly like me. It was a comment he felt was funny and I didn't. It was kind of a reckoning for me. I think for some of us it takes a while. For others, they intuitively understand that's not the way to do business. It was never a matter of me not trying to do the job right or not working hard or that I didn't respect people, but there was just this idea that I have an idea and I think I'm right. However, I'm not right all the time. I'm just not.

Lindsay: Did that realization continue when you came back to be an Air Officer Commanding (AOC) at the Academy?

Welsh: I think when I came back as an AOC, one of the advantages that I had was I don't think I had a righteous view of the Academy and of the cadet experience. I had a very strong view that if we were going to have something called a cadet leadership

laboratory then it needs to be one. We need to let cadets win and lose. They needed to fail. My experience as a cadet and one of the reasons I didn't get real involved in part of the experience was that, in my organization, you couldn't fail. There was no trying and not succeeding. If you started to not succeed, the AOC would take over and you'd be told what to do and how to do it. So, it was very hard to try your style because everyone was trying to do things his way. Even as a cadet, it let me start writing down these leadership lessons that I collected over the years. One of the lessons was to do your job your way. Give it your style and your personality. Trust your gut. Don't try to be someone else. You won't succeed in the job that way. The people who were overseeing my Squadron when I was a cadet didn't believe that. It made me mad, quite frankly, so I turned it off. That was not the right answer and it was an immature answer instead of trying to work through it, but that was my approach at the time. I was taught better than that later when I found that if I disagreed with commanders in the Air Force they would let me sit down and tell them why, and then they would tell me why my righteous approach was not the right answer either. Maybe there was a solution in the middle that we could both work toward. That was a big lesson for me and I had learned that before I came back to the Academy as an AOC.

Lindsay: That ability to fail forward or fail for development is a difficult concept for some to grasp when they are used to a performance and results driven environment. To step into a developmental opportunity where it is okay to provide a context where cadets can take risks and sometimes fail, like that of an AOC, challenges quite a few people as they don't want to let go.

Welsh: It depends on the model you choose. If you say that we are a leadership lab and cadets are going to run the Wing, then you have to accept some failure. You just do or you are kidding yourself and it's not a leadership lab. I don't know that it is the best model,

by the way. I am of the opinion that about 40 or 50 cadets are trying to do the right thing every semester and the rest are fighting them. The squadron, group, and wing staffs are trying to learn these lessons in this leadership lab and their peers are basically saying, "get out of my face."

I think there is at least some merit to an alternative discussion about how this could work. Let me give you an example of something that you could do differently. You could make the AOC the commander of the cadet squadron. Then, you would teach cadets how to lead within an organization. The person setting the standard and directing the enforcement of the standard would be the AOC. Everybody else in their chain of command would be a cadet officer or NCO. The Academy Military Trainer (AMT) would be like the squadron superintendent. The real command lessons would come at the flight commander and element leader level which is where these young folks are going to come out and get their first leadership experience anyway. When they are at that level, they have a very clear set of standards and guidelines that they are given by their Squadron Commander. It's not like in the Cadet Wing where it is hit or miss depending on who your commanders are. Which lessons do you want them to learn? I believe you want them to learn to follow well, because I believe the best followers usually become the best leaders. I believe that they need structure in the way they try and lead and you can do that with an officer chain with cadets in it as opposed to an all cadet chain of command.

The problem we have now, and I think it has been this way for some time, when we get frustrated with cadet commanders, the people who get frustrated are people who have never tried to oversee 100 people. How many AOCs do you think have previously been flight commanders with 100 people working for them? The same applies to our Group AOCs where they are overseeing 1100 people and have likely never led that many people. So, our Group AOCs and Squadron

AOCs are learning some of the exact same lessons our cadet commanders are learning. They're all great people, but that's not a recipe for success.

The other problem is the cadet squadron commander is trying to demonstrate peer leadership, which is absolutely the hardest kind of leadership that there is. I think if you change the model, you could do other things. I'm a believer that if someone comes to the Air Force Academy, they are not getting ready to be in the Air Force or preparing to be in the Air Force. They are in the Air Force the day they arrive and we should treat them like they are in the Air Force. Once they start their junior year and they accept their commitment, give them the equivalent of an Officer Performance Report their junior and senior year. Leave it in their record until they compete for Major. I believe that a lot of the negative comments they make about this place will go away.

Lindsay: That would get rid of the future focused narrative of "once you graduate," or "when you graduate" or "once you are commissioned" instead of a current narrative of thinking about where I am now and the lessons that I could be learning.

Welsh: Exactly. You are in. Start performing. Your job is to do well in school, to do well in sports, and to learn about military protocol and leadership. It is to try to be a good squadron academic NCO. That is your job. We are paying you for it. That would start to get rid of the cynicism that we have seen in the Cadet Wing even when I was a cadet. I think the system breeds that to some extent. Now, there are some people who would go crazy if you tried to have something at the Academy that would linger in a record after graduation. I disagree and think it would have the opposite effect and it would make the Academy a better place. You wouldn't be evaluated on how good you are as a flight commander or as a squadron NCO. You would be evaluated on how hard you tried.

Lindsay: So, it wouldn't just be about success, but about development.

Welsh: It is about development. You gave it your best shot. You did well and you learned a lot.

Lindsay: What that could do is build a mentality early on in the cadet that I am a leader first. I am in the Air Force and not just the functional orientation of I am a pilot, an engineer, etc. It builds that development early on that I am an Airman.

Welsh: It also starts to build the culture of "we are working together here." We are not fighting each other.

Lindsay: It's interesting because we often hold on very tightly to what our own experience was. I am a 1992 graduate of USAFA and my experience then shapes how I think about these things. There are likely graduates out there who think it was great based on their experiences, and others who would be open to a different way if it helps address some of the issues that we know about, like what you addressed in your experience earlier.

Welsh: I would start by looking at what have been the criticisms of the Academy over time? One of the criticisms is that the Cadet Wing is cynical. Everybody talks about that. Another one is that Academy grads don't seem hungry when they come out of the Academy. I don't think that is true, by the way. I think there people in every group that act hungry and those that don't. If we can't make the Academy the place where we can make the most prepared and motivated Second Lieutenants, then what are we doing? It will all equalize because there is a ton of talent coming out of ROTC as well. It's not about who is better. I'm talking about who is better prepared and is more acclimated to the culture. The culture of the Air Force is not the cynical "what can we get away with" culture. How do we change that? I am a believer in the Air Force

Academy but I think the Air Force Academy is this shining place on the hill and I want it to shine brighter. I don't know how great it can be, but it can be better than it is now and it is pretty great now.

Lindsay: Right. We can always be better and should be pushing ourselves to be better.

Welsh: We have to for the Air Force to succeed. I just don't think we should have a different environment at the Academy than we do anywhere else. You are in the Air Force. Let's get you ready to lead. That is why you are there. You are not there to learn how to behave or how to accept responsibility. You are going to get all that but it is not the primary focus. Think about commitment day the first day of your junior year. You make the commitment to come back. I think there is a flip side to that. I believe the Air Force should be making a commitment to you too. That means not everyone would deserve that commitment. If you can't perform in a way during your freshman and sophomore year that we believe (those at the Academy whose job it is to assess that), that you are motivated and caring about the right things and that you are willing to adapt and assimilate into this culture, then why are we going to pay to have you come back for the next two years?

We are all in once we give an appointment. In what business does that happen? There has to be some assessment on the other side of this. We have a program called aptitude probation which has been linked to conduct probation for some reason. I know, because I was on both. Aptitude probation does not have to be linked to conduct. You can have someone who is perfectly fine on conduct who is not motivated at all to do the things that we believe they should be doing to prepare themselves for being an officer in the Air Force.

If we see that during their freshman or sophomore year, you can put them on aptitude probation.

For example, if they finish their sophomore year on aptitude probation, why are we bringing them back to be a junior? It doesn't mean they are bad people, it just means that maybe this isn't right for them. Or they don't have the tools that we think are required to operate successfully in the Air Force culture. All of that is part of building an Air Force. We stay away from that primarily I think for legal reasons because you would have to take a stand on that. You would have to be willing for at least one year during that transition to have a pretty high drop in retention rate that would grab a lot of attention. But once you show the Cadet Wing that you are serious about this, they will perform

Think about commitment day the first day of your junior year. You make the commitment to come back. I think there is a flip side to that. I believe the Air Force should be making a commitment to you too. That means not everyone would deserve that commitment.

to the standard that you set. They are like any other 18 to 22 year old in that they will perform to the standard that you set. If you allow them to perform below the line, it is more comfortable down there.

Lindsay: If they got away with being below the line and it is okay, then why wouldn't they?

Welsh: I did. Quite frankly I did in some areas at the Academy. You can live down there.

Lindsay: I appreciate the thoughts to a new mental model about how the cadet squadron could be structured. One of the things that I want the Journal of Character and Leadership Development (JCLD)

to be is a place to introduce new ideas and processes that can lead to further discussion and reflection. The ability to have a forum where new ideas, and sometimes competing ideas, are discussed is important. If we don't have those conversations, then we can hurt our own development individually and organizationally.

Looking a little further down your journey, when you think about your time as Chief of Staff of the Air Force, what are you most proud of, humbled by, and honored to have done?

I am a big believer in grinding. I like grinders around me. I like people who come to work to go to work, who don't get too high or too low. When it really gets ugly, you know they will be there swinging with you. Because you can trust them when it is tough. In our business, that is really helpful.

Welsh: I think those are three different things. I think the thing I am most proud of is that I tried my best every day. Like everyone else, I have good days and bad days. Some days, I just wasn't good enough and other people would carry me. But, I tried my best every day. If I had done anything less than that, I couldn't face myself. I never quit trying. Even on the bad days, I kept swinging. I am a big believer in grinding. I like grinders around me. I like people who come to work to go to work, who don't get too high or too low. When it really gets ugly, you know they will be there swinging with you. Because you can trust them when it is tough. In our business, that is really helpful.

I think I was humbled most by the opportunity to meet Airmen all over the world. The reason that I feel

passionately about the Academy and what we do there is because I believe in cadets. I believe in the men and women who chose to come to the Academy. They are remarkable in every possible way. They get better and better every generation. I feel the same way about our Airmen. They do really difficult work in really difficult places. Despite the occasional grumble, which is everyone's inalienable right, they don't complain. They put up with hardship. They deal with the sacrifice. Their families support them in doing this, which is a remarkable thing to me. They do unbelievable work for the nation and they take care of each other. I came

into the Air Force because I was in love with the airplanes and I stayed in because I fell in love with the people. I was humbled every time I met a new Airman. I just didn't feel worthy of them. They are remarkable.

As far as how I felt the most honored, the fact that they would accept me with pride when I showed up was an honor.

The fact that a young Airman would let me take his cell phone and call his mom to tell her I was impressed by him and that we could share that moment. That was an honor. It wasn't a big public thing. It was just me and him. That was an honor. Pulling up a chair in a chow hall in Bagram or Kabul or some strange place around the world and having people actually excited to see you there so they could talk to you about the Air Force. That was an honor. Anytime I had the chance to represent them in any forum whether it was a Congressional Hearing or event in D.C., it didn't matter, I was representing the people that I admired more than anyone else in the world.

Lindsay: In listening to you talk about trying your best every day, it seems like you still care about your personal development, even as successful as you have

been. You talk about doing your best, working hard, and caring about people. That is a developmental mindset. What does your development look like now?

Welsh: I think the biggest thing is to not let yourself get comfortable in your profession. In the Air Force, there are opportunities as you go through to go back to where you are comfortable. You can go back to a unit that flies the airplane you flew before or go to a base that you have been to before. I tried not to do that because I wanted to learn as much as I could about all parts of the Air Force. I wanted to fly different kinds of airplanes and I wanted to meet different kinds of people. So, I think you can challenge yourself and look for breadth in your professional development.

When I was the Chief of Staff, there were articles written about, "...well, there's another fighter pilot as the Chief of Staff." The truth is, I hadn't been a fighter pilot since 1998. I spent more time in the intelligence community at that point than I had flying fighters. You really have chance to broaden yourself in so many different ways over the course of your career and I think you should. It gives you a different perspective and over time it gives you more opportunity.

So, first of all, don't let yourself get comfortable professionally. By the way, after I retired, I kind of did the same thing. I jumped into an arena that I know nothing about. I'm three years into the job of being the Dean of The Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University and I really have no clue what I am doing. I'm learning every day from the people that are here and I'm not afraid to ask questions. I know that I'm not great so I keep working to get better. I just think it's kind of a professional lifestyle. As a result, I learn more than I would have otherwise. I didn't understand the educational Academy (not the Air Force Academy) at all. It is a fascinating place with a whole new group of fascinating people, albeit a very different culture. It has been really interesting and

challenging for me. It keeps Betty and me young and it makes us feel like we matter. To me, it is a way of life. My dad was that way. My mom was that way, so I guess I was really lucky that I grew up in an environment where I was encouraged to try new things. Failure wasn't a problem. You are going to do it and get through it and we will love you anyway. I was really blessed to have that and I have a wife who is the greatest human being ever born. She tolerates all this and supports me in it, helps me learn and corrects me when I am being stupid. I'm just a lucky guy.

Lindsay: You mentioned being in a new domain. Why did you choose academics in Texas over other opportunities like business or nonprofit?

Welsh: Texas was easy. I was born in San Antonio and Texas has always been home. I love Texas. It's the greatest place in the world because of the people. They are proud, they care, and take care of each other. So, I always knew I was coming back to Texas. My wife is from Long Island but she's a convert. It also doesn't hurt that our kids and grandkids are here to help convert her. We knew we were coming back to Texas, but we didn't know where. I wasn't really planning on working full time. I was planning on grandfathering full time because we spent so much time away from family that I wanted to reconnect.

About six months before I retired, I got a call from someone here at Texas A&M who asked if I would be interested in putting my name in the hat for this particular job as the Dean. That made me think back in the 90s some time where I had given a speech and somehow it ended up in the Wall Street Journal. President George H.W. Bush read it and wrote me a letter. I think I was a Lieutenant Colonel at the time and I remember getting this letter and thinking, why would a former President write me a letter? I was astonished by that. I found out later that he wrote thousands of them. So, I really wasn't that special, but

I sure felt special when I got it. That letter has been framed and in my office ever since. It was clearly him writing it because it was a personal letter. I just really appreciated the fact that he sent it. Then, a few years later, I heard him being interviewed on TV about this new College at Texas A&M in his name that had been established when he built his Presidential Library here. I remember him talking about public service and how this College would produce public servants and his views of public service as a noble calling. I remember thinking that is a great hook for a school.

...We have the chance to launch these men and women into careers in government and hopefully let them enjoy the same kind of privilege I did of serving. They will take things to a new level.

That is the last I had heard about it until I got that phone call. I thought well, I should probably leave my name in the hat for a bit and that is what I did. I got into the application and interview processes and eventually came to visit as one of the finalists and met the students. They are just like cadets at the Academy, except a little older. They come here because they want to serve. That is the comparative advantage to the Bush School. It is a graduate school. Some of them come here knowing exactly how they want to serve. They want to be the President, the Secretary of State, they want to be in the intelligence community, or they want to be a city manager. They just want to serve. For two years, they share and magnify that in each other, and then about 70% of them actually go into public service which is a remarkable number.

I fell in love with them just like I fell in love with Airmen. Then I really wanted the job and was astonished but very privileged to get it. I have loved

everything about it. It's a phenomenal opportunity principally because we have the chance to launch these men and women into careers in government and hopefully let them enjoy the same kind of privilege I did of serving. They will take things to a new level. That is what is fun about being here – every day you see the future and you stop worrying about it, just like being at the Academy. The corny stuff matters here too. People at Texas A&M believe in all those things like pride, patriotism, faith, family, loyalty, respect, bravery, courage and honor. We talk about it here. People are proud and they embrace it here. At the Bush School, we have that giant university with that clear servant focus all around us and we have a solid core of service oriented leadership from the faculty and staff. It's just a good place to be. If you have met graduates from Texas A&M, then you know that Aggies love themselves some Aggies ... it's a happy place.

Lindsay: With all that, are you still getting a chance to be a grandpa?

Welsh: The beauty of it is all of our kids are Aggies and they come back here routinely so we get to see them a lot which is really good.

Lindsay: Now having moved into Academia, what have been some of the challenges or surprises of leading in a different type of organization?

Welsh: I don't think the leadership challenges and the tools required to be successful are different. I think they are the same. There are some great leaders here at this university. The other Deans, Department Heads, faculty members, and university administrators are exceptional. I would love to work for them and I would follow them anywhere. The biggest adjustments that you have to make is that the culture is different for understandable reasons. It's just like inside the

Department of Defense where there are reasons why the Army is different than the Air Force. They are functionally based reasons but they create different cultures over time. That isn't bad, it's just the way that it is. It's important to understand the cultures of all the different organizations in the Department of Defense if you are going to succeed in the military. It takes a while to learn them and you need to be open to understanding that other organizations aren't evil, they are just different and there is a reason for the difference. The same thing is true within universities. It is a bureaucracy, but the bureaucracy is composed of the types of things that educators need to be really good at. For example, you write a lot for performance evaluations and for recommendations for promotion or awards, but people are used to researching and writing a lot. That is the way they want to assess performance, behavior and compare accomplishments. There isn't much verbal assessment happening there as it is mostly written but that is part of the culture.

The concept of shared governance is huge in the academic academy. To some members of the faculty that means that everyone has veto authority. Of course, that is not what shared governance means, but that is how some interpret it. You have to understand that because you have to communicate in a fairly comprehensive way and you will still probably be criticized for not asking their opinion enough.

The same thing is true in the military. Anyone who thinks that the United States military doesn't operate under a program of shared governance just doesn't know it. If you are going to walk into a room of fighter or bomber pilots, or of Navy Seals, Army Rangers, or Marine Raiders and tell them we are going to go risk their life and here is what we are doing so get in line, you are kidding yourself. They want a vote in how you are going to do that. They know what they are doing and they want to be part of the planning. In shared governance, the difference in the military is that it is really clear that at some point someone has to make

a decision. Sometimes in the academic academy the preference is for no decision because that way everyone will remain unaffected. You have to figure out how to get past that. But, the people are great and there is a terrifyingly high level of understanding of context and fact surrounding any issue or event.

In our school, you have the real benefit of combining a group of great Professors of Practice with tremendous experience in the real world of government and national security with scholars who bring an unbelievable context to the discussion of every issue that affects governance and national security. Our students benefit from that immensely. It has been a fascinating experience for me. Once again, I'm in a place where I'm not the best at anything so I am very comfortable.

Lindsay: Any regrets?

Welsh: Not at all. As you leave any career field, you have to determine what your priorities are and for us it was location, because of family, and secondly it was having an anchor and something to commit to because Betty and I both need that. The idea of consulting, traveling a lot, and making a lot of money wasn't appealing. I don't need a lot of money because I don't know how to spend it. The military retirement is great and I don't know how we would spend more anyway. We have enough to take care of ourselves, take care of our family, and really enjoy life right now. We are happy.

Lindsay: As we wrap up our conversation, is there any closing advice you have for new leaders.

Welsh: I would go back to the things that my dad told me because over time I came to realize the advice he told me was gold. The first thing is trust yourself and be confident. There is a reason you are where you are. Do your best and that is going to be good enough for everybody else.

The second thing is to do your best every day. Try your hardest. The whole system is set up to make you successful. Everyone wants you to be great. That is true at the Academy, as well as when you head out into the bigger Air Force, for the officers around you and the enlisted members who work for you. They all want you to be great because that is what is best for them. Just do your best and let them help you get there.

Sometimes the people who are supposed to be the great guru on the mountain really aren't helping you that much. Sometimes an 18-year old right out of technical school will say something and stop you in your tracks. Listen to everyone and respect their view.

The next thing is to care. I mean care enough that it hurts sometimes. If things go wrong and it doesn't really bother you, if someone working for you doesn't get the opportunity you think they deserve and it doesn't eat at you, in our business if somebody gets hurt or killed and that doesn't just rip you apart, if you don't care that much then you aren't caring enough. Pain as a leader is not a bad thing. Sometimes leadership is going to hurt. Sometimes it is going to hurt really, really bad, but you aren't doing it right if it doesn't hurt.

Finally, respect everyone and learn from all of them. Young Airmen will teach you things that will just astonish you. Sometimes the people who are supposed to be the great guru on the mountain really aren't helping you that much. Sometimes an 18-year old right out of technical school will say something and stop you in your tracks. Listen to everyone and respect their view. Make sure you create an environment around you where everybody's input and contributions matter.

Where everyone feels critically important and where diversity is a strength and inclusion is an imperative. You control the world around you; make it that kind of a world. I think you will find over time that other people want to come into that world. Once they do, you will figure out pretty quickly that you don't have to carry the load alone. That is the key. That

is what leadership is about. It is about realizing that leadership by definition is not about you. It can't be about you. It is about the people you are leading and the organization you are trying to move in some direction. If you do those things I mentioned before, you will all be working toward the same goal. Together, Airmen are unstoppable if you have that environment. If you are a young leader, they are going to make you look so much better than you really are. It is remarkably humbling.

MILITARY

Transparency and Trust

Kaleth O. Wright, Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force

Interviewed By: CMSgt Sadie Chambers, USAF

Note: This interview was conducted in two parts. The first part was prior to the National Character & Leadership Symposium at the United States Air Force Academy in Feb 2019. The second part was conducted right after the Symposium concluded.

Chambers: Thank you for agreeing to this interview. You mention the importance of putting on your mask first when it comes to resiliency and striking the right balance. Is there a personal leadership story where that comes from?

Wright: It really doesn't come from one story, but my years of experience as a leader and as a person really, in trying to maintain some type of balance. I refer to it as harmony. When I first became a front line supervisor in the mid-90s, and started taking care of other people, I realized that at some point along the journey that I spent a lot of time taking care of everybody else and not a lot of time taking care of me. I went to a class one time where they mentioned putting on your mask first, as a metaphor and it just stuck with me.

I never really paid much attention to it, but it really hit home after my first year in this job where I got a little tired and broken down from all of the travel and the engagements. I did a lot of speaking my first year and I realized I in the midst of all that I wasn't getting to the gym and I wasn't eating right. I wasn't meditating. I wasn't doing the things that I needed to do to take care of me. So, I just think it's extremely important.

Most of us, certainly when we get into leadership positions, tend to think of it as being selfish when someone says you need to take care of you. But, I think it is actually selfless because if you don't take care of yourself, then you can't take care of the folks that you are responsible for. You can't be the best husband or the best wife, or

Chief Master Sergeant Kaleth O. Wright is the 18th Chief Master Sergeant of the United States Air Force. In that capacity, he serves as the senior enlisted member in the Air Force and is responsible for providing guidance and direction for the 410,000 member enlisted force. Chief Wright entered the Air Force in 1989 and has served in numerous positions such as professional military education instructor, dental assistant, flight chief, superintendent, and command chief on multiple occasions. He earned his Bachelor's Degree in Business Management, his Master's Degree in Business Administration, and has numerous other certifications at the executive level.

the best supervisor, or the best wingman if you have unresolved physical, mental, and spiritual matters. It has become a key focus area for me and I like to talk about it when I am talking leadership because there are a lot of different leadership philosophies, a lot of different tips and characteristics, but if you don't take care of you, you aren't in a position to take care of others.

Chambers: As a religious affairs Airmen by trade, I love a resiliency tie. With that idea of leadership in mind, how well does the Air Force set leaders up for success?

Wright: I would say that we do a good job with setting leaders up for success. However, I always think we can do better in preparing leaders for challenges. I think where we need to get a little bit better is anticipating the challenges of tomorrow. What we dealt with when I was a young Airmen and NCO, and even Chief, is different from what young leaders, Command Chiefs, Squadron Superintendents, First Sergeants, Flight Chiefs, and Wing Commanders will experience. It is different. The environment has changed. We have less people, less squadrons, more missions, more

can get that into the courses within a matter of a month or two.

Leadership development is a combination of education, training, and experience. I would say we do a pretty good job of educating our senior leaders through PME and some of the other leadership development opportunities. I'll speak specifically for our enlisted senior NCOs, we probably still have more work to do in being more deliberate about the developmental opportunities and experiences that they get en route to becoming a First Sergeant or a Command Chief. So, I would give us a B+ as there is always room to grow.

Chambers: In previous talks, you have addressed the "Airman of the Future," and the characteristics that they will need. They need to be well trained, well led, agile, and resilient Airmen. Can you expand on the hybrid concept of what an agile Airman looks like and how that will influence how they will be led?

Wright: Absolutely. Right now, we have the majority of our Airmen trained in a stovepipe...in operations, medical, maintenance, support career fields, what have you. It is not purposeful for someone to have two Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSCs). If someone does have two AFSCs, it's generally because they retrained from one to the next. It's not very often that we purposefully say, we are going to train you as a defender and as a pavement specialist so that you can defend the airfield, but if it

gets damaged, you can also repair it. We do it a little bit within stovepipes. For example, in maintenance you can think of a crew chief who can do a number of different things. However, mostly we stay within our stovepipes, unless we need to rebalance the force or because of personnel needs. I think the future of conflict will require us to think differently about how we train, what we need, and our ability to rapidly take

You can't be the best husband or the best wife, or the best supervisor, or the best wingman if you have unresolved physical, mental, and spiritual matters.

deployments, and so forth. I think as long as we can keep pace...and what I really like that we've done is that we've loosened some of the reigns on some of our Professional Military Education (PME) Programs. Before, it was really difficult to update curriculum and it was really difficult to add something. If the world changed, and we said let's get it into all of the PME courses, it would take us about 18 months. Now, we

damage, assess it, repair it, and keep pressing with whatever mission we might be doing.

Now, there is a lot of ad hoc stuff that occurs. Sometimes we will send a religious affairs Airmen to Afghanistan or Iraq and they get there and work in the chapel and they find out that we also need them to drive a vehicle outside the wire to get this team to where they need to go. Most of our Airmen just adapt. We give them some pretty good training before they deploy, and most of us just figure it out whatever job we are given. But, I don't think that is necessarily the right way to do it. I don't propose that every Airman have dual AFSCs and are trained and have some type of hybrid background. But, I think we should be really smart about it and think where does this work, what percentage of Airmen would it work with, and what else we could be doing with medics, defenders, engineers, etc.? I think it is something that we really need to explore as we go forward. I think the nature of conflict as we move toward more peer competition, it will look a lot different than what we have seen in the past and we need to be prepared.

Chambers: Changing gears a little bit, what do leaders need to know about the enlisted force?

Wright: Our enlisted Airmen are incredibly proud, dedicated, talented, and resilient. I know I always talk about resilience, but what I sometimes fail to highlight is the amount of enlisted Airmen that meet the challenges and move through the tough times and overcome. I've recently been talking about my heroes—a list of Airmen that I have come into contact with and I stay in contact with who are battling things like cancer and Lou Gehrig's Disease (ALS) or have been injured in the Area of Responsibility (AOR) and they keep their heads held high. They just get after it. I think our enlisted Airmen are incredible. They are good teammates and wingmen. That's why I fight so hard because I think we owe it to them for the sacrifices that they make as part of an all-volunteer force.

They decide to come in and serve our country and represent our United States Air Force. So, we owe it to them to make sure they are properly trained, that they have the equipment that they need, their families are taken care of, and that they have the resources available to them. Because when the tough times come, and they always do, we want to make sure that the leadership, their fellow Airmen, and their families are prepared.

I'm not sure what your experience has been with this, but we don't talk a lot about the social pillar of comprehensive Airmen fitness and how important it is to have a group around you that support you. That has been incredible for me. Of all the things that have kept me moving in the right direction, it is because I have had good friends and family and people who have cared about me and were invested in my success around me when things went awry. When you get to more senior positions, and I have never felt that way, I understand why people say it gets lonely at the top because your peer group shrinks. I've developed relationships over the years that I still maintain and I value those relationships. Time is precious and you only live once so I try to take advantage of any opportunities I get. This past weekend I hung out with a bunch of my friends.

Chambers: How do you develop trust among those that you lead and that you follow?

Wright: I develop trust among Airmen and the folks that I lead by being transparent. I try to be as transparent as possible, whether it is good news or bad news. I try to be as open and honest with them as I can. It takes time to develop trust like in any relationship. I would say that is what really helps me to build and maintain trust in my teammates. I'm open...I'm honest...I'm transparent. I'll let you know what I am thinking. I'll let you know if I like what you are doing or if I don't like it. That seems to help. I would encourage any leader, when it comes to building trust to be open, transparent, and honest with folks and listen. Squint with your

ears. I can't express how important that is. It's not just listening, but hearing what people are saying.

Chambers: What are you passionate about?

Wright: I am passionate about helping people. Helping people discover their dreams and then helping put them on the path to achieve their dreams. I love to see people being successful. I love it when I meet a young first-term Airman who says, I want to be a doctor or I want to be a pilot or I will be a Chief, and I get to help put them on the path to success by recommending people they can talk to, books they can read or things they can do. How long have you been in the Air Force?

Chambers: Almost 19 years.

Wright: I also love when I meet a 19-year Senior Master Sergeant who says, "I don't know what I want to do. I haven't figured out what I want to do or be when I grow up." It is just as rewarding to meet someone like that and to be able to sit down and help them hone in on what they are passionate about, what they are good at, and this is what I love doing. Any opportunity I get to help people, in general, and certainly to help people realize and achieve their goals, that is what I am passionate about. I love teaching, mentoring, and coaching.

Chambers: How has your character been shaped by your Air Force experience?

Wright: In a good way. When I first came in the Air Force, I lacked a lot. I was undisciplined. I didn't like coming to work. I liked fighting. I didn't take my job seriously. I wasn't a good teammate or wingman. I was selfish. I had no idea what I wanted out of life. I was just kind of surviving. Being in the Air Force and being around positive people and having good mentors has really shaped me into the man that I am today. Not just as the Chief, and not just as a leader, but as

the man that I am today. More respectful of everyone. Having more of a positive attitude. I used to have such a terrible attitude. I complained about everything. It didn't matter what it was, I had an issue with it. So, the Air Force has really helped shape me into the man that I am today. I now have a very positive perspective on life, the Air Force, and people in general.

Chambers: When did that show up for you?

Wright: When I was either an A1C or a Senior Airman, I joined the Base Honor Guard. I had been told to join. I did tons of funerals. At the time, it was a way to get off work and earn some extra money because we got per diem for traveling. That was until I got to present my first flag to the next of kin. I kneeled down and said the canned statement, "On behalf of the President of the United States and a grateful nation..." and I had no idea who the family was. But, I made eye contact with the lady and she started crying. I always say, it was summertime in North Carolina, there was pollen, and my eyeballs started sweating. But at that moment, something just clicked and I thought to myself that I needed to get my act together. I needed to take my Air Force career more seriously. That started the transition. By no means was I perfect, but it was mostly upward.

I really appreciate people who have a background like mine because, success to me is more like a squiggly line. People think you climb the ladder to success and it is an upward trajectory, but on the way I made mistakes and I still had a lot of growing to do. One of the things I decided, when I was a Senior Airman was that I was going to be a Chief. That decision, even when I met a barrier (that was mostly self-inflicted), kept me focused. When I was a Technical Sergeant, I got fired from a job and got a bad Enlisted Performance Report (EPR). It hurt, and I was down for a few days, but it didn't take me long to reroute myself. To tell myself, that I had somewhere I need to be and to get after it. Even when I

had success or won an award, I never thought that I had arrived. I still told myself that I needed to stay focused.

Chambers: What does it mean for you to have the 12 Outstanding Airmen¹ here for the National Character and Leadership Symposium (NCLS) at the Air Force Academy?

Wright: I think it is amazing. I have the privilege of chairing the board that selects them and then I get to host them a few months later at my house and get to spend some time with them. I've been involved with this program in some fashion for the last 10 years or so. I know the caliber of Airmen we select to represent our Air Force as the 12 Outstanding Airmen. It is a blessing. They come together and within the first hour, they become like best friends. It's great to see them celebrate each other's success. I always say, "iron sharpens iron," so, it's always good when people like that come together. Any opportunity that I get to see them, spend time with them, and pick their brains about how life is going, what is next for them, how they are feeling, and what they have seen, is a great opportunity. One of the other things that I like about this program is that many of their predecessors (previous 12 Outstanding Airmen) have gone on to become Command Chiefs, MAJCOM Command Chiefs, Career Field Managers, and other very successful positions. Some of them have also gone on and got a commission. I think it is just a testament that we are selecting the right folks to represent our Air Force.

Chambers: It really struck me when you were talking at the last Air Force Association Convention about one of your favorite songs being Sam Cooke's "A Change is Gonna Come." With that in mind, what changes are coming?

Wright: That's a good set up. We will continue to

¹ The Outstanding Airmen of the Year (OAY) Award honors the 12 top Enlisted Service members of the U.S. Air Force. For more information on the OAY, please visit www.afa.org.

work on the things that we have been talking about such as bereavement leave, joint custody, indefinite enlistments, etc. But the big change that I would like to see over the next couple of years is to revamp our performance management system, or what we know as our Enlisted Evaluation System. That is made up of feedback and our performance reports (or EPRs). We are in the process of making some marginal changes with the form like removing some boxes and moving some items around. But I really would like to revamp the entire thing to get us into a system that really drives performance so when we talk about feedback or an EPR, people really get excited about the prospect of sitting down with their supervisor and having ongoing and regular coaching and feedback. So, I am excited about that. It's a long term project, but I'm hoping we can get moving on that soon. It doesn't have to be completed on my watch, but we need to do the appropriate research and analysis to make sure that we consider all our Airmen and the potential impact. I have a pretty good idea of what I want it to look like, so I am pretty excited about it.

Chambers: Any closing thoughts?

Wright: I want to say that I am excited to be here. Thank you for letting me be a part of this experience. It's an honor for me to be here.

Part Two - Post NCLS

Chambers: After experiencing NCLS, what are your takeaways, challenges, or highlights?

Wright: My takeaway is that I wish I would have attended these all throughout my career. I thought it was a wonderful lineup of great speakers, an opportunity to network and talk with cadets, and see first-hand the enlisted contribution to USAFA. It was overall a great experience. I was telling someone that I would love to attend every year for my own personal

and professional development. The highlight for me was Dr. Brené Brown. I really enjoyed her presentation about vulnerability and courageous leadership. I also kind of envy her speaking style. This (NCLS) is a great opportunity and not widely known about for a lot of folks.

Chambers: What message do you have for the enlisted Airmen serving at USAFA and how important they are in educating, training, and inspiring men and women to become leaders of character motivated to lead the United States Air Force and our nation?

You are the first impression for any person that comes onto an installation. So, for the enlisted folks that work here, you are the very first impression for future officers. You need to be on your game, be sharp, and represent all of us well.

Wright: I have the same message for them that I have for defenders at every base we have in the United States Air Force. You are the first impression for any person that comes onto an installation. So, for the enlisted folks that work here, you are the very first impression for future officers. You need to be on your game, be sharp, and represent all of us well. It was so nice to see so many sharp enlisted Airmen...Academy Military Trainers (AMTs), the 10th Air Base Wing, and others throughout the base supporting USAFA. Stay sharp...stay focused...make sure our cadets know that when they are commissioned, they will have a corps of enlisted Airmen that will be there to support them.

Chambers: You were able to see the 12 Outstanding Airmen panel, how do you think they did and do you think the Outstanding Airmen of the Year platform to

influence future leaders is something that we should continue doing here at USAFA?

Wright: I think they did great. Everyone got a chance to express themselves and they were very genuine in their answers. I really do think that panel and that platform is something that we should continue doing at NCLS. It is good for them to get a chance to see the best of the best.

Chambers: I have one last question for you. You referenced that leaders are learners, so what books, videos, or podcasts are listening to, watching, or reading. Are there any that you keep going back to?

Wright: I go back to *The Alchemist*² often. *Helping People Win at Work*³, is one I go back to often because it is helping shape my thoughts about our new performance management system. Another one that I go back to often is *The Go-Giver*⁴, because

it just talks about the importance of adding value to other people. My go-to podcast is called *Tribe of Mentors*, which is a compilation of successful people talking about how they became successful with their daily habits. Those are my go-to sources.

Chambers: Any final thoughts?

Wright: I want to say thank you to USAFA and the team for taking care of us. Every time I come out here, it is a great experience. I love interacting with USAFA and the cadets and am looking forward to my next trip.

2 Coelho, P. (2014). *The Alchemist*. HarperOne.

3 Blanchard, K., & Ridge, G. (2009). *Helping People Win at Work: A Business Philosophy Called "Don't Mark My Paper, Help Me Get an A"*. FT Press.

4 Burg, B., & Mann, J. (2015). *The Go-Giver: A Little Story About a Powerful Business Idea*. Portfolio.

MILITARY

The Value of the Journey

Lt Gen Anthony Cotton, USAF, Air University

Interviewed By: Douglas Lindsay

Lindsay: Would you mind giving a brief overview of your career, lessons you learned along the way, and how you got to where you are today?

Cotton: Absolutely. My background with the military started well before I was commissioned. I started as a military dependent. My father was an Air Force Chief Master Sergeant so I tell people that I came out of the womb as a member of the United States Air Force. My dad served in the Air Force for 32 years. I knew from an early age that I enjoyed the Air Force lifestyle and wanted to be a member of the Air Force. It was my father who told me that he wanted me to do things a little bit different than he did. He wanted me to get a college education and join the Air Force as an officer. So, I went into ROTC, was commissioned out of North Carolina State University and started this incredible Air Force journey.

My first assignment was as a missile officer at Minot Air Force Base. I am a Strategic Air Command (SAC) warrior because back in 1986, SAC was still alive and well. I think what I learned there was discipline. Being the son of a Chief Master Sergeant, it wasn't hard to understand that. I was raised by a disciplinarian and SAC was a compliance driven organization. So, young Tony Cotton was a little different than who I am today as far as understanding the tenants of discipline and how you can weave that into other things.

It was circa 1986, Cold War era, Strategic Air Command. I did quite well in that business. As a result, I got the opportunity to be a part of an organization that was by name only. It was called the 3901st Strategic Missile Evaluation Squadron. That was again, a compliance and discipline based organization.

After that, our community merged with the space community. Mentors told me that I did a great job in the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) business, but I needed to broaden and it would be great to see me tackle this

Lieutenant General Anthony Cotton is the Commander and President of Air University at Maxwell Air Force Base. In that capacity he is responsible for 50,000 resident and 120,000 non-resident students (officer, enlisted, and civilian) every year. Gen Cotton entered the Air Force in 1986 through ROTC at North Carolina State University and earned his Master's Degree from Central Michigan University. He has over 30 years of service to the Air Force where he has served in such positions as missile combat crew commander, executive officer, command operations evaluator, Deputy Director, and command at multiple levels.

new Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) and this new business called space. I went through a board process and I was picked up to join space. My first assignment was in space control at Cheyenne Mountain Air Station. I did really well there and was subsequently picked to go to the A3, still known as the Director of Operations (DO) in those days, at the Headquarters. I did some work in the vault and was the program element monitor for optical ground systems.

School and other things were interspersed in those journeys as I made my way here to Air Command and Staff College (ACSC). Then, I was blessed enough to get the opportunity to be the Director of Operations for the Range Squadron out at the 45th Space Wing at Patrick AFB/Cape Canaveral and got into the launch business. I fleeted up to a Squadron Commander while there at the 3rd Space Launch Squadron. We launched the Titan IV heavy lift as well as the Atlas IIAS medium lift rockets. I was the Deputy Operations Group Commander before heading off to school. After an opportunity to broaden my perspective at the Army War College for Senior Developmental Education (SDE), I was hired to be the Deputy Director of the Executive Action Group for General T. Michael Moseley and Secretary Michael Wynne at the Pentagon. I did that for a year and was picked up to Colonel early and ended up interviewing for a job at Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence (USDI) and was hired to be a Director. That was shortly before the transition from former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to his successor, Secretary William Gates, and I became the senior military assistant to the USDI. I left there and went to the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) to become an Operations Group Commander at one of their sites. Then, I went back into the missile business by going to Malmstrom Air Force Base and became the Vice Wing Commander and ultimately became the Wing Commander. From there, I went back to space to become the Wing Commander of the 47th Space Wing as a one star. Following that, I became the Deputy Director of the NRO and followed that by going back

to the missile business by being the Commander of 20th Air Force.

That was a unique experience and we can talk about that time post the 2014 cheating scandal in the nuclear enterprise. Commanding the 20th AF was an interesting time because my marching orders were to get this right. I was told that as part of my tenure, I needed to make sure that we can validate some of the changes that we made in the enterprise and did we get it right or do we need to make some tweaks? I was able to sit in that job about 27 months. I was then told that I was going to be able to take some of the things that I learned in the operational field and bring it to Air University. I interviewed for the position with the Secretary of the Air Force and the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and here I am.

Lindsay: That's quite the journey. I appreciate you sharing that because the journey is important to who we are today and we certainly pick up things along the way. Being able to talk through that helps us to see where we are and how we are shaped by the journey.

Cotton: I agree. It is a long journey but it gives you the perspective that I'm not someone who has spent a lot of time in academia. So, why do we have someone with an operational background, albeit in missiles and space, leading the charge with Air University? It gives a little insight as to why senior leaders wanted to put me here at this particular time.

Lindsay: It certainly is a bit of a far cry from those early compliance days. How has that transition been from the operational side to a more academic side?

Cotton: It was interesting. I think what has really allowed me to grow and see things differently is the fact that I did not spend my entire career in the ICBM business. I think the culture in the ICBM business did not allow people to feel empowered and I would have grown up in that culture the whole time. Being able

to come back, and I'm doing air quotes right now, and "seeing how the other side lives," gave me a different perspective. Especially coming back as the numbered Air Force Commander.

We can talk about some of the things that I think we missed. I think we had a community in the ICBM business, that was so compliance based, not that that discipline is bad, but compliance to the point that everything was compliance based. It is a little bit simpler to just put that nomenclature over everything. You look at the previous 45 years where this community just grew people who were compliance based. At the end of that, you slap the table and say that we need to fix this and we need to empower people. The first thing that I recognized when I took over was the fact that empowerment is just a word if you have never had it before. To tell someone that you are now empowered to do things, if they don't know what that term means, means absolutely nothing. You are setting people up for failure and not success.

We were using the right words, but we were using words, techniques, methods, and modalities that were foreign to our culture. To get folks to buy in was going to be a longer journey than just saying, "Hey, we messed

this up and we should have empowered you, let's now do that." I'll give you a good example. If something is going on in the field and the crew members can make the decision on their own because there are two officers in charge of the flight, will the two officers make the decision? Or, will the two officers think that what they should do is go up the chain to make sure that the decision they are making is the right one? That is culturally driven. By mandating and saying, I'm sending you out to the field to make decisions that are absolutely appropriate for a Captain or Major to make at your level, you should be able to do that. Then, come

to find out that early in my tenure, they are still not doing that. It was because they weren't comfortable with that and were never given the opportunity to do that in the past. Having a 2-star general telling them it was okay to do that now wasn't really good enough.

Lindsay: Because they had years of experience telling them the exact opposite?

Cotton: Absolutely. From a leadership perspective, I think if my journey wasn't as broad, I probably would have been comfortable with them still going up the chain. But, it did bother me. I had left the career field and gone to the space community where there was a little less structure about being able to do that and then on to the intelligence world where you often don't have the time to do that and go through all of the wickets. Being able to see it from a different perspective based on my experience was critical. Things like having the opportunity to talk to the rated community where we would probably think they would say the same thing, is absolutely untrue. The empowerment really is given

To tell someone that you are now empowered to do things, if they don't know what that term means, means absolutely nothing. You are setting people up for failure and not success.

to the individual. Being able to see that first hand and being able to articulate how to train people and trust people. I think that is key that we trust them. It was something that took me a little while and I didn't recognize right away in my journey that I was going to have to overcome that for the community before we could move on to the next steps. By the time I left there, I think we got to a pretty good place where that was happening.

I often say that any time you make a drastic change in a culture, you have three groups of people. I call

them the “Befores, Durings, and Afters”. You have the folks that have come in after the change and I call these the 2nd Lieutenants. They say, “What are you talking about? This is great and I love what you are doing.” You have the durings who are actually going to see the transition. I will tell you, and the Chief of Staff and I were talking about this just yesterday, you have those that will be part of the transition and to be frank, you will maybe get 60 percent of them. Then, you will have the befores and those are the folks that remember the way it was when Tony Cotton was a 2nd Lieutenant under SAC and anything pre- 2014. They themselves grew up in the business, they may have left the business for a while and now it is time for them to come back. The only thing they remember when they come back is the way it was 15 or 20 years ago. They are not willing to accept change and that things are different. Those are the ones that you almost have to say, it was nice having you part of the team, but we don’t need you to be part of the team any more. We will find you something else to do because you might be of service in other things but I don’t need you here to make us go backwards. Part of that is because they weren’t part of the journey of change and they are walking into the situation without having seen that the change was important, relevant, and needed to happen.

Lindsay: As I hear that, I see so many parallels to the organizational change process. There is a time element and we always want change to happen quicker than it does. There is also a parallel with leader development where it is a process that is going to take time. I think that is one of nice aspects of the Air University system where you have multiple touch points on both the officer and enlisted sides throughout their careers. There is an intentional system to help people through the developmental process.

Cotton: You are absolutely right, Doug. We are tackling it here like you are at the Center for Character and Leadership Development Center (CCLD). One of the things that we noticed right away, and that is why

we created the Leader Development Course in the post Captain time but before you head into Intermediate Developmental Education (IDE), is that there is a little void there in the continuum. The course really concentrates on the soft skills and topics like emotional intelligence, focusing on a person’s blind spots, and understanding the blind spots of others as a person assumes more leadership. It is one of the things we spend a lot of time on.

I use vignettes when I talk to people because it is something that I saw real time as a numbered Air Force Commander and as a Wing Commander, in terms of how you develop people, and how you get people to understand the soft skills of leadership as well as the hard point skills and processes. I talk to every class of Squadron Officer School (SOS) and you get the head nods. When I go into a vignette or discuss a dilemma, you see them shaking their heads and saying, “I have seen that.” That always tells someone like you or I that we have work to do.

One vignette that I love sharing is when you have a young Airman that walks up to you and has a conversation with you and you spend time getting to know that Airman. Then, I’m approached by someone who just wants to shake my hand, have a conversation with me, and let me know who they are. When that person walks away, I look at the young Airman and say, “Wasn’t that your Squadron Commander?” The young Airman says, “Yes Sir.” I usually then turn the vignette and say, “Wouldn’t it have been nice if that Squadron Commander would have introduced me to his Airman?” Wouldn’t it have been nice for him to say, “Hey Sir, I see you just met Airman Smith. He is one of my troops, been here eight months, just been certified, and has his girlfriend coming up to visit in a couple of weeks.” But, instead of that, you get the Lieutenant Colonel that just wants to shake my hand and then walks off. I literally spent 2 ½ minutes talking to that young Airman. So, how is it that we can grow folks that wouldn’t think enough to spend 2 ½ minutes to look

and see that I'm talking to one of their troops, for them to do the introduction, and for them to understand what that means to that young Airman for them to acknowledge that he/she is part of your team? That is the soft skills type of thing that I am talking about. We need to make sure that people understand that there is something about compassionate leadership.

When I was a squadron commander, I did not just want to identify a problem to my boss. I always wanted to be able to identify a problem and be able to give them a couple of courses of action (CoAs) and say, "Sir/Ma'am, this is how I think I can get after it." What I've seen, as of late, young squadron and group commanders think that their job is to identify the problem, not to help fix the condition. Are you seeing anything out there in the literature about what may have changed?

Lindsay: I would say it goes back to a couple of things that you said. The first is the culture that we have in terms of people feeling like they can't fail and having a perfection mentality. If I allow you as a junior commander to fail, I may think that I am putting my own reputation at risk by possibly not being the top commander or the top organization. To the degree that they are rewarded on performance versus development, it creates an interesting pull for the individual between those choices. If it is a choice between looking good versus developing others, individuals are more likely to opt for the former than the latter because that is what they are rewarded on. By having the senior commander make the decision, then they are hedging their bet on not failing.

Cotton: Which is one of the reasons why we would really want to incorporate the officer performance system and make modifications to capture some of that. It's interesting as we have rolled out our first year of the Leadership Development Course, some of our senior mentors have briefed me that their biggest concern is the reaction that they get from the attendees of the course that honestly believe, and it goes back

to what you just said, is that it is a one mistake Air Force. So, why take my chances and expose a possible shortfall? There has been more than one of our senior mentors that have come back to me to say that it is a little concerning that our next generation of leaders at the Maj (O4) and Lt Col (O5) ranks see it as an issue.

Lindsay: I think it also goes beyond that it is perceived as a one mistake Air Force. A one mistake Air Force follows the notion of "I cannot fail." It seems deeper than that of not just not failing, but that I have to be excellent at everything. So, it's not good enough that I'm not making mistakes, but that I have to be the best every time or it's seen as a failure. It is a performance mentality and not a developmental mentality. A performance mentality that I must have a certain stratification or ranking or it is seen as failure. It gets to an all or nothing type of mentality.

Cotton: I agree. How do you have that conversation? When I speak to Company Grade Officers (CGOs), they tell me, "We believe that you believe. We believe that all senior leaders believe that certain things are happening at the lower ranks." They also say that, "We believe that you honestly believe that people can make mistakes and it isn't going to be a problem, to fail forward, and let's learn from our mistakes." Of course, it depends on the level of the mistake and whether it is nefarious or not. They tell me that "...there is a level below you that makes it so that you will never see the ramifications that truly happen to us at that level." As a senior officer in the Air Force, it saddens me to hear that we still have to make it so that people believe you can still take that risk and not be risk adverse about moving forward. I honestly believe for us to continue to be the world's greatest Air Force, we need to be able to have our folks understand that they can take those risks. The things that I get out of them, the ideas, and the "Hey that sounds great, let's give it a try and see what happens," is absolutely incredible and I know you see the exact same there at USAFA.

Lindsay: In your perspective, what are some of the things that will help us move the needle on that and close the gap? Is it more collaboration between our organizations?

Cotton: I believe so. Air University owns 85% of officer accessions. We are having those conversations with regard to things like, do we spend more time at ROTC to enable conversations and development? So, when you become a commissioned officer as a 2nd Lieutenant, we would have already closed that gap a little bit for the field graders and company graders with SOS by modifying our curriculum. Which we have done, by the way.

I think if we wait until senior developmental education (SDE) when you are a Lieutenant Colonel or Colonel select, it is too late. How many times have you heard something like, the way I act and the way I believe has gotten me this far and you are calling me a high potential officer, I am not changing now. I think it is something that we have to inculcate in all of our training and education programs. I don't think there is ever a time where we shouldn't have some lessons on leadership. But, it's more than leadership theory. I really like the modality that we use of vignettes because it really gets people to open up and think differently than simple PowerPoint delivery methods.

Lindsay: It helps them to start to see themselves as leaders early on. I think one of the things that most organizations struggle with is that people start to see themselves more as a skilled individual like a pilot, an engineer, in those types of divisions versus thinking of themselves in a larger context as a leader. Instead, they can think that I may have a certain capability or skill, but I take on more of a leader identity. I really am a leader first, but I also have competency in other areas.

Cotton: Right. How you engage that conversation and that thought process is what we are thinking through right now and ensuring that we do that from

all the access points that we have and through all the modalities that we use. We can do it with Junior ROTC, but it's in ROTC when we know that those individuals are going to turn into future officers of the Air Force that we really start having that conversation and curriculum that revolves around those ideas. It begins there and then hopefully continues in your unit and then gets more robust in SOS. We actually spend quite a bit of time in SOS on leadership.

That is why the Chief of Staff asked us to create another learning opportunity between SOS and IDE to allow people to be "reintroduced" in the tenets of leadership. But, it shouldn't be something that is robotic. What you really want is when someone goes to the field, they take it on as their own as a squadron commander or operations officer. There is a deliverable that the young Major Cotton can use when he is an operations officer with a flight where he can discuss and talk about leadership tenets through vignettes. It keeps people sharp on understanding all the tenets of leadership not just something out of a textbook.

Lindsay: To your earlier point, I think the way we get there is to model that. For example, I noticed in your bio that you have a lot of different courses and programs that you have done for your own development. When people see senior leaders still working on their development and being open to learning and growing, even though they are successful, it is a powerful message.

Cotton: We talk about leadership development, but it's also about character development. The Chief of Staff was just with our AU faculty yesterday and he said, "How many folks out there think they are done with their character development? If that's the case, I want to see you afterwards." You constantly develop character. One of the things you want to do though, is make sure there is a baseline of what our expectation is on character as we grow someone as a leader in our Air Force.

For me, it really comes down to four C's. When I see someone in the Air Force, I ask are you *competent* in your task and are you *competent* in the things that you are given to do? Are you *committed* to being *competent*? Do you show *composure* in getting after what you need to do? The one that I think is more important is do you show *compassion*? I always caveat that because some people tend to misunderstand compassionate leadership with the fact that you need to hold people accountable. I consider myself a compassionate leader but I sure hold people accountable as well. As an example, let's say that there is a military member that may be slightly below the requirements for the Exceptional Family Member Program. They are getting ready to be PCS'd¹ and as a result, the family will have to travel 90 miles to get to a medical referral appointment. Are you that leader that says, hey, there is really nothing that I can do about that because the Air Force Instruction says it is still within the minimum requirements? Or, is that just the beginning of the conversation where you pick up the phone and have a conversation with someone and ask if this is really what we want to do? I think that resonates with Airmen when you can put it in that context so they can understand what you are really asking them to do. I don't see that as an extra step. To me, that is common sense but to others, it may not be. How do you help them grow so that they can react to something like that in a similar way?

Being competent. Being committed. Having composure. Being compassionate. To me, those are my leadership pillars that I have been articulating for over a dozen years now.

Lindsay: With those four pillars in mind, what advice would you have for young leaders in terms of

what they need to be thinking about as they progress in their careers?

Cotton: I would go back to the four C's a bit. I think you need to be credible and being credible depends on where you are in life. For a 2nd Lieutenant to be credible, you need to go into a unit and be the best at what you can be at whatever task the unit gives you. For me, that is the competence piece. You are going to be the best that you can be and people see that you are committed to being the best that you can be. I think those two pillars are very important, even for me. Let's

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take Tony Cotton as an example. I can just imagine people saying, why the heck is Cotton, a space and missiles guy, coming to Air University to run the place? Look at his bio. He has been an operator his entire time. While I absolutely am not looking for someone to like me, you still want to be able to garner respect from your unit. I think garnering respect from your unit is having credibility with the unit. So, I could have very well said, "I could care less about this stuff. I am going to run this place like I would any operational unit," knowing that would get me absolutely nothing. Or, I could really dive in and understand different aspects of what they do, learn what they do and gain a respect through the credibility of knowing how the mission works. That is hard work. That is the commitment of becoming competent in your job. I think that it is critically important to do that. I would tell anyone to be competent, as that garners credibility. By having credibility and being competent in your task, and I

¹ Permanent Change of Station indicates an Airman and his/her family are moving to a new base or assignment.

always throw composure in there, as you are less likely to unravel if something goes wrong. By the way, people are looking at you to you to make sure you do that. There are followers that are going to be looking at you to see how you react.

Lindsay: That's great advice. One final question. What do you want your legacy to be when you move on from your position as the leader of Air University?

Cotton: When I came here, the vision that I shared with the Chief of Staff, and also the Secretary of the Air Force, was that I wanted Air University to be seen by our Air Force as a pinnacle and flagship institution. It is sad to say that I think we are the only service that doesn't see our own service school as a flagship institution. He said, "That makes sense." I went on to share that the way we do that is to make sure that we have a first class faculty. I need to make sure we have a curriculum that is agile and relevant to the National Defense Strategy. I need to make sure that we can enable our faculty to do research. I need to expand our outreach so that reach can extend to other Tier I institutions across the nation. If I can get after those things, we as the Air Force will better recognize that Air University is a flagship institution. We will not have to convince ourselves of that as it is right in front of our faces. The Chief of Staff and the former Secretary of the Air Force have been masterful at helping me do that.

One of the things that I recognized is that our own senior leaders don't even know what Air University offers. So, the Chief of Staff fixed that by directing all Wing Commanders to come here for a day and a half visit so that they can see the entire portfolio and not just what they thought they knew about Air University. Let's be frank. People will remember their experience by the last time that they were here. For some, the last time they were here was when they were a captain at SOS 20 years ago. It has certainly changed from what it was 20 years ago. The curriculum has changed and a

lot of people don't realize that. So, they come here and all leave saying, "I had no idea that what Air University offers." Working with Lieutenant General Silveria is a good example. There was never a formal relationship between Air University and USAFA. Between Gen Silveria and I, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding to formally recognize that relationship between the undergraduate institution known as USAFA and the Master's and Ph.D. programs that are nested under Air University. It is hard to believe that there was never a formal relationship there.

From the accessions piece, I want to make sure that we are doing everything that we can do to make sure that we are looking at all aspects of diversity and inclusion as we move forward. We want to make sure that we are capturing the right men and women from universities to join us through ROTC as well as through Officer Training School (OTS). We are spending more time looking at that and understanding those dynamics.

Finally, 2019 is the year of professional military education and continuing education for our enlisted force. A large number of our Airmen go through the Barnes Center for Enlisted Education. I just want to make sure that we are providing first-rate, flagship level education for our enlisted force across the continuum from Airman Leadership School all the way up to the Chief's Leadership Course. We have been diving into that all year to make sure that we are doing that correctly.

I think if I can leave here and people say, AU spent a lot of time ensuring that we got enlisted education right. That AU spent a lot of time to make sure that the curriculum, courseware, and the leadership pieces are in line with the National Defense Strategy and Joint Integration and really spent a lot of time in leadership development and developing the next generation of enlisted and officers correctly. If we can get our customers, the AF enterprise, to see those changes, I will call that a win.

MILITARY

The Way Things Were Meant To Be

Gina Grosso, Lt Gen (Retired), USAF

Interviewed By: Douglas Lindsay

Lindsay: Would you mind walking us through your background of how you got to where you are today and any lessons learned along the way?

Grosso: I certainly never expected to be where I landed. I'm guessing that is many people's experience. I am the daughter of a World War II veteran and a mother who earned her Ph.D. when she was 55. As I look back, it influences you indirectly in ways that you don't understand until you have time to reflect. I brought up the Ph.D. because right after my mother married my father, and she is 18-years younger than my dad, he went to Viet Nam for the first time in 1961 to 1963. My mother was initially left at home and then a couple of months later, he was able to bring her over there. So, she left college to get married and then go to Viet Nam. For me, if I had left college for any reason, my mother would have killed me. That was never an option.

When I was in the 5th grade, she went back to school because that was important to her. So, watching her, I saw how important finishing her Bachelor's degree was to her. Then, I saw my dad in the Air Force who was later in his career because he started his family in his 40's and was really happy. So, when I was looking to go to college, I decided that I was going to go to one of five private schools which were insanely expensive. So, I ended up applying to every Service ROTC scholarship because I saw my dad who was happy and I thought, I can do that for four years. Honestly, it was not my plan to stay. My plan was to get an MBA immediately and somehow be a corporate mogul.

Gina M. Grosso (Lieutenant General, USAF, Retired) served in the United States Air Force for 32 years culminating as the Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower, Personnel and Service at Headquarters U.S. Air Force. She earned her Bachelor's Degree through ROTC at Carnegie-Mellon University and her Master's Degree in Business Administration through the College of William and Mary. A career personnel officer, she has held numerous command positions at the flight, squadron, group, and wing levels as well as being the Director of the Air Force Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office in Washington, D.C.

However, sometimes life sort of intervenes and the first thing that happened was that I did not get into the college that I really wanted to go to. I applied to five and got into four. So, like any rational teenager, I told my mom I wasn't going to college. In her wisdom, she sent me to an education counsellor. He looked at my background, and the fact that I wanted to be an electrical engineer, and said you should go to Carnegie Mellon, which I had never heard of. Somehow, he sent my stuff there and in July, they admitted me. My dad and I drove out there and I thought Pittsburgh isn't too bad. So, my plan was to stay there for a year and then reapply to the school I thought I should be in. I had a great year and realized as I started to mature a bit, that this is where I am supposed to be. Even at that age, I realized that things are going to be okay. I realized I probably wasn't meant to go to Princeton. I'm not sure I would have fit in there looking back because my parents weren't massively wealthy and I just had this amazing experience at Carnegie Mellon. I also had an great experience in the cadet corps, because it wasn't that big. So, things happened the way they were meant to be.

Then, I came into the Air Force and immediately got my MBA, like I planned. I really liked what I was doing and I kept getting these incrementally good experiences. I actually started in operations research which is what I got my degree in. During college, I switched majors from electrical engineering to operations research and I'm grateful the Air Force let me do that. I started out at Nellis Air Force Base doing weapons analysis, which I wasn't really that excited about. We were also using data to defend the airspace as the FAA was always trying to take it. I was doing data analytics in a very primitive way, compared to what we do today.

At that time, Major Commands could move Lieutenants. So, I was moved from Nellis to Langley Air Force Base where I was doing people analysis. People were interesting and I like analysis, so it was a

perfect fit. I had a boss who said that I should think about going into personnel, which we called it at the time, because you could do so much more. I stayed at Langley for my longest tour so that I could finish my MBA. The Air Force wasn't too happy about moving someone from an operations research analyst specialty into personnel, but somehow, he made it happen. I tell you that was the best advice I could have ever gotten.

My first real leadership test was as a Flight Commander in a Military Personnel Flight, having never been in one. It was really fun. From there, it was a series of opportunities that you really don't get very often. I just really liked what I was doing, I really liked who I was serving with and I was continually challenged. I was developed as well. I am a lifelong learner so that really appealed to me how the Air Force really takes an interest in your development. The Air Force paid for my undergraduate degree, provided tuition assistance for my MBA, I spent a year at Newport (Naval Command and Staff College) to get a Master's Degree in National Security and Strategic Studies, and then I got to spend a year at Harvard. It culminated at 32 years with me being the Air Force A1 (head of manpower and personnel).

Lindsay: You mentioned that your journey wasn't what you expected. What did you think that journey was going to be and when did you start thinking about the Air Force as a career?

Grosso: It was literally incremental. I was single most of my career, so financially I had a lot of flexibility. They just kept giving me these neat opportunities. I was never at the point where I said, "I'm not so sure about this Air Force gig." It was a, 'you are getting positions that you have never done, so I hope I don't mess it up' kind of thing. So in reflecting, and thinking about what I like to do and what motivates me, it is solving big problems. That is what I like about math. Taking a hard problem and solving it. The challenge of it and

making the world a little better. Taking those things into consideration, you can't beat serving in the Air Force. There was never an aha moment, if that is what you are asking.

Lindsay: I like to ask that question because for many people who are successful like yourself, when they reflect back, there are always detours from where they thought that they were going to be that take them through lessons that create a different path than they may have originally thought.

Grosso: Exactly. I played competitive sports in high school, so I have always been competitive, but it is much more of an internal competitiveness. I just want to do well at what I am given. I also realized that I enjoy switching jobs every two to three years. The Air Force takes care of that for you. Now, being on the other side and having to sell yourself, that is one of the things that I appreciated about the Air Force.

Lindsay: You mentioned finishing up your Air Force career as the Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower, Personnel and Services. What was that experience like?

Grosso: I was really well prepared for it. I had spent time at a lot of different levels from the flight up to Wing Command and at the Air Staff and Office of Secretary of Defense (OSD). So, I had experience from the tactical to the strategic levels and felt as prepared as anyone could be to help me be successful.

As a younger officer, I spent 5 years at Langley. At the time, I thought Tactical Air Command (TAC) was the center of the universe. I will never forget, one time we had people come in from the Air Staff, and I thought, "Who are these people telling my boss what to do?" So, you realize pretty quickly that you have a lot to learn. That is where my time at OSD was helpful. You get a sense of their challenges. You have all of these

services that want to be independent, but then you have the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and Congress. I had several interactions with Congress and you figure out how to manage those relationships respectfully and be successful. If you don't have that experience, you don't understand how important that is.

Lindsay: How did you manage those relationships?

Grosso: First, you have to have them. Because I had been exposed to them as a Lieutenant Colonel, with some really great mentors who let me go with them, I understood their role. They have a different perspective, but they are good people. You learn early on that just because people see the world a little different, or have different constraints, they aren't bad people. You need to have a relationship with them so that you understand what their interests are, what they will be able to support you with, and what they won't be able to support you with.

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Lindsay: Often, I think people who don't have that experience, get the sense that it can be an adversarial context. But it doesn't sound like that was the case.

Grosso: As an example, when I was the Air Force Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Director, I had a really interesting conversation with Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (U.S. Senator from New York). It was very respectful on both ends. She believed that military prosecutors should be taken out of the equation. I said, even if you really believed that, you wouldn't get a different outcome because it goes back to the data. It's very rare that there is a disagreement. Interestingly, she said that is because you don't train

your prosecutors well enough. She believed that and that gave me insight as to where she was coming from.

Lindsay: If you can understand that perspective, it can really help makes sense of why people often make the decisions that they do.

Grosso: Yes, and it is genuine. She wanted the same thing that I did. We wanted it to stop sexual assault in our ranks. It is a horrible crime. It is devastating to the individual and it is devastating to the mission. We wanted the same thing, but we approached it differently. As time has gone on, and with cases that I have seen, maybe she had a point because we don't have career prosecutors in this crime. Maybe we should, but that is not in my lane. That is in the Judge Advocate General's (JAG) lane. You wonder at some point if you need some specialization versus generalization. That is always a challenge with developing people.

Lindsay: To what degree do we need people to be specialists who are great at their craft and at what level do we help them make the transition to more of a leadership focus? To what degree do we allow people to stay in their specialty versus having them broaden?

Grosso: That is where compensation has been challenging for us. Our structure, which was really built in the 50s and 60s doesn't help us in the force that we have today. Congress has helped in chipping away at that. But you also have the culture piece and you have to slowly figure out how to get that right. Culturally, we tell people, this is the path and you have to take it. So, how we are going to loosen those reigns is really the biggest challenge for the future.

I am currently working at a mid-sized company that just won the contract for Air Force ROTC instructors. There are 38 contract instructors, and these are amazing people. It just begs the question of what are we doing wrong if we won't let them do that in uniform? Some of it is that they are retired and we have eight

Colonels that missed the Air Force and want to come back and give. You can never get that level of talent and experience even if you wanted it in uniform. So you think about it culturally, how should we think about this differently?

For people that want to specialize, especially on the officer side, that is really hard because the system is still designed for up or out. We do have some loosening of this, but for the future how do we get that right? For example, how do we let some people stay a Captain as long as they want and how do you compensate them? The medical world has figured that out a bit. They have paths, but we are going to have to figure that out for line officers. How do you let people progress when they are ready to? I did have several people ask me, I'm doing really well at what I am doing (they were at the Captain and Major level), so why do I have to keep worrying about making the next grade? That is a fair question. If we can figure out mathematically how to get it right, because you always have to know how many people to bring in at the beginning, we ought to. Because you brought them in and trained them and they are really good, why would you not allow them to serve? I think that is the challenge for the future?

Lindsay: Agreed, as many of the degree and training programs are extensive and expensive.

Grosso: Added to that, we also don't have the 20-year cliff any more. So, I think it will take us time to really understand the dynamics of that for the force that is coming in. That might help us with some of this idea of permeability. However, it is hard to model. What I did find interesting was the take rate, during the year to opt in, was significantly lower than was projected by the people that designed it. I'm not sure what that means. Is it that they didn't understand it or they plan to stay?

Lindsay: Are there any indicators as to what that may be?

Grosso: We still need to figure that out. Quite honestly, it surprised me as I thought it would be the other way around. People would want the flexibility. So, what is interesting to me is that maybe the pull to 20 years, the 50% at 20 years, is still appealing. On the other hand, it could be that people didn't understand it or that they were too busy to elect it. It is an interesting question and a great topic for someone to do a paper on like at Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) or a Master's Degree thesis.

Lindsay: It would also be hard to get a good mentor on that topic since no one going before ever had that option. Maybe people are waiting to see what happened.

Grosso: That could be as well. As another example, I had a young operations research analyst and he was brilliant. He figured out his own solution because he believed he could invest better than the government. So he opted in. His intent wasn't to leave, he just thought he could take that money and invest it better.

Lindsay: How are we doing in terms of manning the force? Are we getting the people that we need?

Grosso: It gets back to something that you said earlier in how do you measure it? We have targets and we are meeting those targets. We have been growing the force since 2015. What is interesting from my perspective, is if you look at the end strength of the active component since the time the service was born in 1947, we peaked at about a million plus in the Korean War and we have been getting smaller with just a few blips up until 2015. That mindset is so dramatically different than growing, and I remember thinking as the A1 that we really need to shift our mindset. Everyone has been growing up in a force that has been getting smaller. One of my

Executive Officers had been force shaped 4 times before she was a Lieutenant Colonel. Can you imagine that? This growth mindset has really caused us to rethink a lot of the programs that we have because we aren't trying to push people out, we need to retain talent. We have to keep talent and you need to bring talent in. You can't get to that end strength without both. You have to keep more people than you normally do and you have to bring in more people. From a pure math perspective, we have been able to do both because we are hitting the end strength. My perception, however, is that it is challenging and we certainly haven't hit the diversity that we would like to hit so there is still critical work to be done for the future. It certainly isn't

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for lack of trying. The people that lead that effort are aware of that and are working hard at it. How do you get into those communities? How do you convince parents and influencers that this is a good place to be? There are huge challenges with that. I think the other huge strategic challenge is that the number of young people between the ages of 18-26 that just don't qualify for military service. From what I understand, that percentage is going up and not down.

Lindsay: One thing that is encouraging is the perceived willingness of the service to explore some different ideas regarding retaining talent. Bonuses seem to be the easy one in throwing money at people, but aren't always effective. Instead, what does right

look like versus, like what you mentioned earlier, approaches that were developed decades ago.

Grosso: To your point, we have been somewhat successful in saying that just because it was done to you, doesn't mean it needs to be done that way forever. For a lot of people, it is not money quite frankly. Some of it is stability when you need it, some of it is a follow on assignment that they want, some of it is more control on where they are going and not necessarily that they don't want to go. I think every person and family has their individual set of needs. We are a big enough organization that we can probably accommodate most needs. I wouldn't say all but what we were trying to do with the Talent Marketplace¹ is leverage that. We have a lot of jobs and we have a lot of people, so how can we meet the satisfaction of the individual and of the hiring authority? In an optimization model, we absolutely do that.

The other thing I liked about it was before you make one assignment, you will know where no one wants to go. Then, you can really do some targeted thinking about it. Okay, so we need to understand what it is about X place that is unattractive, and I'll bet we find things that would make people very surprised. So, you get away from all the assumptions about where people want to go and don't want to go. Then, you can have the conversation about what will it take to get this person to go there and can we do it? Some of it will be money, but I would argue that most of it will not be money.

Lindsay: It could be anything from a quality of life issue, to is it a challenging assignment, or am I going to get a growth opportunity out of it?

Grosso: Exactly. It could also be something like a Ph.D. Maybe I want to go to school after this and I want to go teach somewhere. Or, to your point, I was

amazed in ROTC when I got to visit, that almost every student was studying a language. It didn't matter what their primary was in, they were all interested in the world. So, maybe you let them do a more diplomatic mission. The idea of a stovepipe, or this one right path, you do away with that and really value all experiences. The functionals will have different opinions of that I am sure.

Lindsay: As you look back on your time as A1, what were you most proud of that you were able to accomplish or what do you think your legacy was?

Grosso: I don't like the term legacy because it sounds so self-centered. You don't do anything individually, especially in that position. I had so many great leaders under me. It's hard to pick one thing. For example, we were doing some really great work on modernizing the data system so that we could do things like the Talent Marketplace. I even understand we have an app that is about ready to come out.

Honestly, not as a 3-star, but as a 2-star, I was really proud of doing our first evidence based sexual assault prevention strategy. If you remember back in 2003, we did a lot of things right. We stood up Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARCs) really quickly. We stood up victim advocates and were taking care of the aftermath, but we weren't really getting after primary prevention. There are a lot of people in the private sector that study this. It is not about training. Training is not going to get you that primary prevention. I think we really had to shift our thinking. Unfortunately, we still aren't where we need to be on that.

As the A1, I would say laying the foundation for the breaking up of the line of the Air Force competitive category is really important for the future and something I am proud to be a part of. It starts to get at that specialized versus the generalized approach.

¹ The Air Force Talent Marketplace is a web-based talent management and assignment program utilized by the Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC).

Lindsay: Could you talk a little bit more about that?

Grosso: If you think about the line of the Air Force, I think it had basically 70% to 80% of the force under one model or one path, which is crazy. When you look at the skills we have today, some people progress quickly and some people need more time. When you have a system that only rewards one model to get promoted, it absolutely made no sense. That is a really massive change. Ideally, if you started from scratch, you would take skill sets with like paths and you would lump them together so everybody has the same opportunity for the things that are important and the timing is the relatively the same to compete against one another. That is what we tried to do with the categories. We did a lot of work trying to get those categories right. You will never get 100%. We were very comfortable pulling off the lawyers, the doctors, and dentists, these people we don't perceive as primary warfighters. However, when it came to the rest of the force, we were totally okay comparing a cyber operator with a pilot with a maintainer with a logistician, which doesn't really make sense.

In addition, there are some people that are inherently good strategic thinkers that do not always do well at the technical level. There are also people at the tactical level that aren't your strategic thinkers. So, since we had this one path of you need to do Squadron, Group, and then Wing, I'm convinced there are some people that would have really thrived as a General Officer in the strategic arena but would never get there because their strength is not at the tactical level. So, do we really have that right? It makes me think.

Lindsay: With all of this discussion in mind, what does the future Air Force leader look like?

Grosso: You have the bench that you have. That is the other interesting challenge. We have a bench of 5,000-6,000 Colonels and you cull that down to those who will be 1-star. That leap is huge. Once you have

that General (Officer) population, it is what you have to work with. There is no senior level lateral entry. So, it is critical that we get that right.

Also, I wonder if the future of war will be less kinetic. You just wonder what the nature of warfare is going to look like. Is it still going to be humans killing humans or is it going to be systems killing systems? For example, we already have unmanned vehicles and we are still accessing a huge number of pilots. At some point, we will likely need to address the influence of technology as it relates to our accessions. So, these types of things will shape what our future leaders will need to be and the experiences that they need to have to be successful.

When we see things like 5G², exoskeletons, quantum, and our ability to process huge amounts of data, it is a bit hard to predict the future. However, it seems like leaders will need a strong technology base to be effective. Is it an all of government approach? The whole idea of the Space Force has been fascinating. How do we stand it up? Should we stand it up? Who should own it? It has huge ramifications through all of government. I don't think we have a good answer for that yet, as a government.

Today we organize around geography with the Army principally on land, Air Force in air (and now space), and the Navy is sea. If that is the way that we are going to organize, then cyber is difficult to think about with respect to that model. How do you think about organizing your expertise because everything is connected?

In addition, if you think about young people today, they are shaped much differently than you and I were due to the technology and access that they have while they are growing up. They are inherently more technically savvy. Maybe it will be a competency that everyone has.

² 5G cellular network technology is capable of controlling connected machines, objects or devices.

Lindsay: With all of this in mind, what advice would you have for young leaders who are starting out their professional careers regarding leadership and development?

If I do the best that I can, I may not be able to control the outcome, but I am comfortable with what happens. You can't do more than you can do. If you haven't prepared, then that is a different story.

Grosso: I think you have to like what you are doing. If you don't know, then you need to find that out. Have some self-awareness. If you bring your best to what you are asked to do, good things will happen. That is still my philosophy. If I do the best that I can, I may not be able to control the outcome, but I am comfortable with what happens. You can't do more than you can do. If you haven't prepared, then that is a different story. But if you are prepared as best as you can, then the outcome will be what it is. nine times out of 10 is going to be better than you thought.

The other piece of advice is that you don't have to know everything. Almost every job that I was in, I probably knew the least about it. When former Chief of Staff of the Air Force Gen Mark Welsh³ asked me to run the SAPR office, my internal voice was saying,

you are asking a person with a math degree, one in national security, and an MBA who has taken almost no social science to run this program. So, I started to read a lot and I had a great team. I had the opportunity to go down to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and listen to the experts and I learned from

them, and then I hired one of their experts to help us. You don't have to be an expert if you take the people who you have, understand their strengths, find where your gaps are, and if you are fortunate, fill in those holes with talented people.

3 See Page 13 for interview with General Welsh.

First Things First

Kurt Warner, NFL Network & First Things First Foundation

Interviewed By: Douglas Lindsay

Lindsay: Would you mind sharing a little bit about your background, where you came from and some of the things that you learned about character and leadership along the way?

Warner: I came from a town in Iowa, and if you go back to my upbringing, there is just something about the Midwest. There is something about the values of the Midwest – hard work, earning everything you get, doing things the right way, respecting the people around you, and respecting your father and mother. Some of the fundamental values that I think are integrated into the Midwest is where my foundation really started. Obviously, I had the dream to be a professional athlete from the time I was very young. It was just something that I chased and using those values, character you might say that I developed in my upbringing, I went full force to chase after my dream. It wasn't always smooth. I was like a lot of guys that through high school, everything was great and it looked like there was a possible path to play professional football. Once I got out of high school though, everything kind of went haywire. Only one scholarship offer. I went to college and sat on the bench for four years. Finally, I got to play my fifth year and was able to turn it into an opportunity as a free agent with the Green Bay Packers. However, I got cut by the Packers. Then I spent a couple of years trying to figure out where else I could play. Nobody seemed to want me. That was during the time that I ended up stocking shelves at a grocery store just trying to make ends meet. I was hoping another opportunity would come along.

I played Arena Football and played in Europe for the National Football League before finally getting another opportunity when I was 27 years old with the Saint Louis Rams. From there, it kind of took off and as they say, the rest is history...going to 3 Super Bowls, winning a Super Bowl Championship, winning a couple of MVPs, before retiring from a 12 year NFL career.

Kurt Warner is a National Football League (NFL) Hall of Fame (2017) quarterback, who spent 12 years with the St. Louis Rams, New York Giants, and the Arizona Cardinals. He had great success on the field with multiple NFL MVP awards, two Super Bowl trips, and as a Super Bowl Champion and MVP. He had a unique path to the NFL with time spent in the Arena Football League and NFL Europe after being initially cut by the Green Bay Packers. He now spends his time as an analyst for Fox Sports and leading the First Things First Foundation.

Up to that point, it was some ups and downs and ins and outs, but I think there were so many things that I learned during that time. I think our experiences often times, show you who you really are. Or they go a long way in refining who you want to be and how you want to carry yourself and the character by which you want people to see you. You start to understand the values that you think you have. You start to understand whether those are true to who you are or those were things that just sounded really good when things were easier and going your way. When the rubber hits the road a little bit and you start going through trials, struggles, and challenges, is that who you really are? I think that's one of the things that when we go through the trials, struggles and challenges, we really find out who we are and we get a chance to examine ourselves and figure out if this is who I want to be? Regardless of what happens. Regardless of where I end up. Regardless of whether I end up playing in the NFL or not. Those experiences and challenges really refined the person that I was so when I finally did get to the NFL, I was the person that I wanted to be. I was able to carry myself, on that platform and in that spotlight, in the way that I wanted to carry myself. I'm not sure without some of those trials and struggles and searching, I would have been the same guy. I think it's easy to look back and go, "yeah, I would have been and it would have been great if I had seven, eight, or nine more years," but I don't think we really know that until we go through certain things and we come to a true understanding of what life is all about. How we want to carry ourselves and what kind of leader we want to be.

So, even though it wasn't perfect and it wasn't smooth, or it wasn't exactly how I dreamed it when I was younger, I'm very grateful for the path that I took because I think it made me into the person I wanted to be when I finally got there. I'm not sure everyone gets that opportunity and I think you see people go in different directions. Or maybe never make it to begin with, because they didn't have some of those things that really strengthened who they were and the resolve

that they had. To be able to really fine-tuned their values and things that they could use to ultimately have success in the field that they are in.

Lindsay: Do you have an example of a time that you were tested or an event where you said, that was a defining moment for me in terms of not just espousing those values, but an opportunity for you to live what you believed?

Warner: I think an easy one for people to relate to is going from an NFL training camp to working nights in a grocery store stocking shelves. Being on the precipice of achieving your dreams and goals to finding yourself in a place you never thought you would be. Struggling day after day and questioning everything. I think that was a great opportunity for me to really find out what I was made of. I think the first part is that it is so easy in life to blame our circumstances or blame other things for why we are in a particular place or why we can't achieve our dreams. I think it would have been very easy to find myself in a grocery store and just sit there and go, the reason I am here is because so-and-so couldn't see my talent. Or so-and-so didn't give me a chance to play in college until my fifth year and kind of pawn that off on a lot of other circumstances.

I think a couple of things that period of time did was first of all, this idea of hard work that I think we throw around so often. I just tweeted something the other day about how I can't remember the last time I asked someone if they were a hard worker and they told me no. We all think we are hard workers. We all think that we do so much to achieve what we want. I oftentimes think people don't really understand what hard work is. They understand what somebody else might think it is or what somebody else thinks it looks like, but most people don't really understand it. To me, hard work is not just working hard, it is understanding what kind of work I need to do to become better at whatever it is that I am chasing after. That to me, is what hard work is. It is taking those things that I am

not good at, those things you have to self-reflect and go, okay, where do I need improvement even though I am not good at it now.

Unfortunately, nobody wants to do those things. People want to take the things that they do well, and then they want to do them a lot and say that is hard work. I'm putting in a whole bunch of time to the things that I enjoy doing. That, to me, isn't hard work. Hard work is finding yourself in a place where you have to do things that you don't want to do. Things that aren't fun, but have a reward at the end of them that gets you closer to who you want to be, where you want be, or what you want to accomplish. I think that period of time when I was working in the grocery store gave me a place to really self-reflect on who am I as a player. Where are my weaknesses? What do I need to do if I really ultimately want to achieve that dream? Oftentimes, if things go your way, you never really self-reflect. You kind of stay in this mode like, okay,

I'm fine, I'm just going to keep doing what I'm doing as opposed to truly refining yourself to become better. So, I think it gave me a chance to self-reflect and look back on why I didn't play in college. Why did I get cut from the Green Bay Packers? How in the world do I go from here to actually achieving my dream? To do that, sometimes you really have to look closely at who you really are. What are your skills? What are your deficiencies? So, it allowed me to do that. I really think it helped shape my hard work.

Growing up, I was in all kinds of sports. I'll use my brother as an example. My brother wasn't really into sports and never made the sports teams. So, he worked all through high school. He's going to school and he's working a job and has that responsibility. I never had

that. I did sports, but it was stuff that I enjoyed. It wasn't stuff that I was doing because I needed to do it. I didn't need to do it for gas in my car or buy cleats so I could play football. I was fortunate to do what I loved to do. I was playing sports so I didn't ever have to get a job. So, it was really the first time where I really had to weigh everything. How do I continue to prepare for football while also working a job?

At the time, I was dating my eventual wife who had two kids and she was going to school. I was watching the kids during the day and at night I was working and somewhere in between I made time to work out. I would sleep for a few hours and then do it all over

Hard work is finding yourself in a place where you have to do things that you don't want to do. Things that aren't fun, but have a reward at the end of them that gets you closer to who you want to be, where you want be, or what you want to accomplish.

again. I just really got to understand what hard work looked like...what sacrifice looked like...because I don't think most of us really understand that until we find ourselves in a place where you are stretched in every direction. I think that time when I was working in a grocery store really allowed me to do those two things. You have worked hard and you have worked hard on the football field, and is that who you really are? Is that work and that hard work that you have always claimed, does that hold true in every circumstance? Is that through and through who you are? I think that period of time really helped me see where I wasn't a hard worker and where some of that stuff that was instilled in me, or that maybe I applied in sports, was taken to a new degree and really came to define who I was as a person. That was something that I carried with me

as I went through my NFL career, as a father of seven, and with the things that I do now. I really think that shaped the work ethic in me.

One of the aspects of character that I always want to have is the ability to scrutinize who I am. Whether that is to scrutinize how I played on a particular Sunday even if everyone in the media said I played great. Can I sit back and truly be honest with myself on who am I, why did I do this, and how can I be better? What little things that I could easily kind of hide and not talk about and kind of cover up that I notice about myself that I want to improve on so I can be more well-rounded... that I can be better...that I can speak to more people and more circumstances and really impact the lives of other people through finding those things in my life that I need improvement on? So, I think those are two things that through that period of time, two character traits that I was able to put under a microscope and fine tune that would ultimately become foundational pieces for who I wanted to be, what I would accomplish, and the kind of husband/father/football player/whatever it may be, that I would become later on in life.

Lindsay: One of the things that I heard you keep coming back to was that idea of ownership. Often, we see people with an opportunity and when struggle or adversity hits them, they can go one of two ways. They can embrace a negative narrative, which is like what you alluded to of why is this happening to me? But what you talked about is taking ownership of the situation and sitting there processing the questions of what is my role and what is my response to that? Then, owning that for your own development in order to use that as an opportunity to shine light on those areas that you may not have thought about developing before.

Warner: Yes. I think there are a couple of things in there. The first thing, and we try to share that with our kids all the time, is that that life is not fair. That is the first part of it. We always go in to life or circumstances thinking that everything should be fair.

Everyone should be on equal ground and everyone should have equal opportunity. I think what you come to realize pretty early in life is that life is not fair. It can be extended to so many different things from the house that you are born into, the circumstances that you are born into, the struggles you may face growing up, or something that you want doesn't play out in your direction. But, life is not fair. Something that we try to profess in our lives is that we have seen that on both sides. We have seen that in times of struggles and trials, where we could sit back and think, you know what, life is not fair. We have also seen it on the blessing side as well. After everything that we have been through to be where we are at, sometimes I look back and think, "Why me? Why was I chosen to be given all of this and placed in this opportunity?" I look at so many other people that are trying to do the same thing and don't get there and you can say life isn't fair. We are blessed and we need to recognize that. So, I think that is one part of it in understanding that life is not fair. It's not so much the hand you are dealt, but what are you going to do with the hand that you are dealt? Because we often don't have control over the cards that are given to us. But, we do have control over how we use them.

I think the second part is the internal reflection. We live in a world where it is so prevalent for people to look for outside reasons why they are where they are at instead of looking internally and asking what hand did I have in this? Where did I fall short or miss? I think you put those two things together and sometimes it is out of your control. Sometimes it is not about you. But there are other times when it is, at least to some degree, about you. I think you really have to scrutinize every situation and make sure that you are really looking at both sides to be able to determine what you are going to do with that. Is it about my personal improvement or is it simply about taking my cards and turning them into something else? There are two sides to it. I think that, certain things throughout my life, have shown me that I need to consider everything. I need to consider both sides. I need to make sure that whatever side it is, I need

to grab ahold of it and not let it take me out. So easily, I think people sometimes say that life isn't fair and they blame everything that happens in the future on the fact that at that point in time, life wasn't fair. They never look at themselves. They never take ownership. They stay in the path and stay in the fact and say, it has nothing to do with me. I was just dealt a bad hand. I believe that there are ways for us, in the midst of both of those circumstances to get better...to better ourselves...to better our circumstances. Sometimes you can't do it all by yourself but I think starting with that kind of perspective, has always helped me to gravitate to the next things. To hope that tomorrow will be better than today. That was one of those circumstances that allowed me to fine tune the scope that I wanted to have on each and every circumstance that I faced in life.

Lindsay: That echoes one of the things that we teach our cadets at the Academy is to own where you are at and what you do and then you need to engage that situation in order to be better. That is part of our Leader of Character Framework.¹ At the end of the day, you still own where you are...what you do...what you stand for in any given situation. Fair or not. You still have the responsibility of how you respond in that situation. That leads me to another question. When you look back at your NFL career, what would you like people to say about you and how you lived your life in front of millions of people on a daily basis? What would you want people to take away from that period in your life?

Warner: That's a big question. I think with everything, you want people to take a lot of things away. When you look back at the journey, I want people to take away the idea that he never let his circumstances define him. Very similar to what we just talked about. He was dealt some different hands. The circumstances weren't always in his favor, but he never let that define who he was, who he was going to be, and how he carried himself. That could be everything up until I was in

the NFL or while I was in the NFL where I found myself benched three times and cut a couple times and having to resurface. The overarching theme is the idea of perseverance and never letting the circumstances define what he was going to do in his career, but more importantly, who he was going to be as a person.

What I would want them to remember about me is just this idea of character. Everywhere he went, everything we know about him, he was above reproach. You build and you spend so much time trying to allow your values and your character to define who you are. So many people do a great job of that and then through one circumstance, one instance, or one moment they throw that away because they contradict who they have been up until that point. My hope, when it is all said and done, not just my career but my life is that I don't have any of those moments. Character was something that defined me in everything that I did...in every circumstance...in every relationship, that there will never be a time where people can look back and tear apart my character. I want them to see me as a person of character, first and foremost, in all things. They understood who I was, what I stood for and that never wavered no matter what situation I found myself in.

Then, I think the game of football is the ultimate team sport. When it comes to a team sport, or a team in anything, leaders are so important. What is accomplished by that group of people or that team oftentimes is dictated by the leader that they have. I would like people to look at my career and if nothing else, say maybe he didn't throw the ball the best, or maybe he wasn't the greatest player to ever play, but he was a great leader. When he was at a place, they played and achieved at a level above what they have ever achieved before or what they would have achieved without him due to that leadership.

Leadership can mean different things and look different ways, but ultimately it is about the ability of the leader to elevate the commitment, performance,

¹ <https://www.usafa.edu/character/>

and belief of the people around them so they accomplish things that people never thought they could accomplish. If I kind of wanted people to define who I was, because my career has been up and down and weird in a lot of different ways as I found myself in different places and on different teams, if you look back to when I played the game and when I was on the field that all of my teams succeeded at a particular level. I like to believe a lot of that had to do with my ability to lead. Whether that was through the character and values that I had that wore off on other people or if it was my ability to connect with different people in

Warner: Everything that we do with the Foundation has a background in things that we've dealt with or experiences we have found ourselves in. To be at the place we are now, after having gone through some of those things, a lot of what our Foundation does has been shaped around those experiences and trying to help people to work their way through that. So one day they can be in a place similar to where we are at. Everything that we do comes from the kind of people that we want to be. It starts with faith and that is why we named it First Things First. We do believe that we are where we are at now because we keep our faith first.

Leadership can mean different things and look different ways, but ultimately it is about the ability of the leader to elevate the commitment, performance, and belief of the people around them so they accomplish things that people never thought they could accomplish.

Through that, we have been blessed and have an amazing platform. We are blessed to be where we are, but also see it as a tremendous responsibility to make sure that we use it properly. To be able to use those things in our lives that we want to define us: the importance of relationships, perseverance, hard work, belief, letting people know

different ways to push them to a level that they never thought they could get to. Or, simply instilling a belief in a group of people that they never had before. We all know that belief has an unbelievable way of allowing us to achieve things at a level we never thought we could simply by believing that it is possible. I think those things are some of the defining elements that I would want people to say about me, my career, or the person I was when it is all said and done.

Lindsay: You clearly had success on the football field and now you are having success in other domains like your First Things First Foundation. How has the growth and development that you mentioned before translated into what you are now doing with your Foundation? Could you speak a little about what you are accomplishing through the Foundation?

that you love them, trying to inspire people to do more and be more than their circumstances say that they may be or people around them say that they can be at a particular time. Who we want to be as people and who we model ourselves as – our Foundation has been an extension of that. It has also been an extension of our lives in what we try to do from a program perspective. For instance, we work with sick children, whether it be the hospital things that we do or the Make a Wish trip that we have. All that stemmed from when our oldest son suffered a traumatic brain injury when he was four months old. So, we understand those struggles and the challenges that can have on a family.

In those times, you often will need people to come in and help you out and allow you to take a step or take a step with you. Or to forget about some of the struggles for just a few minutes and enjoy your family. A lot of

our programs have been designed around that part of it. When I met my wife, she was a single mother of two. After we were married, we bounced around from one apartment to another and we will never forget when we got the opportunity to own our first home and what that meant for us as parents, our kids, and our family to have a place we could build around and a sense of accomplishment and pride that carried us to another level. So, we do a program that was adopted from Warrick Dunn, called Homes for the Holidays, where we help single parents obtain home ownership for the first time with help from organizations such as Habitat for Humanity. It helps them take that step and then move forward to a new place in life. So, that is kind of how our Foundation started and developed by taking the character and values that we believe are so important and applying them to programs that have directly impacted our lives over the years. We combine those things and try to leave a lasting legacy on people's lives.

Lindsay: It sounds like that is a family endeavor for you all.

Warner: All of our kids are involved heavily in all of the programs that we do. That is very important to us as well because how Brenda and I grew up and what we went through is so different from what our kids have gone through. The situation that we are in now, and as blessed as we are, they will probably never have some of the struggles that Brenda and I had. So, one thing that is important to us is that they see what is important to us and for them to understand those values. A big part of living life and being a part of a community or team is being able to take your eyes off of yourself and focus on other people. That has always been something that we have instilled in our children. So, everything that we do is family oriented within our Foundation to make sure that our kids understand that and they see that in action. They are aware that even though the worst thing in their lives may be something minute, there are

people that are struggling on a daily basis and we are called to help them in any way that we can.

Lindsay: That is quite the commitment. With that in mind, what does the future look like for you? What would you like to do and how will you continue to impact people?

Warner: I'm still trying to figure that out but there are definitely some things that I want to do. I've been fortunate to turn my on field career into an off field career. But I think, when you look at the big picture and look through that long lens of the future of what you want to do in the next 30 to 40 years, I think there are a couple of definitive things. I want to continue to impact the world. I'm always looking for opportunities that would allow me to do that in bigger ways. I want to change the world bigger than I am able to right now. To give you an idea of one example, some partners and I started Elite Sports India. It is a league in India, like the NCAA of America. We started and developed this with the idea of how sports in our country have impacted the lives and the direction of families in an incredible way. We are taking sports into India in hopes of creating a model to help those in poverty and to help transform people through sports so lives are changed and we have an impact on that country in a positive way. Families are positively impacted for the long term. Those are the kind of things that I have visions for. How can I be as far reaching and impactful as possible in the next 40 years?

I think the other part of it is making sure that I really use my position to impact the lives of my family whether that be my seven kids or my grandkids. A big part of our legacy is what we leave behind and how those that we have impacted go on to impact others. The other part of it is making sure that I can feed into the lives of my family, my kids, and my grandkids. How can I help them to move on and impact the world in powerful ways in whatever direction that they go?

Those are the two things that really jump out. I think the bigger picture for me is to spend the rest of my life impacting the lives of others with the hope that they can pay it forward and impact others to continue to make the world a better place.

Lindsay: That's a great vision building on the substantial work you have already done. In thinking about the idea of legacy and impacting the future, at the Air Force Academy we are developing the next generation of military leaders. What advice would you have for them as they are at the beginning of their careers?

Warner: That's another big question. I think one thing that has become really important to me in everything that I have done is the ability to, in every circumstance, see two sides. The first side is what do I need to do, what do I need to accomplish, what is my goal in this? How can I be great at what I am getting into? That is always one side of it. Everything that I do, I want to be great at it. I want to make sure that I can define what that looks like and how I can do that and make sure I follow that course. But, I also believe in every circumstance that we need to get outside of ourselves and ask, in this, how also can I impact people or impact people around me? How can I leave a legacy within this that isn't simply just about me? That would be my encouragement to any young person that is trying to define what their life is going to look like. In this moment or circumstance, what is that going to mean and to make sure you look at it from both lenses. I think too many people get stuck simply only looking at themselves and looking at what I want to do and I want to be great and they get self-absorbed and they miss sight of the opportunity to truly impact the world around them. To truly look at the opportunity in a team or group setting. I think you see that in our world all the time. Sometimes, you shake your head and ask where are we going as a culture? I think it is too often because people simply look at themselves. They want

to start a business and want to know what will they get out of it? They get involved in something and only ask what can I get out of it? They want to get into the NFL and know how they can accomplish their goals instead of being able to see both sides. The reality is that I can have my goals and I can have my things and I can be great in what I do, but I also need to make sure that in all of that, I am looking at a bigger picture and realizing that the bottom line is that my success must lead to other people's success. It needs to lead to bigger success. It needs to lead to cultural change. It doesn't need to be worldwide. It can be in my household or my small business or my team. I would just encourage them to go into everything and not just set personal goals but also team goals or cultural goals. Be able to make sure that their eyes aren't just stuck on themselves. Success doesn't just look like them accomplishing what they want to accomplish personally. It is about accomplishing something that is bigger than you and leaving that as you legacy.

ACADEMICS

The Leadership System

Barbara Kellerman, Harvard University

Interviewed By: Douglas Lindsay

Lindsay: Would you mind giving a bit of a background about how you found yourself in the field of leadership?

Kellerman: I remember, even as a little girl, being interested in how some children seemed always to get what they wanted and when they wanted it – and other children did not. We did not certainly use the word leader, but always there were those who ended on top. I remember even back then being interested in the phenomenon. As well, I grew up in a very politically oriented home, and regularly there were conversations about outstanding leaders. So, certainly parental influence also played a role. As far as making a profession out of leadership, I became interested in the subject in graduate school. My dissertation was about the important German Chancellor, Willy Brandt – who by the way, I was able to interview while on a Fulbright in Germany - and was titled, “Willy Brandt: Portrait of the Leader as a Young Politician.”

But when I got my Ph.D. and wanted to go into academia, there were no jobs for faculty interested in leadership per se. By the way...there still aren't many. But there were plenty of jobs for faculty who, for example, taught the American Presidency or the U.S. Congress. So, that is exactly what I did. I was able to get into academia by knowing somewhat more about the Presidency and Congress than did my students! Only in the fullness of time, was I able to transition to that which I had cared about all along which, is leadership and, later, followership. They really had been my lifelong interest, which I had to fit into making a living until a job opened that was close enough to home and that specifically was in the field of leadership, or leadership studies. The first real leadership job I had was at the Institute of Leadership Studies at Fairleigh Dickinson University. It was a graduate program that awarded an Ed.D. Since then, I have been able to stay professionally involved in the field of leadership.

Dr. Barbara Kellerman is the James MacGregor Burns Lecturer in Public Leadership at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. Previously, she has held academic appointments at Fordham, Tufts, Fairleigh Dickinson, George Washington, and Uppsala Universities and at Dartmouth College. She was one of the founders of the International Leadership Association and the Founding Executive Director of the Harvard Kennedy School's Center for Public Leadership. Dr. Kellerman received her B.A. from Sarah Lawrence College and her M.A., M.Phil., and Ph.D. from Yale University. She has authored and edited many books on leadership and followership.

Lindsay: As a field of study, how are we doing?

Kellerman: Anyone who has read my blogs, articles, or books on leadership, especially recent ones such as *The End of Leadership*¹ and *Professionalizing Leadership*², knows that I have begun freely to write about, and speak about, my disappointment in how the field of leadership studies has evolved. I refer to it – the whole leadership enterprise – as the “leadership industry.” This industry – which started small about fifty years ago – has become an enormous moneymaking machine. In this it is successful. But it is not – the field of leadership, leadership as an area of intellectual inquiry – as rich, as evolved, as interesting or stimulating as it could be and should be. Neither practically nor pedagogically. I wrote about this at some length in *Professionalizing Leadership*. I do feel that leadership learning is incredibly inferior to learning any other profession or even vocation. It astonishes me that higher education – undergraduate institutions and graduate ones – does not take more note of this. In part on account of the academy’s³ laxness and inattention, it does not really surprise me that leaders, across the board, are far less respected and less trusted than they used to be. And leaders behave more badly than they used to – again in part because we who are in the field of leadership studies, we who are experts, seem ourselves to disrespect the field. One more point – my research suggests that as an institution the military generally, is the exception to this rule. I go into this in more detail in *Professionalizing Leadership*. The point is the military sector – in comparison with the civilian one – generally takes leadership seriously and comes far closer than the civilian sector to professionalizing the process of learning how to lead.

Lindsay: With that notion of taking the leadership

1 Kellerman, B. (2012). *The End of Leadership*. New York, NY: Harper Business.

2 Kellerman, B. (2018). *Professionalizing Leadership*. Oxford University Press.

3 Refers to the larger academic community.

industry to task, how has that resonated with those in the field of leadership be it business, consulting, academic, etc.?

Kellerman: It is an interesting question and one that is hard to respond to precisely. I do not feel that my argument has made an enormous impression or that I have had an enormous impact. On the contrary, I feel that I have had relatively little impact. Having said this, it is also the case that there are absolutely some people, in both the private and public sectors, who are willing to say out loud that they resonate with my concerns and complaints. And, indeed, to act on them! So I haven’t been ostracized – people are still talking to me. This said, I cannot say that I think that the majority of my colleagues, in the academy especially, hears me – or maybe wants to hear me. As in any profession, or line of work, there are vested interests. Deviating from these interests, and from past patterns of behavior, is a difficult thing to get people to do. Especially when there is no one in a position of authority to tell them to do it.

It is impossible to look at the overwhelming majority of leadership programs – again, exempting the military – and conclude that we are doing as good a job of teaching leaders, teaching leadership, teaching people how to lead than we could be. It’s screamingly obvious that electricians and plumbers get more of a proper education – education befitting a vocation, not to speak of a profession, than do leaders. It should not surprise us then that we get leaders – sometimes even Presidents of the United States – who have zero expertise or experience that is relevant. We see this often in politics, where we seem to have scant compunction about electing or appointing people who are complete novices. But of course we would never in a million years bring into our homes – as I implied a few moments ago – a plumber or an electrician who is similarly demonstrably unqualified. Why we are willing to settle for obviously unqualified leaders remains to me an absolute mystery.

Lindsay: It seems like what you are suggesting is it not like we don't have the ability to, it's that we are not. Am I hearing that right?

Kellerman: I think you are. I'm not saying that, for example, the military is perfect. It teaches how to lead as I, ideally, think it ought to be done. But the military not only teaches leadership early on, specifically, most obviously, at the military academies, but the military also takes leadership seriously lifelong – throughout people's military careers. Cadets who go to the various military academies get a real leadership education. For example, in the liberal arts, they are obliged to take relevant courses in, say, subjects such as history, psychology, political science, and philosophy. And, as indicated, the military continues to take leadership learning seriously, throughout a person's career. Leadership is talked about, practiced, focused on with laser-like intensity and consistency.

This is what I mean when I speak about leadership *development* – as opposed to leadership education and training. Moreover, the military has a moral code, which I consider essential to professionalizing leadership. This, by the way, is analogous to medicine and law, which both have moral codes to which professionals are supposed to adhere. Professions typically have a moral code in addition to a body of learning that is considered essential to the field. But in the field of leadership, no matter how highly ranked the institution, places such as, for example, Harvard and Stanford, there is nothing even vaguely resembling what the military has. Again, it's not that the military academies are perfect. But, they are good. They take leadership – leadership theory and leadership practice – seriously. Obviously, I consider the idea that leadership can be taught swiftly and easily ridiculous.

Lindsay: That's interesting because if you look at it from a value proposition case, having effective leaders is good for the organization. Therefore, leader development interventions should be intentional and

be assessed for their efficacy. However, they often are not. Why is there a disconnect between what we know about leadership and what organizations do with respect to developing leaders?

Kellerman: If you survey leaders in the private sector, since your question was primarily about the private sector, they register a high level of dissatisfaction with the leadership programs that do exist – there is plenty of data to support that. It's not as if people are satisfied with the leadership learning that does take place, which makes your question the more relevant. If people are not satisfied, why don't they do something different? In ancient time, the times, say, of Plato and Confucius, people seemed to understand that learning to lead was a lifelong enterprise and, at that, a deeply serious one. But for some reason – mostly money, I suspect – when the leadership industry emerged relatively recently, it was assumed by the private sector, with higher education every bit its match, that learning how to lead was easy, could be accomplished quickly, sometimes even on the job. In other words, neither the private sector, nor higher education, has been willing to dedicate to learning how to lead the necessary human and fiscal resources that would be required to do so wisely and well.

Medical and law schools – and most vocational schools – do take their responsibilities seriously. They credential and license people, and individuals must pass certain tests before they can practice their profession, or vocation. For some reason, all these escape leadership educators in higher education, and in the private sector, and in the public sector. They – leadership teachers and leadership learners – seem not to understand that leadership needs to be taught seriously and in a way, yes, that requires a significant investment of time and money, on everyone's part. For example, Harvard or Stanford Universities could easily develop a serious leadership curriculum. During their last two years of college, undergraduates would concentrate on Leadership Studies – take liberal arts

and social science courses directly related to leadership. Then they would go to a professional school such as a business school or a school of government or a school of education. This would amount to a four-year curriculum in leadership education and training. This would signal that leadership is to be taken seriously, as is any other profession, in which both education and training are the lynchpins.

Lindsay: That truth that leadership can be learned is an important one. There is still a surprisingly large number of people who believe leadership is something that is inherent within an individual that it is something that you are born with. The reality is that it is a combination of both and not either or.

parts: leaders, followers, and contexts. As you might know, I've written quit extensively about the leadership system. It is not just about leaders. It is the opposite of leader centric. The leadership system is equally about followers – and about the contexts. Can we teach leaders to be aware of their followers, how to interact with their followers, to be aware of the context, to know what to look for, to be contextually intelligent and aware? Absolutely. This is work that we can do. We cannot make everyone a great leader but we can make leaders far, far better equipped to lead than we do now.

Lindsay: That's an interesting shift in the mental model about leadership of just trying to make everyone a great leader. If we would stop the bad leaders from enacting their bad behavior and help all levels improve, we would see vast improvements by bringing the bottom up. To your point about the military, that is what we try to do in terms of trying to eliminate

the bottom end by getting everyone where they are at least good at leadership versus just focusing on the top several people.

Kellerman: I think that is a really good way of looking at it.⁴ I'm very interested in bad leadership and some years ago I wrote a book about it. I do think that, as you are suggesting, they go together. What we are talking about is increasing the number of good leaders and, of course, one way of doing that is by reducing the number of bad leaders. Bad leadership, though related to good leadership, obviously, is a whole other subject. One that is, sadly, almost entirely ignored by the contemporary leadership industry. Bad leadership is a reason I became interested in followership. How do people who are powerless get rid of people who are powerful, if the latter are performing badly

We cannot make everyone a great leader but we can make leaders far, far better equipped to lead than we do now.

Kellerman: I would compare learning to lead to learning to play the piano or to learning any other skill. Is it possible for me to be a great piano player? Absolutely not. I simply don't have the innate talent. That's analogous to leadership. There are some people who are just gifted at leading and some who are less so. Just as there are some people that are just naturally gifted at playing the piano. If I took piano lessons for years at a time, would I learn to become a reasonably good piano player? Absolutely. But, again, would I learn to be a great piano player? Not in a million years. This dichotomy, then, between leaders being born or made is absurd. Are piano players born or made? Education and training make better leaders and better piano players. But they do not make *great* anything.

Here's a question: what can be learned from a good leadership education? I now teach about what I call the leadership *system*. This system consists of three

4 Kellerman, B. (2004). *Bad Leadership: What it is, How it Happens, Why it Matters*. Harvard Business Press.

either because they are ineffective or because they are unethical, or sometimes both? It is a complicated issue, but certainly the way you framed it is absolutely one way of looking at it.

Lindsay: With that idea of bad leaders and their impact on followers in mind, what advice do you have for followers who may be stuck in a situation where they are needing to lead up due to having a bad leader?

Kellerman: As with most things that are leader-related, any advice to be offered depends on the specifics: on who is the leader, on who are the followers, and on what is the situation. Therefore, the best answer to your question is, it depends. How to deal with bad leadership depends upon the variables to which I just alluded. In general, though, don't try to get rid of a bad leader all on your own. In almost all cases you have a whistle blower, which is really what that amounts to. Being a whistle blower, for example, a follower who goes against the powers that be, usually by him or herself, is risky business. There is a small literature on whistle blowing, and invariably it's full of cautions. This is not to say that no one should blow the whistle. It's great to have some Davids going up against some Goliaths. Some followers going up against some leaders who are in some way "superior" to them, that is, more powerful or having more authority. But, again, it can be and usually is, risky personally, risky professionally, risky politically and sometimes, even risky legally. People have to be careful, to an extent self-protective. Ira Chaleff, a colleague, would call a whistle blower a courageous follower. Which is great – it's great to be a courageous follower. But one has simultaneously be a strategic follower. Most of us are not masochists. We don't want to sacrifice ourselves on the altar of followership. So, being a strategic or a clever follower is just as important as being a courageous follower. If you find yourself stuck in a situation in which bad leadership is rampant, evident, my best single piece of advice is to try hard not to go it alone.

Lindsay: I was hoping that you would bring up the idea of the system of leadership and the value of the context. Those are important distinctions. I think a lot of people approach it from the standpoint of, if I just do X or Y as a leader, then I will be good as a leader, regardless of where I am at. We see some leaders who have been successful in one domain, try to transition to another domain and they forget that they are walking into a different context. They mistakenly think that what made them successful in one domain automatically allows them to be successful in a different domain. If you don't realize the value of context, you will have some very predictable negative results.

Kellerman: I think it is correct to say that there are absolutely leaders who are splendid in one context and then, in another context, they are much less splendid. Sometimes even, in some cases, downright bad. It's equally true that there are leaders who are good in one context, and then in another context they are just as good. However, this does not for one second diminish the importance of being contextually conscious. I cannot tell you how curious I find it, and how unfortunate, that in general leadership experts ignore the significance of context. Context matters. It is directly relevant to leadership. Therefore, when someone is learning how to lead, they should be learning, as an integral part of the process, how to be contextually conscious – that is, contextually aware, contextually expert, and contextually intelligent. It's my contention that in teaching people how to lead, one of the mistakes we make is focusing far too much on them – on their level of self-awareness, on their authenticity, on their skill set and so on – and far too little on the other, the follower, and equally far too little on the context.

Lindsay: How does this importance of the value of the context affect your approach to leadership and how you teach, coach, and develop leaders?

Kellerman: I'll make two comments. Since the inception of the leadership industry, the world has changed. Things change, they always change. I write about this all the time. For example, the culture has changed and technologies have changed. Technology is not, per se, about leadership or followership. Rather it is about a change in the context. But, again, how can we teach leadership without teaching the impact that social media has had on the relationship between, the dynamic between, leaders and followers? To me, such an omission is a mystery. My students, by the way, and my various audiences, all get it. They get that understanding leadership and followership in the 21st century without understanding the role of social media is not possible. The same holds for culture. Cultural changes explain the decline in respect for authority which, in turn, explains a lot about leadership at this moment in time, in liberal democracies and, I hasten to add, autocracies.

I fold many of these ideas into the course that I now teach at the Harvard Kennedy School, titled, *Leadership System: Leaders, Followers, Contexts*. I have, according to my students, zero trouble convincing them that followers matter, and that contexts matter. I want to take just a moment to focus on followership. When I say that there have been changes of great consequence in the last half century, what I am saying is that the context has changed, and that followers have also changed. These are independent - and they are interdependent. I would say the same things about followers that I just did about context. To teach leadership, to teach leaders, in any way, shape, or form, without paying even the slightest attention to followership, to followers, strikes me as absurd. Pay attention people! Open your eyes to what goes on in the world and you will see that it is not just about leaders and leadership anymore. The world has changed - irrevocably. And it will continue to do so.

Lindsay: As I hear you talk about that, it seems like on the applied and academic sides of leadership studies, we see a great proliferation of the different "types" of leaders. Servant leaders, authentic leaders, etc., and a focus on the individual aspects of the leader. To your point, we don't see a concurrent systems view of leadership study. We see a little bit on the negative side of things with explanations like the Toxic Triangle that addresses destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments from Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser⁵, but little else from a systems perspective.

Kellerman: Institutions and organizations that should be on the cutting edge of leadership education, training, and development have, alas, changed rather little in the last 20 to 30 years. So, we are stuck in a situation in which the pedagogy is behind the times, far behind. By the way, I suspect that one of the reasons why people are reluctant to tackle this, to take on leadership learning in a big way, is that it is complicated. It simply can't be done without a considerable investment of time and other resources. Moreover, to do it right would take a depth of understanding of the world in which we operate. For example, the levels of fractionalization in this country, the levels of unhappiness with the leadership class, the divisiveness, anger, and disappointment - all these are relevant to what we are talking about. Simply because the level of investment, as I have said, is so great that it is daunting, which means people are loathe to, or at least, reluctant to, address it. Moreover, there are always personal and professional politics involved. The academy, by the way, is hardly immune from the competitiveness and turf-consciousness to which I allude. They make real reform, genuine rethinking about something as fundamental as a leadership curriculum, difficult. Additionally, there are the professional organizations, which equally have not shown themselves equipped or inclined to

5 Padilla, A., Hogan, R., & Kaiser, R. (2007). The toxic triangle: Destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 18(3), 176-194.

take on the issues to which I refer in any meaningful, in any impactful, way. So far any way, they too have lacked the dedication, seriousness, and clarity of purpose that in my view would be necessary to create meaningful change.

Lindsay: From a practitioner or consulting standpoint, when you look at the fact that over \$40+ Billion dollars is spent annually on leader development just within the United States, there is money that people spend but it seems as if it is doled out to various programs to check a box so that it can be said that something is being done regarding development. So, the money is out there, but it seems as if it is being done in a more tactical way instead of what you are suggesting in a more strategic way.

Kellerman: I think that is a good way of putting it. I think that distinction between tactics and strategy is a good one and it frames what I am getting at. Tactics are short term solutions, whereas in this case certainly strategy generally implies a long-term perspective, in this case trying to figure out how to get from where we are now, at point A, to where I would want us to go, point B. Point B is taking leadership learning seriously and professionalizing it accordingly.

Lindsay: That might explain why we see a shortage of valid leader assessment and why we see simplistic approaches to assessment like the reaction criteria of, “How did you like the program?”

Kellerman: Exactly. I did want to go back though and say a bit more about professional associations. Look at the professions and the way they developed over time – all of which was tied to the notion of professionalism – and you will see the role played by professional associations such as, in the United States, the American Medical Association and the American Bar Association. These professional associations then furthered the idea that medicine and law respectively,

were professions to be taken seriously. That’s how, over time, standards were set not only for education, but also for credentialing and licensing. That’s why in this day and age it generally no longer suffices simply get your MD and then to be an intern and resident. Now you are generally expected also to continue your education lifelong. Understandably, because you can’t be credentialled as a surgeon in 2019 without knowing full well that five or 10 years from now, surgery, the science of surgery, the techniques of surgery, will be very different. So, you are expected to engage in educational experiences lifelong. Or, at least as long as you practice your profession.

It should be the same with leaders. Ideally, there should be a professional association for leaders that takes some of this on fully and responsibly. That, among other things, fosters conversations about licensing and credentialing leaders and, to use your word, about assessing leaders. The lack of a professional association and the inability of leadership experts to collaborate even to a moderately sufficient degree, whether it be academics, practitioners, coaches or consultants, has been a severe liability for those of us who have an interest not only in furthering the field, but in growing better leaders.

Lindsay: With the idea of a professional organization that could start to sort out some of those standards, requirements, and lifelong learning, where could that start? If we notice that there is a gap, and we see other professional organizations making progress in understanding their profession and moving it forward, what would be the first steps in making that happen?

Kellerman: I’ve been involved in this to some degree. Less so in recent years, but some time back I was very involved in just the question that you are raising. I ultimately found that the politics and personalities were just not conducive to doing the work. In the intervening years, it is not my experience that any single organization is currently suited or constituted to

do the necessary heavy lifting. It is not that there are no organizations out there that are doing some good work. That is not what I am saying. Rather it is that the work that would be required to raise the standards of leadership education, development, and training is extensive – and none of these organizations as they are now led and constituted, is in my view properly equipped, however equipped is defined, to undertake the task. By the way, I have written about the different

somewhat frustrated by the lack of progress. Moreover, I suspect that if, magically, he reappeared on the scene, he would not exactly be heartened by what he saw.

Lindsay: With all of this information that we have talked about, what advice would you have for new leaders in terms of what they should be thinking about or work on as they begin their professions?

Getting a leadership education is one process, being trained as a leader is another process, and being developed as a leader is a third process.

verbs that are used in this general regard - education, training, and development. They are all important, but they are not one and the same. Though they generally are used interchangeably, even synonymously, they refer to very different things. Getting a leadership education is one process, being trained as a leader is another process, and being developed as a leader is a third process. These processes are all important – it does each a disservice to not clearly and consistently distinguish among them.

Lindsay: Unfortunately, it sounds like until we start to think about what that looks like, we will be stuck in this cycle of the introduction of new theories and new programs without much progress on moving forward as a profession.

Kellerman: One of the leading lights behind leadership studies as contemporaneously conceived was James MacGregor Burns. He was not only an eminent scholar, he was also an activist. Among his various endeavors, he tried mightily in the 1970s and '80s to do some of the work that we're now talking about – including becoming involved with some of the organizations dedicated to these issues. He has since passed away but as the years went on he became

Kellerman: To young people I would say first say get yourself a good liberal arts education – and only then move on to leadership education and training in the area within which you intend to locate yourself. To more mature

leaders, or would-be leaders, I would say don't just think in terms of your own personal and professional self, think also outside the box, outside your box. Think about leadership as a system – which means thinking in addition to yourself thinking about everyone else, and about the various, multiple, contexts within which all of you are situated.

Lindsay: So, what is next on the horizon for you?

Kellerman: I am co-authoring a book titled, *Leaders Who Lust: Power, Money, Sex, Success, Legitimacy, and Legacy*. It will be published by Cambridge University Press during the first half of 2020.

A Life Long Process

David Day, Claremont McKenna College

Interviewed By: Douglas Lindsay

Lindsay: How are we doing, in general, with respect to developing leaders today?

Day: It depends on who you talk to. We know the level or rate of leader derailment hasn't really changed that much over the last few decades. If you look at that evidence, it seems to suggest that we haven't made a lot of progress in terms of preparing leaders for the challenges of the times. But, it may be that we are just running behind the change that is happening and the challenges. One hypothesis is that we are doing a lousy job of developing leaders and that has been static. Another hypothesis is that we have actually gotten better at developing leaders but the challenges are more complex at an increasingly rapid pace. Put another way, our development hasn't kept up with the rapidly changing world and the challenges therein. If you look at that as evidence, it is a little disheartening but it is a complex world and it is not getting any simpler.

Lindsay: Could you elaborate on some of those challenges that you see in the leadership landscape today and into the future?

Day: It is the notion of the interconnectedness of things...the interdependencies. No matter what domain you are in, you need to think about things globally, not locally or even regionally. I think that is becoming more prevalent and more prevalent at lower levels in organizations. That is one particular challenge, this idea of leading across the world, across different cultures and languages but there are also the related challenges of trying to diagnose and intervene on issues that have so many interconnected causes. This is one reason why the field is beginning to acknowledge the importance of things like shared leadership or what I call collective leadership capacity, which is

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moving beyond what any one leader can do to solve the challenges of our time. Working with others to try to address what seem to be intractable problems is much more likely to provide new insights and solutions to these challenges.

Lindsay: It seems, though, like we still have a very individualistic approach to leadership when you look at the different theories that are popular today like authentic and transformational leadership that focus on the leader. However, what it seems like you are talking about is that the interconnectedness of the world is forcing us to look at what Barbara Kellerman talks about as leadership as a system with the leader, follower, and the context. Are we misaligned by focusing too much on the individual?

Day: It's not an either-or, but an and-both. We need to continue to invest in developing individuals as leaders but we also need to work on ways of connecting them into systems of leadership. There is recent work being done on network approaches to leadership and I think that is interesting in terms of how we may be able to measure and model capacity for leadership in more sophisticated ways. There is also research and theory building being done on multiteam systems and the leadership involved in those which is a very complex operation. But, the world lags behind and people in the world still have a very leader centric, heroic, romanticized notion of what leadership is. As a crisis unfolds, I think it is human nature to look for a person who will save us from that crisis. How do we unlock that mindset of focusing on an individual leader to thinking more about how can people work together to create leadership? The classic saying is how can we develop people to be a leader even when they aren't the formal leader and work together with others to create a very deep and rich system of leadership?

Lindsay: You just mentioned some promising leadership that is happening. If we are lagging behind a bit and trying to make sense of this complex, ever

changing environment, are there gaps that you are noticing that we need more research in?

Day: I think a lot of leadership research is still very much measurement bound. You have a published measure that is purportedly about leadership and people will use it and claim that they have discovered something about leadership. I'm becoming increasingly skeptical that we can learn anything new from the application of either an old or new survey-based measurements of leadership. We know from the work back in the 1970s that people don't have unbiased perceptions of their leaders. It is influenced by a host of things, especially how successful we think the leader's group or organization has been. Yet, we still tend to approach leadership as what subordinates' perceptions of their supervisors means and the relationship to various outcomes. Specifically, performance, which is a very complex outcome that is causally determined by any number of things, is multiply predicted. To say that leadership is the sole cause of that is an oversimplification writ large.

Lindsay: What should leader development look like then? If you have an organization that is thinking about wanting to develop leaders, do you have any advice for them?

Day: One of the first places to start is to get rid of all of the bad practices that are out there. The non-evidence based fads and fashions that we tend to follow based on whatever the latest guru has written in a book that is purportedly the panacea for all of our leadership development. I have been reading some things in *Industrial & Organizational Psychology* from years ago and I came across a piece by Marv Dunnette in *The American Psychologist* from 1966 where the title of it is, *Fads, Fashions, and Folderol in Psychology*¹. The folderol, he defines as practices characterized by excessive ornamentation, nonsensical and unnecessary

1 Dunnette, M. (1966). Fads, fashions, and folderol in psychology. *American Psychologist*, 21(4), 343.

actions, trifles, and essentially useless and wasteful fiddle-faddle. I think where organizations should start is not by doing more, but by actually doing less of the fiddle-faddle. Cleaning the decks of fiddle-faddle is a great place to start followed by rethinking what are we really trying to do here? We are trying to develop capacity in individuals to lead better.

Now, I think it is an illusion to think that any organization can develop someone who doesn't want to be developed. You cannot make someone develop and yet we still seem to have this event based, episodic thinking that we will just send him or her to another program. Then, we will find another program to send them to and that these programs will develop this person into a better leader. One of the truisms behind the science of leader development is that

it is continuous and ongoing. People don't develop if they are comfortable. One of my favorite analogies that I like to spring on people these days has to do with the question of, what do you think is involved in developing as a leader? A number of people, and these range from emerging leaders in college to more senior leaders running complex functions or organizations, think that it is a trip to Disneyland. You get a ticket to the amusement park, you go on some rides, and you come out and say that was great and somehow you are changed. I don't think that is the right metaphor. I think the right metaphor is leader development as a gym membership. You have to go to the gym and you have to grunt, work, sweat, and challenge yourself if you are going to change yourself. We know from gym memberships, however, that many people buy them and the percentage that actually use them is low. It's pretty bad. But also the percentage of people that use gym membership appropriately is abysmal. You go to a gym and it's basically a socialization venue rather than a development venue. People are chatting and

strutting around and they might do a little something on an elliptical trainer for a few minutes and then are back to talking and wandering around. Do they really think they are going to change their aerobic capacity or anything about their muscle mass? No, you have to work hard at a gym if you are going to get yourself in shape. The same thing applies to leader development. You really have to think about it as a gym membership where the responsibility is on you to challenge yourself and find places where you can practice and become a better leader.

One of the truisms behind the science of leader development is that it is continuous and ongoing. People don't develop if they are comfortable.

Lindsay: You mentioned that people don't develop if they are comfortable. Could you talk a little bit more about that?

Day: It goes to one of the cornerstones about what we know about using experience for development. It needs to be a challenging experience. Something that gets you out of your comfort zone. Something that requires you to do things differently or try to do things differently. It is tied into learning and this is why performance is not the right outcome because we know that when people are trying to do things differently, we often see performance drop before we see an eventual improvement. Then, it becomes a question from a research standpoint of when do you measure this? How do you know if you captured the true trajectory of what is changing?

I think one of the things about human beings that is interesting is that we seem to be the only species that will approach rather than avoid this notion of

challenge or pain in the name of development. I can't think of another species that will do that. We are different in that regard. However, unless we do that we stop developing once our maturation growth cycles have finished in our late teens and early 20s. The developmental theorists like Piaget thought that once you hit your early 20s, you are done. We see some people who once they hit that time, they are done and don't really do anything that really challenges themselves. They watch a lot of television, may do their job which is routine, have fun, but it nothing that really changes their mindset, their worldviews, or their human capacities or potentialities. That said, some people do challenge themselves and they actively seek out these challenges whether they are the adventure seekers, so-called adrenaline junkies, or people who want to improve their capacity to influence and interact with people for a common goal. This brought along a change in developmental theory around what is called post-formal operations. This is the neo-Piagetian approach that says that people can continue to develop across the lifespan. It doesn't mean that they invariably will because it depends a lot of what they do in terms of experiences that they create to challenge themselves to create a capacity to do new and different things. It is the idea that it is on the individual. If you don't do that, then you really won't develop in any meaningful way beyond early adulthood.

Lindsay: It ties back to what you were talking about earlier about why performance is problematic as the sole outcome measure. If I am just attending to my performance or results, and I see that they are good or I receive some sort of feedback that it is good enough, then there really isn't an impetus to do more since the results are acceptable and the organization seems to be happy.

Day: That's right. It is the mindset of every challenge that you have faced in the past is going to be just like the ones that you face in the future. That's clearly

not the case. We know enough about job transitions, promotions, and derailment that people don't necessarily prepare themselves for what they are experiencing in a new role. It is the overreliance of what they overlearned in a previous role. The classic example is the engineer who is the best engineer in the department, who gets promoted to a leadership position who still wants to be the best engineer, and approaches every problem as if it was another engineering problem. They don't think of themselves as a leader but as an engineer.

That is why I think identity processes and leader identity processes in particular, are so important. We know, and this is a fact, that people will do things that they think are important for them. That means that they do things that are consistent with their identity. So, having a leader identity and helping someone internalize a leader identity is part and parcel to the leader development process because it is a basic resource allocation issue. We only have so many resources (with time being the most valuable of these resources) and we allocate them to things that are important to us, which are things that are tied to our identity. So, if you don't think of yourself as a leader, you are less likely to invest in trying to develop yourself as a leader. I've seen it with engineers, accountants, and people who have come up through technical specialties who have a difficult time letting go of that identity in order to internalize or enhance a different identity. It usually involves an entirely different set of skills around leadership.

Lindsay: How would you describe a leader identity?

Day: I have to say this with an asterisk because the identity literature has numerous different approaches to studying identity from a social identity, to a narrative identity, to a role identity, which is where I tend to come from. That is to what extent do you think being a leader is important to who you are? If you don't think that being a leader is important to who you are, then I

don't think you have a very strong internalized leader identity. If you think that being a leader is important to you, then you have a stronger leader identity and that will dictate how you spend your time and how you allocate your resources. If you are thinking about ongoing experience as the lifeblood of development, you are going to be more likely to invest the resources and find ways to challenge and develop yourself as a leader.

Lindsay: It is common to hear the terms leader development and leadership development used interchangeably. I know you have made distinctions between those two terms. Would you mind explaining the difference?

Day: It is trying to be clear about what your interventions are trying to accomplish. Most of what we call leadership development is really leader development. There isn't anything wrong with that, but we should be clear about the target of our developmental interventions: It is to develop someone's capacity to be a more effective leader. It doesn't necessarily mean that any leadership will be developed because leadership comes about through the social interactions in some shared workspace. In other words, what is developed is eventually applied to address experienced leadership challenges. The notion of leadership development really involves, in my mind, the notion of moving toward a collective capacity around leadership. The leadership is tied to the connections between people engaged in some shared work. This is why I like the whole network perspective on leadership that is emerging. So, leader development is really about investing in developing an individual's leadership capacity but it doesn't necessarily mean there will be better leadership because it is much more of a complex undertaking that has more moving parts. The

leadership development piece is more about developing the overall capacity in an intact system, like a team, to draw forth leadership when the challenges require it.

Another reason why I really strive for this clarification between leader development and leadership development is that if you confuse the two and you talk about leader development as leadership development then you think you have your problem solved. That you have developed some higher level of leadership in your organization but, in reality, you have just perpetuated this leader centric approach to leadership. This is especially the case in corporate organizations around high-potential programs. They say that they are going to invest in the top two percent of our thousands or hundreds of thousands of employees to be the next generations of leaders and that these special "high potential" leaders will solve all of the problems for us. That is the implicit message that is being sent. It perpetuates a very leader centric, heroic, and romanticized notion of what it means to lead in this century.

We know that people don't act in just one way. They act in a lot of different ways due to a lot of different reasons. Trying to then capture this dynamic changing notion of leader behaviors is a challenge for researchers.

Lindsay: With that distinction in mind, are there some promising lines of research or work that is being done around this idea of leader capacity?

Day: There are a number of points that are converging around dynamic leader behaviors. This is tied to changes from previous research which looked at leader behaviors as static entities that can be captured by subordinate ratings. We know that people don't act

in just one way. They act in a lot of different ways due to a lot of different reasons. Trying to then capture this dynamic changing notion of leader behaviors is a challenge for researchers. People are starting to adopt methods that are more dynamic and longitudinal, using different kinds of measurement procedures like event sampling to try to capture that. Now, will it lead to any new and different understanding of leadership? I actually think it will. I think where it can be especially helpful is in better understanding this notion of a leader's capacity to lead. If you think about it in terms of a volume metric, some leaders have greater volume with their leadership capacity than others. How do we measure that? I think one way is to see how they use different kinds of skills and competencies in different situations. It is a situational approach but it is also the idea of how can a leader concoct or create an effective approach to a challenge they have never experienced before using things that they cobbled together in the moment. I think that is where developmental capacity comes in.

Lindsay: The approach of examining leadership capacity is a helpful one because it gets away from the idea that some people have regarding innate aspects about leadership. To your point, some may have more overall capacity, but everyone can fill the capacity that they do have to be a better leader.

Day: Absolutely. Some people are born with more potential than others in many aspects like, sports, music, science, or even leadership. But we also know that there are a lot of people that are born with vast potential that do nothing with it. As a result, you have someone who could have been a contender who really didn't live up to their potential. We see it over and over again. We also see the converse of that. Someone who wasn't born with all of the raw gifts in terms of raw potential, but work really hard to develop what they do have and fly by the people who had the raw potential but didn't do anything with it.

Lindsay: Would you say that some of the difference between those who seemingly over achieve and those that don't live up to their potential is their ability to see themselves as a leader?

Day: I think so. It's the idea of wanting it. They want to develop as a leader because it is a part of who they are. Where does that come from? That is a darn good question. When does it start to emerge? That's another good question. I think these questions point to the notion that we need to have more of a lifespan perspective on leader development. Not just at the older adult end of the continuum, but more at the early childhood end as well.

Lindsay: So, the ability to expose people to this idea of leadership as an identity to help them see this as part of what the normal maturation process is as a leader?

Day: Absolutely. In a 2015 paper that I did with Lisa Dragoni², we talked about this notion of proximal versus distal outcomes of development. People haven't really thought about time in leader development in any kind of rigorous or systematic way. Ours was a bit of a crude start at that, but if you think about proximal indicators of leader development, we organized them into two categories. One set of categories is around the knowledge, skill, and abilities (KSAs) and leadership competencies that people can learn. There are things that people can learn in a relatively short amount of time like influence. We know from Robert Cialdini's work that there are certain principles of persuasion that people can learn and become better negotiators and influencers. That is part of being a good leader. The other category of proximal indicators of leader development is self-views. Identity is one of those self-views along with self-awareness or understanding where your tendencies are and where your blind spots might be. The whole notion of self-efficacy is having

2 Day, D., & Dragoni, L. (2015). Leadership development: An outcome-oriented review based on time and levels of analysis. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 2(1), 133-156.

confidence that you can develop as a leader and ultimately be effective as a leader. These things you can work on as part of a leader development system and find relatively strong change in a fairly short amount of time. Now, whether it is weeks or months, remains to be seen and still needs to be documented in the literature. But it is still more proximal than things that are much deeper and fundamental to a person that get at their fundamental operating system. What are their core values and core world views?

Lindsay: So, we need to not just think proximally, but start to change people's mental models to get to some of the more distal things.

Day: What is tied into an individual's capacity as a leader is also tied into their complexity of self. The complexity of self is tied into things that are part of constructive developmental theory or post-formal operations in adults. It is really moving from how you see the world in relatively simplistic ways, which we all do when we are younger, to thinking about them in increasingly more complex and interconnected ways. Some researchers talk about requisite complexity. This construct has been around for a long time yet it remains very difficult to quantify. The thinking is that we need leaders whose complexity of world view matches or exceeds the complexity of those leadership challenges in the world that are faced. The research that has been done in this area has shown that the complexity of our leaders in terms of adult development metrics is well below the complexity of the world challenges. So, that may be one of the reasons why we continue to experience high levels of leader derailment and problems in moving certain world problems toward a solution. It is that the complexity of thinking of the people in the positions of leadership that should be doing something about that are ill-equipped to deal with the underlying complexity in the world.

Lindsay: Is that something that you would advocate for in starting earlier in the education system? Is that a larger issue with our educational system of not introducing that complexity early on?

Day: It is endemic in our educational systems. I once had a conversation with a former provost at a major university. He said, "You know Dr. Day, the world has problems, and universities have departments." So, how do we go about in higher education in helping people to develop multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary thinking? The reality is that it is difficult to do in our current university tenure and promotion systems. You have to publish in your discipline, create a reputation in your discipline, and get evaluated by people in your discipline who have a specialized set of academic skills if you are going to keep your job. That just reinforces the notion of staying in your lane. We need people who are working across all kinds of different lanes because the real problems anymore aren't in any one lane.

We need people who are working across all kinds of different lanes because the real problems anymore aren't in any one lane.

Lindsay: Could that be why people have narrow identities if they are used to being in just one lane.

Day: Sure. You see it in every organization. You go to a corporate organization and you talk to the marketing people and everything is a marketing problem. If you talk to someone in operations and everything is an operation problem. These are the functional blinders that we put on when we become experts in a particular area.

Lindsay: With all of this in mind, when you look at the next five to 10 years of leadership scholarship and

development are you optimistic, pessimistic, or waiting to see?

Day: I'm optimistic about this. When I first got into this area of leader development, there wasn't really anything there. There was no theory or rigorous research and a lot of people thought there wouldn't ever be. That it was basically a space that was owned by practitioners and would always be owned by practitioners. We have seen a change in that and we see more top tier journals in management and applied psychology publishing research on leader and leadership development. There are younger scholars who have taken on this mantle of working with something that has historically been the purveyance of practitioners to try to develop some theoretically grounded and evidence-based insight into how people develop as leaders. That I find very encouraging.

Lindsay: Do you see consultants and practitioners starting to take notice of that?

Day: On one hand, I think there is more attention being paid to evidence-based practices of all kinds. I think that is a good thing. But, I am also very cynical to how some consultancies operate. It sometimes is less about solving the problem as it is about continuing the problem and billing accordingly. This is coupled with the tendency for many consulting companies come at problems with their own proprietary tools. As a result, every problem can be solved only with that proprietary set of tools. It is a version of the functional blinders that we talked about a few minutes ago. Whether or not it is the appropriate tool to use or the most evidence-based practice, that tool tends to be taken out of the tool box because it is tied to the treasure chest of the consultancies.

Lindsay: It reminds me of the old saying, of when all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

We also can see it sometimes with therapy when it sometimes seems like therapy continues on forever, regardless of whether the problem is ever solved or not.

Day: Have you ever heard of a psychotherapist tell a client that they are done? I haven't. Some could say, look Day, it's a lifelong endeavor and maybe these problems are lifelong things that you need to work through. Still, I've never heard a psychotherapist say that they are finished. You are cured.

Lindsay: One final question for you. In thinking about leader identity and the notion of lifelong development, what advice would you have for young leaders to keep in mind as they start on their journey?

Day: Start as soon as possible. There is a tendency of students to focus on the technical skills that they want. Make some space to start developing yourself as a leader of others. Start as soon as possible and don't think that you need to wait until you are mid-career to do it because you will be way behind if that happens. The other thing is to take ownership of it. Don't expect someone to develop you because it is never going to happen. It can't happen. Nobody can make you develop. You need to challenge yourself to develop. The third thing is we know there are evidence-based tools and practices out there that are free for anyone to use but you need the discipline to implement them and to practice them. Two key ones are feedback and self-reflection. The notion of not just taking on experiences but also capturing the learning from those experiences through self-reflection is really important. You also need to think about how to build a feedback intensive environment around yourself where you not only can give feedback freely to people in ways that they can accept and develop, but also how you can solicit feedback from others that can be part of your assessment data as well as support system going forward as a developing leader.

Lindsay: That is great advice. Any final thoughts?

Day: A final thing would be that it is a journey and you can't expect it to be completed in a few weeks or even a few years. It really is a lifelong process. One of the things that you learn is that you might be a pretty good leader now, a 7 or 8 out of a 10-point scale and you think you don't need to work on it because you have it all pretty much figured out. But we know, the farther you go and the higher up you advance in any organization, the challenges get more wicked and complex and you learn that it isn't out of 10 anymore, but out of 100 or 1,000. You don't want to be stuck at seven. By the way, this doesn't just happen to junior leaders but happens to mid and senior level leaders as well.

Lindsay: It really is an investment mentality for the future.

Day: I like that. It makes sense. Thank you for the opportunity to share some thoughts.

BUSINESS

Leading With Purpose: Understanding That Values Matter

Howard Behar, Former President of Starbucks North America and Starbucks International

Interviewed By: Josh Armstrong, Ph.D.

Armstrong: Could you please share your story of working at Starbucks and becoming the President of Starbucks North America.

Behar: I had a long history of consumer goods and retail; almost since I was thirteen years old I had been working around it. Over the years, I worked in different retails, primarily in the home furnishings industry. I had been President of a land development company in Seattle that got in trouble and had to sell. I was trying to figure out what I was going to do with my life and I met this young guy named Howard Schultz, who was the CEO of this tiny little coffee company called Starbucks, which I knew quite well because I had been a customer for seventeen years, buying mail order, etc. So, over a journey of about a year's time we got together, he invited me to join Starbucks, I accepted the invitation and I never looked back. I was there 21 years where we built it from 28 stores to around the globe and it was a wonderful experience.

Howard Behar is former President of Starbucks Coffee International. For 21 years, Behar led Starbucks's domestic business as President of North America, and he became the founding President of Starbucks International opening the very first store outside of North America in Japan. During his tenure, he participated in the growth of the company from only 28 stores to over 15,000 stores spanning five continents. Howard now serves on the boards of several for-profit and non-profit organizations, including Education Element, iD Tech, The School of Leadership Studies at Gonzaga University. After the successful publication of his books, *It's Not About the Coffee: Lessons on Leadership from a Life at Starbucks* and *The Magic Cup: A Parable about A Leader, A Team and the Power of Putting People and Values First*, Howard now travels the world speaking to leaders, corporations, and students.

Armstrong: You were instrumental in developing Starbucks' vision to be one of the most well-known and respected organizations in the world and known "for nurturing and inspiring the human spirit." Can you tell us about cultivating that vision and how you keep a company connected to this culture through great growth?

Behar: By the time I got to Starbucks, I was in my mid-40s and I was pretty well formed in terms of what I believed in leadership. I had also been a student of Robert Greenleaf¹ and servant leadership for, at that time, almost 20 years. That's what I brought to Starbucks, this idea that we weren't in the coffee business, serving people, but we were in the *people business serving coffee*. That became the battle cry for the company. That little saying kept us focused on what we were really about, which was people. That formed the nucleus of the company and everything that we talked about outside of coffee was about people – about growing our people, how we treated our people, what kind of organization that we wanted to have, so that was a driving force for us from the very beginning. If you were at Starbucks, this was a philosophy that you had to subscribe to. If you were a leader at Starbucks and you just couldn't sign on to that, then you really just didn't have a place there, and we had mechanisms in place to sort that out to make sure we had the right people, in the right jobs, at the right time.

Armstrong: What role did character have on your leadership style and organizational success?

Behar: Well, character is everything. Character to me is a culmination of all your values. It's everything that you stand for and it's been a driving force for me. So, I have my own personal mission statement and my own

core values that I try to live by. That's what we did at Starbucks. We had an organizational character and we had our values and our mission statement, which you talked about, being "known for nurturing and valuing the human spirit." That was the forcing drive for us and so character was everything at Starbucks. It was how we lived our values. It primarily was around this idea how we treated each other, how we treated ourselves, because you have to respect yourself and what you stand for. It wasn't like we did everything right all the time, because we didn't and we made mistakes along the way. But we had these mechanisms along the way to help us get back on track.

Armstrong: You write about being true to yourself and your values. How did you discover this sense of self and your core values?

...Character is everything. Character to me is a culmination of all your values. It's everything that you stand for ...

Behar: Well, that came because of a crisis that I went through in my own personal life. I was working for a company called GranTree Furniture Rental, which was headquartered in Portland, Oregon. I had been promoted to Vice President, which I never thought I would get that opportunity because I don't have a college degree. But I got the opportunity, they threw parties for me, and it was an exciting time for me.

But one day, I was standing by the elevator and the CEO came up to me, and he put out his hand. He says, "I know I'm not the first to congratulate you, but I want to extend my congratulations on a well-deserved promotion." Then he said that little three letter word, BUT. "But there's something I'd like to talk to you about." His name was Walker. I said, "Yes, Walker.

¹ Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership. www.greenleaf.org

What is it?" He said, "One of the things I've noticed about you, Howard, is you always wear your heart on your sleeve. Everybody knows what you're feeling. If you want to be a great executive, that's probably not something you want to practice or something you want to do." He went on to say, "The other thing I've noticed about you is you're always willing to express your opinion. When asked a question or in a meeting, you're always willing to do that. Great executives kind of hold their cards close to their vest and want to act as if they're really thoughtful about things and maybe say something like, 'Let me think about it for a day or two, and I'll get back to you.'"

Well, I wasn't either one of those things. My emotions were right out there, and if somebody asked me a question or I was in a meeting, they would get what I was feeling. I would say what I was thinking. I didn't hold it back. So, I went through a long struggle, about a 3- or 4-month struggle about what was I going

my journey of trying to figure out who I was. I did that through identifying my eight to 10 core values, writing my personal mission statement, and then writing out what I call my six P's about how I wanted to live my life. That began the journey. Then Robert Greenleaf and servant leadership played a role in that because that is something I really identified with and with those ideas. I just never had the language for it. So that's really how it started and I've been working on it ever since. I'm 75-years old, and I'm still working on it.

Armstrong: You mentioned your "six P's." Can you tell us about them and how they inform your leadership?

Behar: Well the first P is purpose. Everything in my life has to have a purpose greater than myself... something better than myself. Second, if it's worth having a purpose better than yourself, you darn well better be passionate about it. I need to always bring passion to my work and values. The third P is persistence. We know what it takes to live a life and to accomplish the goals we have for ourselves, but you have to be persistent or you won't get it done. Life puts up road blocks, others put up road blocks, we put up our own

road blocks, and we need to work through them, so persistence matters. The fourth P is patience, which is something that I haven't been too good at. It has taken me a long time to learn patience. I have a type-A personality and only recently have I learned patience. The fifth P is performance. Performance counts. None of us want to be evaluated and we hate performance reviews, but performance counts in life. Performance counts in interpersonal relationships. When you make a commitment to another human being, to a significant other or spouse, to do the tough work through that relationship, that's performance. Performance counts at your work. When you make a commitment to your organization and to the people that you work with,

Performance counts. None of us want to be evaluated and we hate performance reviews, but performance counts in life.

to do. I went from a guy that loved his work to someone that hated his work in a very short period of time and I finally decided I was going to leave the organization. And at the end of the day, I didn't because of a coworker that talked me out of it.

But after living through that, I decided that the problem was when Walker said to me, "You've got to change who you are," it wasn't like he was telling me to change the color of my slacks. He was trying to change *me*, and I had never thought about who I was up to that point in time. I was just Howard being Howard. So, I decided I was never going to let that happen again and I was going to figure out *who* Howard was. That began

you have to live up to those commitments or let people know why you are not. Now, do we always get things done that we say we are going to do? No, we don't but performance counts in life and it's a difficult thing to explain, particularly to young leaders. It does matter. The final P, and the most important P, is people. All the other P's are about serving people, at the end of the day, and that's what we are here to do.

Armstrong: You have discussed before the idea of "leading with one hat." Could you explain what you mean about that?

Behar: Leading with one hat has to do with this idea that you have to be who you are. I call it, "Wear one hat. Wear your hat." That usually means—like my wife says, "Yeah. You can have one hat, but I could have 30 hats because I got to do this, I got to do that." I'm not talking about the roles that we play. I'm talking about who we are. The hat that we wear that defines who we are as a human being. And that has to do with identifying your core values and then living to those core values. So that, for me, was the key for my life, and I still live by them. I wrote them down. I had them on a piece of paper I carried with me. I carried them with me for 40 years. I've changed a few things from time to time, but they are really important to me.

Armstrong: Can you tell us a story about when those values were tested or when you called them into question?

Behar: Well, they've always been tested because in organizations or in life, there's always somebody that's pushing you to do something that's against those values. It's in different places all the time, but that's really what happens. One of my core values is honesty, and there are people that will push you to be dishonest. Maybe not in an extraordinary way, but there'll be people that'll push you to be dishonest. And it would be easy to cheat on a number, or when somebody asks you a question,

not tell them the truth, kind of white lies or whatever it happens to be. So you are always being tested.

There's been times when I've been tested myself, as honesty is a core value of mine. I remember when I was in my mid-60s, I was on the Board of the University of Washington Foundation, and I'd buy these parking passes, 10 for \$100. They would allow me to park anywhere on the campus that I wanted to park. You had to sign in pen the date that you were there and put it on your dashboard so you couldn't use them again. Well, one day I didn't have a pen. All I had was a pencil. So I used the pencil, and I made it really dark so people could see it and it looked like a pen. But the next day, I was going to be there for another meeting and there was a little voice -- one of my "Board of Directors that sits on my shoulder" said to me, "Hey, Howard. You give them lots of money. You could use that parking pass again." It was a quick conversation. It was about three seconds. But it was testing me. Was my core value really honesty? Then, another of my Board Members said, "Hey, Howard. Your core value's honesty," and I ripped it up and threw it away. So it's always going on in our lives. We're always testing ourselves, and other people are always testing us. But it's being clear about what those values are and then trying to live by them.

Armstrong: You mentioned earlier about servant leadership. Do you believe this philosophy can be effective in all settings?

Behar: Yes. Absolutely. Servant leadership is applicable to everywhere. Servant leadership is in families. Right? How you treat your significant others. How you treat your spouse. How you treat your kids. It's the understanding that we're here to serve others. Well, we're here to serve our family and our kids need to understand that they're here to serve too, and what all that means. In organizations it's the same way. Being a boss, or being a CEO, your primary role is to help other people get what they want out of their lives

through the journey of them helping the organization get what it needs. But it's a two-way street. First comes your commitment to serve your people. You can't expect your people to serve the organization if you're not willing to serve them first. So, absolutely, it is everywhere. And you just have to make a commitment to it and understand that it's not just in business, it's in nonprofits, it's in families, it's anywhere.

Armstrong: We seem to see a lot of leadership failure now. Do you think it's gotten worse over time, or has it just always been there and we're better at recognizing it now?

...Look for what they do. It's that simple. Don't just tell me. Do. Because a lot of people will espouse great leadership. But in action, they don't. They don't live it. At the end of the day, it's about what you do and not what you say.

Behar: I think that failures in leadership have been there forever. I actually think it's getting better in the sense that we are becoming more aware today of what good leadership looks like. We are certainly paying this price right now with the kind of leadership that we have nationally and the people in our Congress that don't seem to understand what leadership really is all about. They think it's about policy. They think it's about getting their way. It's not about those things, right? It's about serving others and the growth of the people in the country and then the people in the country help to serve the country. I remember that saying by John Kennedy, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country." I mean, there's the prime example of servant leadership.

Armstrong: From a leadership development standpoint, what advice do you have for new leaders

regarding learning about leading organizations and themselves?

Behar: Read, read, read. Get every book you can on leadership and on leaders. Biographies, autobiographies, and try to find the ones that align with what your values are. You can read the other ones too, the ones that aren't so that you understand what all that means, what the conflict is going to be, because there will be those conflicts. You may work for an organization where you're totally out of alignment with the person who's leading the organization or your boss, for example. How are you going to deal with that, and how are you going to stay true to your values when

you're living and working in that kind of situation? I believe in reading and studying and finding examples of how you want to be and then copying those things until they become you.

You can choose who you want to work for. We are not victims. Now, you may be working in a company and all of a sudden, your boss changes.

If it's not working for you, get out of there. Find a different boss or get to a different organization if you can. But don't sell yourself down the river. Stay true to who you are and read, read, read, and pay attention to what's going on. Learn from all people, people that you disagree with their leadership style and, particularly, the people that you agree with their leadership.

Armstrong: How can you assess a leader's character? What do you look for?

Behar: I look for what they do. It's that simple. Don't just tell me. Do. Because a lot of people will espouse great leadership. But in action, they don't. They don't live it. At the end of the day, it's about what you do and not what you say. Also, I think the biggest thing is holding yourself accountable, right? That's why you have to write these values down. If you don't write them

down, you're not committed. But you also have to pull them out and review them...all the time. And I do. I look at them all the time. Even after 40 years, I'm looking at them. I go home at night, before I go to bed and I ask myself a question. I look in the mirror and I say, "How did I do today?" Not, "Did I make more money today?" But how did I do living up to my values? There are days when I do a great job and days when I don't do a great job. You've got to forgive yourself when you don't do a great job and don't get caught up in yourself when you do a good job. So I think it's making sure that you hold yourself accountable because performance matters in our lives.

Armstrong: What did you do at Starbucks to try to build a system that would help assess people's leadership development?

Behar: Well, first of all, we had great leadership development programs. We did that. But primarily, it was how leadership at Starbucks performed. So the three leaders, Orin Smith, Howard Schultz, and myself, decided right from the very beginning that we were going to be able to walk down the hallway, look everybody in the face, and everybody would know we were all in it together. We had no company cars. We had no boats. At the time, we had no airplanes. Everybody had the same healthcare, from the part-time worker to the CEO. Everybody got equity in the company. So, we tried to live our values and, most importantly, how we treated each other with respect and dignity not putting people down and not blaming people. Now, were we perfect? No, we were not. We made lots of mistakes. We didn't always live up to it. But we had mechanisms in place. We had one mechanism called mission review and it was a little card that went in the paycheck. People could write on the card any comment about how we lived up to our mission statement or not lived up to our mission statement, and why they thought that way. From the time we got the card, we'd have 72 hours to respond if they wanted a response. So it was a

mechanism that helped us live up to what people felt we had committed to.

Armstrong: What do you believe is Starbucks' greatest impact on our culture?

Behar: I think a place for people to go and sit without having to buy anything, having a cup of coffee, reading a newspaper, or having a conversation with somebody else. It could be political, romantic, or whatever it happens to be. But I think our greatest contribution has been that it's this idea that there was this egalitarian place, whether you're a police officer, a college student, CEO of an organization, a husband or wife, or whatever it happened to be, you could go there and sit. And it wasn't if you bought a cup of coffee—some people would say we were expensive, but I'd say we are a great value for what we give. But I think that's been the key.

I think a commitment to our product... a commitment to the quality of our product. Not everybody likes our coffee. But I think everybody appreciates that we had a commitment to the quality. But most of all, we had a commitment to people, not only the people that work in the organization but the people we serve, the people we call customers.

Armstrong: What's the most meaningful conversation you've had over a cup of Starbucks coffee?

Behar: Oh, God. That's a hard question. Probably with my wife. We were struggling with our marriage at one time, and we had to work our way through it. She's a Pepsi drinker, so I was drinking my coffee while she was drinking her Pepsi. It was that conversation, and how we were going to...how we were going to work ourselves back together again.

Armstrong: What do you tell leaders who are looking for mentors and how they can learn from them?

Behar: Well, number one, recognize that mentors come in all shapes and sizes. A mentor doesn't have to be somebody that you report to or somebody that's senior to you or older than you. Mentors can be a lot younger than you. They could be one of your students, for example. Mentors don't need to be in your industry or where you are. They can come from all sorts of places. So, a teacher could be a mentor. Look for mentors everywhere. Also, you can look for mentors that are in your line of work. That can help you too. But be open to anybody being a mentor, and try to be thoughtful about what you want from that mentor and what you want that mentor to help you with because not everybody is good at everything. I was good at some things but not good at other things. I was really good at the servant leadership idea and creating your own hat idea and I drove that. But I wasn't necessarily a good mentor for an engineer trying to figure out how to get ahead in engineering because I didn't know engineering. So find people that are specific, and have lots of mentors in your life. They don't need to be forever. Sometimes, a mentor might be in your life for six months or even three months. Sometimes, your mentor might be in your life forever. I have a mentor that's been in my life for over 40 years and he's still a mentor and still part

of my life. Your kids can be mentors. Your wife can be a mentor. You just have to open yourself up. There are no rules.

Armstrong: What's a legacy that you're proud of now, looking back?

Behar: Well, probably, the most important thing that I have done is to help other people. The legacies that I look back at are the people that have moved on, left Starbucks, and gone on to run their own companies. They have taken the values of Starbucks with them... taken the idea of servant leadership with them and the idea of values-based leadership with them, and created them in their own organizations. Particularly, the women in the organization of Starbucks that have gone on. We had lots of them that have become CEOs of their own companies. So, those things are, to me, the most important thing. Finally, leaving behind at Starbucks this idea that we weren't in the coffee business serving people, but we were in the people business serving coffee. That's still alive and well at Starbucks.

CONSULTING

Making A Difference

David Altman, Center for Creative Leadership

Interviewed By: Douglas Lindsay

Lindsay: Would you mind sharing a bit about your professional journey, lessons along the way, and how you came to be at the Center for Creative Leadership?

Altman: For the first part of my career, I was in public health. I have a Ph.D. in social ecology from the University of California – Irvine. Then, I did a post-doc in cardiovascular disease prevention and epidemiology at Stanford. I worked at Stanford in a multidisciplinary center that focused on disease prevention and health promotion. Then, due to family considerations, I left Stanford after 10 years to move to Wake Forest University where I eventually became a Department Chair and tenured Full Professor of Public Health Sciences. I loved my career in public health. It was all about studying and intervening on health-related behaviors at the community level including topics such as tobacco, alcohol, violence and physical activity. I love multidisciplinary environments and I am kind of eclectic in my disciplinary background. I love working at the intersection of theory and practice.

Then, I got into a fellowship sponsored by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation which was a 3 year leadership program (the so-called Kellogg Fellows program). I still worked full time at Wake Forest, but got released for part of my time to travel the world and explore leadership, put myself through extreme conditions, and as part of that, I took a couple of classes at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL). Even though I was living in Greensboro, NC at the time and knew some people at CCL, I hadn't experienced the organization directly. I was quite intrigued by the couple of classes that I took. Long story short, I was going about my career in public health and then somebody who worked at CCL contacted me and said there was a VP job of research and innovation that was opening up that

Dr. David Altman is the Chief Operating Officer for the Center for Creative Leadership. He earned his B.A. in psychology from the University of California Santa Barbara and his M.A. and Ph.D. in social ecology from the University of California at Irvine. Prior to joining the Center for Creative Leadership, he had an extensive background in the field of public health where he worked at medical centers at Stanford University and Wake Forest University in addition to numerous national level programs. He is a Fellow of three divisions in the American Psychological Association and of the Society of Behavioral Medicine.

I might want to consider. I thought they were crazy. I'm a public health guy and didn't really know anything about leadership. I hadn't published a single article on leadership.

But I decided, maybe the fire in my belly wasn't burning as bright as it once did and even more than that, as much as I love public health and still do work in that area, leadership affects all aspects of society and I was always about evaluating how I could make a bigger difference in the world. Every problem that we face in the world, and every solution to those problems has at its core, effective leadership or ineffective leadership. I thought that I could continue pursuing public health while also getting involved in other domains of society. I came to believe that my impact on the world could be even greater if I got the position at CCL. And wouldn't you know it, they decided to go with the outside candidate, and I was offered the VP job.

However, I then had the existential crisis of figuring out if I should leave a 20+ year career in public health that I loved, with great colleagues, and with lots of grant money to go to CCL. That was 15 years ago. My hunch was true that leadership is so central to making the world a better place and there are such needs and opportunities that exist out there that I am inspired by the work that we do. Every day I wake up and look forward to coming into the office to make ourselves, clients, and stakeholders even more effective. And, fortunately, at CCL, I continue to be able to work at the intersection between public health and leadership.

Lindsay: That's great to be in a position where you look forward to coming to work and making a difference. I think it is rare today to find people who enjoy what they do.

Altman: I think it is. The reality is that I felt that way at Stanford and Wake Forest. Part of it is my personality, part of it is luck and good choices I made about where I worked and the people with whom

I work. And partly it is that I am in public health and leadership and how can you not be motivated by improving the health of people and making the world a better place through helping people become better leaders and organizations and communities build more effective leadership capacity? If that is not inspiring, then I need to go find something else to do!

Lindsay: Your point about being multidisciplinary and being at the intersection of theory and practice resonates with me as that is what drew me into the field of leadership. With a background in Industrial/Organizational Psychology, I initially approached things from an organizational standpoint focused on aspects like selection, assessment, and training which gives a process focused perspective on organizational issues. Leadership incorporates the human dimension which is foundational to organizational process and that hooked me.

Altman: Don't take this personally but let me make a comment on that. I am surrounded by extremely capable Industrial/Organizational Psychologists at CCL and I am familiar with and use principles of psychology in my job. I think one of the challenges in leadership development is that it is dominated by psychologists and most of the psychologists are individually oriented. The field is less focused on higher levels of analysis (e.g., organizational, community, society). We need economists, mathematicians, political scientists, gamers, information sciences and experts in other fields putting their hand in the field of leadership development and asking different questions and using different methods in order to advance the kind of work that we are doing. Context matters and social norms affect what individuals do. So, to look at the interplay and different levels of analysis will advance the type of work that we do not only theoretically and conceptually but also practically.

Lindsay: That's a great point and brings up a question I wanted to ask. I think there is a segment

of consultancies out there that take a much different view than what you just talked about. It is much more about the tools, techniques, and proprietary measures. One of the things that has intrigued me about CCL, and why I became an executive coach for CCL, is that it is theoretically grounded and evidence based for the majority of what you do. It isn't just about the tool or technique per se. It is based in science, in behavior, and what we know about people. Could you talk a little bit about that? How do the ideas of research, theory, and application play itself out in the CCL model?

Altman: I appreciate what you just said as many people don't understand that. We really do aspire to be evidence-based, both in research as well as the experiential work that we do. We are a 501(c)(3) in the U.S. (i.e., we are a nonprofit educational institution). When we were established in 1970, we were basically a think tank. The family foundation that underwrote the initial funding of CCL hired 10 psychologists and said go study creative leadership and cross-country thinking. At the beginning, CCL was focused on studying and not on doing. There wasn't a formal field of leadership development at that point.

We have retained that approach. We have intellectual curiosity and we are always looking to better understand with is happening with leaders and in leadership collectives and we use those data and insights to inform the kinds of solutions that we put in front of our clients around the world. A core message around our branding right now is, "Results That Matter." We are focused on results with practical application which is why we are global. We are not just focused on serving the needs of big organizations that pay high dollars. We aspire to have more scalability. We work with young kids and with underserved

populations on the continent of Africa and in Southeast Asia. We do a lot of work with Habitat with Humanity and with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) out of Switzerland. One person, who has a military background and works for us, says that we are a think tank with a delivery arm. Which I think captures much of our overarching focus. We also have a strong social mission to make the world a better place through better leaders and better leadership.

Our focus is not about putting gurus in front of clients or coming up the next best 2x2 model to wow people. It is about making a true difference in the world. If we help our clients, who come from all walks of life, achieve their goals then we are going to

Context matters and social norms affect what individuals do. So, to look at the interplay and different levels of analysis will advance the type of work that we do not only theoretically and conceptually but also practically.

benefit society worldwide. Those are key words in our mission. To increase the understanding, practice, and development of leadership for the benefit of society worldwide. We are all about making the world a better place. That looms so large for the people that work at CCL. You are a coach, and you know that if you can help an individual leader gain greater insights then the cascading effects of that individual leader being more effective are really significant and go well beyond individual enlightenment or happiness. Those are important goals to achieve but ultimately it is in service of a higher purpose. It is that higher purpose that people who work at CCL are focused on.

Lindsay: I appreciate that history because it highlights how CCL approaches the leadership challenge from a different perspective than many other organizations.

What I often see in the leadership space, is a company that has an idea, technique, or practice that they want to export, and they develop a research arm after the fact to provide validity for the purpose of selling to a client. What you described in how CCL started was a greater understanding to help society and individuals within the society and exporting that by connecting with organizations became a byproduct of that idea of wanting to help people. That is a different model under the 501(c)(3) approach, as compared to for profit organizations looking to dominate the \$40+ billion dollar leader development industry. There is something core about how you became an organization that allows you to serve in a different capacity than a lot of other organizations. It is a grounded approach. This seems to resonate with the people you bring into the organization because they tend to be very loyal and stay around for a long time because they buy into that approach.

Altman: Those are really insightful comments. We do struggle with some of that. We do pursue investigator-initiated research. We aren't telling our researchers to go study this or go develop that because a client needs it. We are not a contract research organization. We hire smart people and have them go study topics they deem to be important and then they let us know what they discover. As the space gets more competitive or when there are downturns in the economy, there is pressure to produce things that have tangible viability in the short term. So, we do struggle at times between the balance of just studying things and that good things may come out of it over time versus being focused on developing particular tools, assessments, solutions, or modules. Whatever we do, we make sure there is evidence behind it. The last thing we want to do is put a leadership solution out into the world for which there is no empirical or experiential support behind it.

Lindsay: By not being a contract research organization that allows you to have some independence. So, you

aren't dependent on another organization's dollars and the influence that comes from that. It seems like what you are suggesting is that you take what you see in the workplace and what you are learning about where there are gaps or future challenges to help shape the research. While not fully independent of having a researcher go study whatever they want, it is still grounded in what you are hearing from the field in terms of where there are gaps. Am I characterizing that correctly?

Altman: Yes, but to be brutally honest, sometimes we fall short. The aspiration we have and the majority of our work, value proposition, and strategic differentiation is being evidence-based. The reason we fund, do, and appreciate research is for that reason. It is like it was in medicine. In the early 1900s medicine was dominated by charlatans, bloodletting, skull drilling and the like and then there was a report called the Wexner Report that changed the face of medicine. It was the beginning of evidence-based medicine. Not too long ago, in the Academy of Management, a leader of that organization said we need to bring evidence-based management borrowing from evidence-based medicine. We really subscribe to that. Like David Day's work, or Barbara Kellerman's work as two among many examples, they take somewhat different approaches. But what they have in common is what they are putting out has evidence behind it. That is the kind of source material that we like to use to drive the solutions that we develop. We do research and we are consumers of other people's research but our mission in the world is to put it in the hands of the people on the front lines so that they can make a bigger difference in the world.

Part of our orientation is that we don't embed ourselves in an organization like a consultant would do. For a consulting company, that is a dream. They go into the organization and work shoulder to shoulder and hip to hip by being embedded so that they can drive the kinds of outcomes to which the organization is aspiring. We are more interested in sustainable change. What is

required for that is a developmental mindset. Our goal is not to embed ourselves in an organization. Instead, our goal is to increase the capability and capacity of an organization, community, or leader to do what they need to do to accomplish the task they have. If we create a dependency on us, then sustainability is not achieved. We have a very developmental orientation and one that is ultimately about what is left months and years after our work ends.

Lindsay: That is sustainable change and that ties into what you mentioned earlier about working with communities, countries, and NGOs. In your work, what are you seeing as trends within the field in terms of what people want and what organizations are looking for?

Altman: I think at a meta-level, goals and aspirations aren't changing that much. People want individuals and leadership collectives to be more effective in a rapidly changing world. We don't see any evidence that the fundamental tenets of who we are and what we do is being challenged. That said, there are substantial changes in client expectations and needs. We are more global than we ever have been. There is a desire among large organizations to be able to do leadership development across time zones, culture, languages, and geography. So, that has become more dominant in the last decade.

Certainly, the technological revolution with social media, artificial intelligence, predictive analytics, big data, and all the client-facing technology are having an impact. There is a rather significant transformation occurring in learning. What emanates from that is a desire among many clients to incorporate technology, and I am using that word broadly, into the leadership solutions. It is also very easy to get persuaded by the

notion that everything has to be technology-focused. What we find is people want, and need face to face contact. It is the blend of things that we are working on in response to our client's needs.

A corollary is, as you know, there is quite a bit of attention these days on data privacy and security. So, there is a bit of a tension between the widespread availability of technology and data privacy and security. I think where that is going to end up is unclear.

Staying on learning, people today in developed countries want on-demand learning, that is bite-sized, non-classroom based, synchronous/asynchronous, and just-in-time. These are the themes that are coming up. People clearly want impact. Very few organizations are

There is a rather significant transformation occurring in learning. What emanates from that is a desire among many clients to incorporate technology, and I am using that word broadly, into the leadership solutions.

willing to invest the time and money in doing formal return on investment studies, but we are seeing an increasing demand for "show us." Prove to us. Show us cases studies. So, that ties back to our previous conversation about evidence. People's expectations are increasingly around evidence. But, it's not always hard-core science that is needed.

In parts of the world, scalability has become a significant issue. In the past, leadership development has been for the elite, for the endowed organizations where people paid premium pricing. That still exists, but in many countries like on the continent of Africa, in India, Indonesia, the Philippines, and many other countries, there is a desire to reach more people. We are

seeing demand for solutions that are scalable and low priced that still have impact. So, there is a challenge and an opportunity for the field to do that. Can you deliver to tens of millions or hundreds of millions of people low cost solutions, in different languages, at different reading levels, sometimes using images instead of words, with proven impact? Even if the effect size is small, if you are reaching millions, the collective impact can be quite substantial. That is an area that is of particular interest to us which would not be of interest to many consulting firms and most business schools. Scalability looms large relative to our mission. Consumer product companies like Unilever and Procter & Gamble have been dealing with these issues for some time. How can they get product, at low cost out to markets where people can afford to buy the products? They have innovated a lot of ideas at the “bottom of the socioeconomic pyramid.” It is not like we are following that, but there are seven billion people in the world and maybe a million or two have been exposed to current leader development. That is a huge gap. Even if you believe in trickle down effects, you aren’t going to reach seven billion people, or five billion, or a billion people with the leadership development methods we currently employ.

Lindsay: Bringing some of those themes together, what are you hearing from people about why they come to CCL versus many other learning opportunities? What is it that you are hearing about what differentiates you from other choices and organizations?

Altman: It is word of mouth and reputation. We have been around almost 50 years. We do marketing but it is a very competitive space and thus hard to differentiate. So, people come to us because the word on the street is a lot of people, in a lot of organizations, have experienced what they consider transformational impact by working with CCL. Some come because all we do is leader development. If you are a consulting firm or a business school, you are doing a broad range of things

like strategy and finance. We focus exclusively on leader and leadership development. That is attractive to people. We are sort of like barbers and hair stylists in that the need for the work that we do is never going to go away. Everybody needs more effective leaders and more effective leadership collectives.

There is a commonly held view that you can never have enough good leaders and enough effective teams given the rapidly changing world. Some come because of the evidence. We put out a lot of books and blogs. Our intellectual property is largely accessible free of charge or at low cost and I think people find that valuable. We are not overly proprietary. Hopefully, we come across as confident, but humble. It is a combination of factors, but the main thing is that you live and die by your reputation. In most circles we have an excellent reputation and we are known to produce positive impact.

Lindsay: What do you see the future of leader development being over the next 10 or 20 years? You mentioned technology, the rapid pace, and the need to be global as current challenges, so where do you see what we are learning about leader development going in the future?

Altman: Some of those things that I talked about earlier address your question. What I didn’t talk about is the so-called “gig economy,” an issue you are seeing the U.S. and in other developed countries. Contract workers and the relationship between individuals and organizations is changing. If the trend continues, then there is going to be a model out there where individuals, who are contractors, wouldn’t have access to organizational sponsorship of leadership development. But they are still working in teams and are leaders of themselves, and through influence processes with other people, are going to desire effective and fairly priced leadership development. I think that is an untapped market need. Work force dynamics could

fundamentally affect how leadership development is conceived and provided.

Despite the tribalism that is dominant in the world today where people are looking more inward in terms of their identities, we are a more interconnected and interdependent world than we have ever been. I think the leadership solutions and the knowledge driving those solutions will be impacted by that. For the most part, the intellectual underpinnings of leadership development are informed by Western models (particularly from the United States). I think as time goes on, Eastern approaches will come more into play. I think collectivistic, non-heroic individual, models will come to inform and affect how we approach leadership development. Many of our Asian clients want to know how the West does leadership development. What we are seeing, however, is that they want us to take into account Eastern models and weave it together with the Western models. Let's look at a topic like feedback. If you work in a culture where there is high power distance, giving feedback to superiors is inappropriate. Likewise, where "saving face" looms large as a cultural norm, some of the models that we use like feedback and 360 degree feedback aren't going to work in the same ways. We have put out recently some interesting leadership research reports on Asia and India. Thus, we are beginning to invest in that and we are seeing that as a way of innovating, contributing substantively in new ways to the enhancement of the predominate paradigms on leadership development that exist today.

NONPROFIT

The Hustle of Leadership

Anthony Hassan, CEO & President, Cohen Veterans Network

Interviewed By: Douglas Lindsay

Lindsay: Would you mind giving a brief overview of your journey and how you came to your current position?

Hassan: I was born and raised in the city of Chicago and had humble beginnings. Growing up, I realized that I wanted to get away and do something different. I had a friend who went to Army basic training. When he came back, he told me that he thought I would do well in the Army if I joined. At the time, I needed direction and guidance. After some thought, I took his advice and enlisted in the Army. I was just 17 years old and two days when I entered Army basic training. I went on to serve 11 years as an enlisted soldier working with artillery and infantry units as a radio operator. I learned a lot during my Army years. I learned what it was like to sacrifice. I learned what it was like to lead others. I learned how to lead peers. I learned what it meant to lead by example and to inspire and motivate others when there wasn't much to offer. I also learned that by contributing, by being part of the team, and demonstrating commitment to the mission was one way to inspire those who were my peers.

I was successful as an Army Non-Commissioned Officer, but I knew I wanted more. I knew to serve in a great capacity as a military officer required a college education. So, I pursued my education on nights and weekends. I went to school during my lunch hour, after duty hours, and on weekends. It was difficult, but I think part of my character is to never quit. I have a lot of hustle in me. So, while my friends were having a "good time," I was grinding to achieve my goal of becoming a military officer. After several years, I finally received my Bachelor's Degree. My ticket to pursue a career as a commissioned military officer. .

Dr. Anthony Hassan is the inaugural President and CEO of the Cohen Veterans Network. Dr. Hassan is responsible for leading and executing the strategic, operational, and financial direction of a \$275M network tasked with carrying out the establishment of 25 mental health clinics across the nation. Dr. Hassan is a veteran of both the United States Army (enlisted) and Air Force (officer) with over 30 years of experience in military behavioral health as a social work officer, leader, clinician, and academic. He earned his Bachelor's Degree from the University of Alaska in Anchorage, his Master's from Florida International University, and his Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration from the University of South Florida.

What I learned during my enlisted years from a military social work officer was the quickest way to becoming a commissioned officer would be to receive a commission as a military social worker in the military medical corps. I asked him, “What does that require?” He said I needed a Master’s Degree in social work. So, I separated from the Army after 11 years to get my degree with all the intentions of coming back into the Army. People thought I was crazy and I was making the wrong move. But, I knew all along that I wanted more and could offer more as a military officer. I took the challenge and separated from the Army. I went on to secure my Master’s Degree in social work and quickly applied and within a year I was commissioned in the U.S. Air Force as a military social worker. As an Air Force military social worker, I was afforded many opportunities to grow professionally as a leader and clinician...to hone my clinical skills while serving in various leadership positions alongside excellent leaders and mentors.

During my service as a military social worker, I also had the honor to support service members in faraway deployed locations on two occasions. I served in Saudi Arabia, where I was the only mental health officer on a compound of 5,000 personnel in the middle of the desert supporting Operation SOUTHERN WATCH. I deployed a second time to the border of Iraq & Kuwait in 2004 as a mental health officer on a combat stress control team. These experiences were the most rewarding experiences in my life. I felt for the first time stigma didn’t impede care, and I was able to really help my fellow service members at the right time without barriers to care.

I served in the Air Force as a military social worker for 14 years with my last assignment at the United States Air Force Academy. I was a part of the leader development program for the Air Officer Commanders (AOCs). At the academy, I was in a position to lead successful military officers with amazing careers as a

peer. I helped educate, train, and develop these hand-picked officers to be even better leaders. Along the way, I developed as a leader. I found myself in constant reflection striving to be better. This role at the Academy gave me a greater appreciation for the complexity of leadership, the challenges of peer leadership, and all that is required in the development of oneself. We are never finished developing is what I learned while at the Academy. I retired in 2009 after 25 years of military experience.

Also, during that time, I received my doctorate—again grinding on nights and weekends to achieve this goal. Not because I needed doctorate, but because I wanted one. I wanted it because I thought it was something that I should accomplish in my life. It was a goal that I set for myself. By having the doctorate degree, so many more doors opened.

After retirement, I then went on to the University of Southern California (USC) which was my first civilian job. In that job, I helped develop the country’s largest military social work program and established a research center focused on military mental health. This was very important at the time, and remains important today. The impact on the military member’s mental health after war and the impact it has on their families can be devastating.

My work at USC was rewarding and the catalyst to my current job as the CEO of the Cohen Veterans Network. Mr. Steve Cohen, who I now work for, was looking for someone to execute on his vision of providing accessible mental health care to veterans and military families. He pledged \$275 million to this mission. Steve A. Cohen is a man dedicated to ensuring that military men and women who need mental health care can get help, as well as their families, at no cost. In 2015, I joined Steve to build his network of military family clinics. Today, we are an organization of 14 operating clinics, growing to 25 clinics total by 2020.

We have 45 staff members here at the headquarters and over 200 staff members that operate our clinics across the country. In just three and a half years, we have been able to accomplish a lot. It has been the greatest success of my life. To build this network of mental health clinics from the ground up has been amazing with so much more to do. It is quite a challenge, but I come to work every day inspired, motivated, and committed to leading this charge. I am grateful for all of the experiences that brought me to this point and for all the people that mentored, guided, and believed in me.

Lindsay: Thank you for sharing a bit about your journey. You mentioned that you come to work inspired and motivated. What do you find most rewarding in your current position?

Hassan: Our collective efforts are saving lives, saving families, and saving futures. I know that may sound cliché, but it is true. The 12,000 people that we have seen so far in our network may not have received mental health care or may not have received it when they needed it. This is important. Access to mental health care in America is hard to find. Quality mental health care is hard to find. We are providing access to high quality, culturally competent care. It matters. This is amazing and to be able to lead this effort is a once in a lifetime opportunity.

From a leader's perspective, when do you have the chance in your life to build, operate, and innovate all at the same time? Of course, this comes with huge challenges and a lot of complexity. But, this is what we are doing. We are building a network of clinics, and as we are building them, we are operating them, all the while looking to innovate. It so dynamic and it's amazing what we have been able to accomplish in such a short period of time.

Lindsay: With having to build, operate, and innovate all at the same time, what are some of the things that you are looking for in the leaders in the organization?

Hassan: We are very thoughtful on all leader selection, or for any member of our team. We always select for someone who can complement the team with a skill set or competency that we don't have. Those closest to me are people who have competencies or talents that I don't have. For example, we might look for someone who is very creative or someone who is process oriented. We look for someone who is aware of social media and marketing. I'm always looking for competencies that are complementary to the leader and the team as a whole. But it's not just about their competency. The individual also must have hustle. I need all team members to grind with me on the work. I need passion for the work. I need integrity and transparency and someone who is not afraid of it. At the same time, I need teammates who can also be compassionate for others. I can't have someone berating others. In addition, teammates must deliver excellence in all they do. I am asking a lot of people and it generally takes us a long time to find the right person for our team and in order to do that we have to sacrifice time, to find the right person to come join us.

If you aren't hustling on our team, especially within the senior leadership group, you are going to stand out and you are not going to last long. When you are building, operating, and innovating at the same time, you have to have hustle. I have learned over time that hustle and passion are core to being successful. This is especially critical in a startup that is evolving into an organization. It takes special people.

Lindsay: That idea of hustle is an interesting one. When I think about hustle, there is certainly the aspect of being willing and able to do the grinding of the work that you mention. Being in the leadership development side of things, I also think that hustle also involves knowing where your weaknesses are and being willing to better yourself and better your best. Can you talk a little bit about that with respect to development over time and how you work to create that within your organization?

Hassan: I think because we are a new organization, we are just starting to strategically work leader development into our organization. That said, we have already supported team members with continuing education especially in their occupational competency. We are also poised on hiring a group to provide us with some leader development where we work through a process that will help us grow as individual leaders as well as a team. Our senior leaders, in addition to myself, are also reminding our team that growth is constant and that development is a process. For example, I have a habit of getting up early and reading various articles generated by the industry. When I find one that I think would be relevant to a particular department or all of CVN, I send the article along with a little summary of how it is relevant. What I am trying to demonstrate is that I am always engaged not just in leader development, but also in the industry trends. I'm constantly trying to model that reading is important and it is vital to stay on top of your profession. As the CEO, I don't know everything, but it is critical that I know enough about the lines of business so that I know where they intersect and how they are related.

You remember the Hogan & Kaiser¹ model that highlights the point of who we are as people is how we lead others. I constantly remind the team that leader development starts with them. That they must understand who they are and what they bring to the team and organization. That they shouldn't be afraid to find a weakness or growth area and work to improve it. I also reflect back to lessons I learned while at the Academy about topics like transformational leadership and Kouzes & Posner's five practices of exemplary

leadership², and why individual leader personality and behavior is important. At CVN, leader development is not yet a formal program, but eventually will be...but more important than a formal program is the day-to-day of how we do business, our organizational culture – how we do thing around here.

Lindsay: That approach can be very powerful by embedding it into the organizational culture of “that is how we do things around here.” Often, I think people struggle because they think about leadership

...Educational experiences need to be integrated. Organizational leaders need to give their team members room to grow though things like progressive job responsibilities. They may not know everything about the new task, but I guarantee you if you give them chance to grow and excel, they will.

development as an event, a specific program, or a course that you go to. It is something that the organization is having me do or something that is being done to me. This limits the individual accountability in the developmental process. Since people aren't static, they are constantly being impacted and developed (positively or negatively) by things going on around them.

Hassan: I'm glad you brought that up. I am a strong believer that education, workshops, and conferences are the least impactful developmental opportunities. They are certainly useful, but there also has to be a connection to what is going on every day in one's organization. The educational experiences need to be integrated. Organizational leaders need to give their team members room to grow though things like

¹ Hogan, R., & Kaiser, R. B. (2005). What we know about leadership. *Review of General Psychology*, 9(2), 169-180.

² Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2006). *The Leadership Challenge* (Vol. 3). John Wiley & Sons.

progressive job responsibilities. They may not know everything about the new task, but I guarantee you if you give them chance to grow and excel, they will. We have had a unique opportunity to bring people in and watch them progressively grow in jobs that stretched them. Today, they are phenomenal leaders within our organization. You never know what a person's capacity is until you give them the chance. We have done that here at CVN and I am very proud of that. When someone has hustle, is intelligent and has a passion for what they are doing, their potential is endless. It is our job as leaders to cultivate this talent.

Lindsay: Again, you brought up the idea of hustle. Oftentimes we tend to focus on certain competencies when we talk about leadership or leader development. Are they extraverted or conscientious or some other trait. However, hustle is unique from that. If you see a young leader that has hustle, what are you seeing from them? What does that look like?

Hassan: I have to first give credit to a friend of mine who shared the term hustle with me in the context of an individual's propensity for success. I would say someone who has hustle is tenacious, is future focused, mission-oriented, resilient, hopeful, and positive. Someone who is always striving for excellence. A person with hustle wants more...is hungry...is willing to sacrifice, who is never comfortable – restless.

As a personal example, people describe me as restless and never comfortable with the status quo. They say that I am always looking at new ideas, adventures, or opportunities. Someone with hustle isn't afraid to challenge or afraid to take on a new challenge. If they fail, they learn from their mistake. They are undeterred.

Lindsay: I think that is important talk about because that doesn't really show up in the literature on leadership, but is so critical to success. To me, it goes back to a word you mentioned earlier of grinding. It's

doing the work and the investment in yourself and in others. Sometimes that is those long nights, like what you mentioned you did in earning your degrees. It is the constant working to be better, to serve better, to show up better at work every single day.

Hassan: Absolutely. It is living the mission. Some people may argue that people like me who have been described as restless, might be too determined and not focused on the operating side of the business. But, I would argue that there is just as much hustle in operating as there is in building and innovating. Operators need to be relentless on identifying key performance indicators, using artificial intelligence to gain insights, laser-focused on quality assurance, etc. There is hustle needed everywhere. Those same traits continue into your life outside of work as well. I don't want to give anyone the impression that someone who hustles is consumed with their job and doesn't find enjoyment or quality of life elsewhere. Hustle is an approach to life, not just work. Remember, what got you here – won't get you there...without hustle!

Lindsay: I agree. The hustle idea isn't just applicable to work. Fundamentally, you aren't someone different at work than you are at home. The desire to do better isn't just at work, it's about how you choose to live your life. It goes back to your comment about who you are is how you lead. Thinking about that a little more, I would say that leaders who hustle will often find themselves in a very unique career path. For example, if you look back at your career path, you wouldn't necessarily predict where you are today. But it is the hustle that you displayed that probably makes you perfectly suited for the position that you have today.

Hassan: I appreciate you saying that. I reflect on that all the time. How did I end up here? Yes, I'm hustling all the time. I am always looking to improve, be better, and to challenge myself. I could not have predicted I would be where I am today. When I first met Mr.

Cohen, he described me as someone who is passionate, which I think is synonymous with hustle. If you are hustling it is because you are passionate about what you are doing and you are committed to it. While not every single person in the organization can be described as one who hustles, the leaders in our organization and those who are responsible for business lines do hustle and they have to hustle across their line of business.

Lindsay: With that in mind, and looking back over your career, what advice would you have for young leaders?

Hassan: I would say that relationships matter. Be nice to people. Transparency is also important. Subordinates need to know what you are thinking, what your values are, and what is important to you. People need to know your roadmap. You will need to determine the level of transparency in terms of what you share, and that is developed over time. Leaders also need to listen. I personally pay attention to listening more. As I mentioned earlier, leadership is a developmental process and this is one area that I am working on. Even before I go into meetings, I remind myself to listen more and to ask more questions. It is amazing what you will hear and what people will share if they are given the opportunity.

I try to model shared decision making and I try to make sure everyone in the room has a voice. That is important and leaders need to be open to new ideas, but the ultimate decision rests with the leader. Once a decision is made, we need to move on it.

I would also say that all leaders need to be humble. There is no place for arrogance. What we see from the leadership literature and in real life is that the leaders who fail are those who do not manage their discretion

well. When a leader grows through the organization, they are given a lot of discretion. They are given a lot of decision making power. What we see often with leaders is their inability to manage discretion. So, leaders need to be careful with the power and authority given to them and they need to use it wisely.

What I learned in the last few years is that it is important to have performance management standards and then manage to the performance. What are you measuring and what tools do you have in place to measure your outcomes? What outcomes are important because what is measured is what people will pay attention to. Moreover, managing the performance, having your leaders, managers, and the team manage performance. Making sure people know who is responsible for what. Understanding that people

...You always need to have multiple capabilities. You can't have one single point of failure. In other words, you need to have a backup or an exit strategy for all of your business strategies.

will be held accountable. What is the pace that you are expecting around these deliverables? Do you have the right people in the right places to get the job done? It is so important for people to understand what they own and what they are going to be held accountable for at the end of the day. There should be no ambiguity.

Lindsay: That is great advice. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Hassan: I did want to add a couple of thoughts regarding leadership at the strategic or organizational level. One of the things that I have learned because of the partnerships and franchise relationships that we have established, is this notion of meta-leadership. I am having to work with other CEOs in our network and

constantly ponder the importance of peer leadership. I think this is a whole different aspect of leadership that more should be discussed and written about.

Another area is the importance of Board relationships. I never had to worry about a Board in the military. A few important things to ask are: How do you manage your Board? How do you get to know your Board members? How do you respond to their inquiries? At what tempo do you communicate with your Board?

And, one last thing that I'd like to share is that you always need to have multiple capabilities. You can't have one single point of failure. In other words, you need to have a backup or an exit strategy for all of your business strategies.

I hope that I have offered you something that will be useful to the Journal.

Lindsay: Absolutely. Thank you for your service and your time.

BOOK REVIEW

A Review of "Leaders: Myth and Reality"

Stanley McChrystal, Jeff Eggers, & Jason Mangone,
New York, NY: Penguin Random House (2018)

Review By: Douglas Kennedy, Ph.D.

“Of all the things I’ve done, the most vital is coordinating those who work with me and aiming their efforts at a certain goal.”

Walt Disney

Retired General Stanley McChrystal offers a fresh way of investigating leaders and the concept of leadership. Although a relatively different interpretation, it does follow his other two books that stress the role of leaders in a process with their followers. The former commander of Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), and whose last command was the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Commander, US Forces – Afghanistan (USFOR-A), asserts that the role of the leader has been misunderstood which establishes the “root cause of the mythology of leadership—its relentless focus on the leader” (p.7). Instead, with the assistance of authors Jeff Eggers, a former-Navy SEAL and member of the White House National Security Staff during the Obama administration, and Jeff Mangone, a former Marine, McChrystal reveals a model that he suggests more efficiently and clearly demonstrates the role of the leader.

McChrystal’s inspiration derives from *Plutarch’s Lives*. Similar to the Greek historian, McChrystal provides concise biographies on the lives of thirteen personalities, versus Plutarch’s 48, in order to show the true complexity of leaders and the leadership they provide. Through the examination of his once-hero, Robert E. Lee, and the six pairings of other individuals who he views as leaders—the inclusion of his former enemy, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, is certainly surprising—he effectively demonstrates the need for his new interpretation. The eclectic choices of personalities certainly makes for an interesting read, especially if one thought he would solely focus on military figures. He profiles Walt Disney and Coco Chanel as “The Founders,” Albert Einstein and Leonard Bernstein as “The Geniuses,” Maximilien Robespierre and al-Zarqawi as “The Zealots,” Zheng He and Harriet Tubman as “The Heroes,” “Boss” Tweed and Margaret Thatcher as “The Power Brokers,” and Martin Luther and Martin Luther King, Jr. as “The Reformers.” Using basic biographies, McChrystal identifies the diversity and flaws of leaders, revealing that context and how these leaders influenced their followers, or vice-versa in many cases, was more essential to the synergy of leadership. Additionally, the authors emphasize that not all leaders are successful or moral.

The authors fashion three common myths regarding leadership:

1. The *Formulaic* myth that emphasizes a static checklist containing those traits for others to emulate to be a good leader, which neglects any input from the follower or context. As the authors state, “This first essential flaw in the mythology of leadership is our quest for something that can be boiled down to a prescriptive theory, or an equation with fixed coefficients” (p. 373).
2. The *Attribution* myth, which highlights the leader and his/her abilities, ignoring, once again, the contributions and agency of those surrounding the leader, or the leader’s inherent flaws. Again, the “Rose coloring [of leaders’ lives]...introduces romantic and myopic distortions” (p. 375).
3. The *Results* myth, where focus is on the leader’s goal-oriented outcomes and achievements. This myth disregards the complexity of what leaders should provide. Instead, “The truth is that when we look closely, we see leadership as much in what our leaders symbolize as in what they accomplish” (p. 378).

As an alternative, the authors would like us to change the lens of how we view leaders and leadership. As they uncover, the common structure of viewing leaders, and the leadership they provide, is where the leader is on the apex, offers his/her leadership, which influences the followers in some type of context that produces some type of result(s). And this result should be “success.” This is the myth that needs a dose of reality. He insists that we require a different picture. What is deemed more effective—the reality—is visualized more like an interface proposed in Clausewitz’s remarkable trinity where context, followers, and the leader effectively collaborate in a dynamic, interactive system, with the product of leadership as the result. He also includes a basic schematic with some definitions later in the book. In offering this model, and using the varied personalities in the book to support this model, McChrystal has validated his own experience that leadership is most certainly situational—there is no formula. For many this may not be the panacea desired, but it is the reality. Through his discussion of the myths of leaders and leadership, McChrystal presents the pitfalls of leader-focused work, and reveals a better method of envisioning the process.

BOOK REVIEW

A Review of "The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations"

Ori Brafman & Rod A. Backstrom, London, UK; Penguin Books Ltd. (2006)

Review By: David Houston, Lt Col, USAF

Authors Ori Brafman and Rod Backstrom utilize the powerful analogy of the spider and the starfish to compare and contrast organizational structure in the context of the amount of emphasis placed on the role of a leader. An organization in which the leader's role is highly emphasized is compared to a spider (centralized). An organization where this role is de-emphasized is compared to a starfish (decentralized).

Brafman is an entrepreneur who holds a BA in peace and conflict studies from the University of California-Berkeley and an MBA from Stanford University. Backstrom is a technology start-up businessman who holds a BA and MBA from Stanford University. The authors fuse their business expertise with biological science and historical case studies to provide an interesting and entertaining account of organizational leadership.

This analogy begins with an explanation of how memory in the brain operates. One would think that memories are stored in a central repository, however scientists are realizing this is not the case. Rather, when memory is activated, it pulls from multiple networked areas of the brain. This mechanism enables the brain to retain memory despite damage to certain portions of it. In the same manner, the authors examine organizations that function using this decentralized type of structure, which is similar to that of a starfish. When the arm of a starfish is cut off, it will grow back and the arm that was removed will regenerate as a new starfish. In this sense, by attacking a decentralized structure you actually increase its ability to thrive. This was the case for the Apache nation when attacked by the Spaniards in the 17th Century. The "flexibility, shared power, ambiguity—made the Apaches immune to attacks that would have destroyed a centralized society" (p. 21). This example is far different from the spider-like society of the 16th Century Aztecs, where the Spaniards killed Montezuma II and then rapidly conquered a leaderless indigenous people.

The book continues by explaining the ingredients and value of decentralized types of organizations. The first ingredient is that norms instead of rules drive action. Second, a person emerges as a catalyst to get a movement started, but then fades away or moves on to start a movement with a different population. The third ingredient, an ideology – the ‘why’ – is established and serves to motivate people to commit to this organization. Fourth, this ideology leverages a pre-existing network of people willing to take up the cause. Lastly, a figure emerges willing to champion the cause, not to be its leader but instead to be its promoter. In order for decentralized organisms or organizations to move or advance – whether that be an organism like a starfish or toward a vision for a business – all significant parts of the starfish or business must convince each other of the appropriate movement. In other words, leadership under this decentralized model occurs via consensus not through authoritative directives and hence there is buy-in and ownership by the majority of individuals in the organization. In addition, decentralized companies like Wikipedia or Craigslist develop trust with the users which creates a willingness to contribute to the conversation and introduce diversity of thought, leading to innovation. These types of organizations tend to outlast and outperform their more centralized rivals.

The authors do offer three ways in which a centralized organization can combat a decentralized one; however, they require a radical shift in thinking. First, you must change the ideology of the decentralized organization. An example of this would be through bringing hope to where it currently doesn’t exist (such as in third world nations). Second, you must centralize them. The United States government eventually achieved this with the Apaches by giving them cattle. Once they had an economic good, they ceased their nomadic lifestyle and the decentralized structure associated with it. Third, decentralize your own organization. Basically follow the edict if you can’t beat them join them. The authors conclude by stating that in our current global economic

state, in order to be successful, businesses must find the hybrid sweet spot and constantly be balancing between centralization (as a mechanism to obtain profit), and decentralization (to ensure innovation/relevance).

Organizations seeking to develop leaders might take away some valuable insights from this book. The launching of institution-wide programs would likely benefit from ensuring the analogous arms of its “starfish” agree to this change. These stakeholders must come to consensus that the change is in the appropriate direction. A second takeaway directly applies to leader development institutions such as the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA). Here, in terms of the required ingredients, we have a catalyst and integrator (Center for Character and Leadership Development), existing network (Commandant of Cadets, Faculty, Athletic Director and Airfield), and a champion for leader development at USAFA (Superintendent). Shifting more from rule to norms-and more coherently communicating our ideology as to what a leader of character is and how USAFA can develop them – would serve leader development institutions well. Lastly, we should view USAFA’s cadets as more decentralized than the staff and faculty. In order to lead cadets in their leader development journey, faculty and staff members should consider seeking to change a cadet’s ideology, give them a more centralized structure in which to operate, and engage them in a more decentralized manner.

CALL FOR PAPERS

2020 NATIONAL CHARACTER & LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM

THEME: VALUING HUMAN CONDITIONS, CULTURES, AND SOCIETIES

The annual National Character & Leadership Symposium (NCLS) is the United States Air Force Academy's flagship event on character and leadership. It brings together distinguished scholars, military leaders, corporate executives and world-class athletes to motivate and equip participants for honorable living and effective leadership. The next symposium will take place on February 20-21, 2020.

This two-day symposium provides an opportunity for all Academy personnel, visiting university students and faculty, and community members to experience dynamic speakers and take part in group discussions to enhance their own understanding of the importance of sound moral character and good leadership.

This year's NCLS will have an emphasis on cultural awareness and fostering successful interactions through a three-phased approach in understanding human conditions, cultures and societies: knowing oneself, knowing others and constructive engagement. Self-reflection, distinguishing between objective and subjective elements of identities, and engaging dialogues will be at the heart of the 2020 NCLS theme.

In order to support NCLS, the Journal of Character and Leadership Development (JCLD) will focus the Feb 2020 issue on the theme of the Symposium. That way, the JCLD will serve to start the conversation and engagement around the theme of NCLS prior to attending the symposium. If you have an idea for a paper or interview that could support the NCLS theme, please reach out to the Editor in Chief at jclld@usafa.edu.

REFLECTIONS







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Combining quality, peer-reviewed scholarship and the experiential perspectives of leaders at all levels, JCLD aims to enhance intellectual understanding and empower real-world development of the effective, character-based leadership that both individuals and organizations need to succeed in a complex and demanding world.



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