

Ep. 45: Leadership perspectives on Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention, Part 2

Welcome to Sword and Shield, the official podcast of the 960th Cyberspace Wing. Join us for insight, knowledge, mentorship and some fun, as we discuss relevant topics in and around our wing. Please understand that the views expressed in this podcast are not necessarily the views of the U. S. Air Force, nor the Air Force Reserve, and no endorsement of any particular person or business is ever intended. (Light music)

Good day gladiators, thank you for joining us for the second part of our conversation with retired Lieutenant, General Jay Silveria. And - Colonel Rick Erredge - So again, we're thankful to have you General Silveria and we are continuing our discussion on sexual assault awareness and prevention month because, we are in April and that's what our focus is this month - Well it is a pleasure to still be with you and like I said on our previous discussion I am very proud of the 960th for taking on this topic and being upfront and talking to your organization about it I think that's so important. - Absolutely. - Yeah, Thanks sir, thanks for joining us and giving us all this time and the emphasis you put on it just from a time aspect helps us understand really it is important, and we want to make sure all of our airmen have the opportunities that they need to reach their goals and be the best they can. And certainly this is a part of their safety and understanding and education to help the organization be the best we can be. - And so, you know, the department of the air force kind of revamped the sexual assault prevention training. So before it was, you go on online do your one-hour training and you were good for a whole year. And so that, and suicide prevention training changed in 2020. And so now it's broken down to continuous conversation every month that's led by the commanders or myself in our wing. And so I think doing that and having that ongoing conversation versus I check the box I'm done, I don't have to hear about it for another year is really what we're adopting and trying to take on as a wing. - And I think Francis I think those conversations are so important and it can't be a lecture, right? It can't be just someone that is talking about what you should or shouldn't be doing, it has to be conversation so that people can learn from each other and how learn others see situations and that's where the growth takes place. - Absolutely. And we talk a lot about accountability as well, right? As it relates to the prevention measures, leadership involvement because granted, if an unfortunate event happens, where does the blame shift? And, we have to look at that in order to prevent it. - And I think so many times when that unfortunate event it's a lot, like in cases where we would call a safety episode where we're an accident happened that we can often go back and find a chain and we can find an element somewhere along the way where this could have been prevented a while ago. And I think the same thing happens so much in sexual harassment and sexual assault that we miss the idea that in fact that there is a, there is a chain there, someone didn't decide that they're going to assault someone or they didn't decide that they're going to harass someone. It was, it was part of something that was either not discussed or they did not have a chance to learn that, or it was not

presented in a way that they understood. So, as you talked about it's important that those conversations monthly about sexual assault, sexual harassment the conversations about suicide prevention, it's important that they happen in that continuous way in that monthly and as you described it, then it's always present that it's always available to talk about. - Yeah. And I think the way we talk about it, sir needs to be, you know, not just a bunch of bullet points talk about here's what you should do right. We've got to talk about what kind of behaviors, what kind of things what kind of modeling should we be doing for our children? What kinds of things that people see in mainstream media where they're coming from, what they're understanding what healthy relationships look like and making sure that we are reinforcing those through all of our engagements with organizations and, we've had some during COVID here we've had some opportunities to engage with some other family members that we probably wouldn't have through virtual events that Francis has put on and that we've had the opportunity to participate in and modeling those behaviors that we want that lead to healthy relationships is really important. - I, and I think Rick there is that is such an element that has been missing in a lot of our call it training and our prevention through years. One of the things from my time at the air force Academy was that we really worked on call it healthy interpersonal skills. And then on the further inside of that through healthy relationship training. So a lot of times our education in these areas and a lot of these societal issues our education has been about what not to do. You can't say this, you can't do that. Don't do this. Don't say that, that crosses the line. That's too much. What has been missing a lot of times in our education is prevention has been what to do and how you should act. So as a, I think Francis talks a lot about the people that that arrive in an organization, arrive in the air force that they already come with their background and their experiences and their baggage. And in many cases they haven't been taught how they're supposed to interact with people in a appropriate and in a healthy way. So we have a responsibility to teach them how to do that not just what they shouldn't do. - Exactly. I think that's some parts are missing, right. You know, when you, you have a kid and you're like, stop doing that, don't do that. Don't touch this, don't touch that. Instead, like giving them objects that they can play with, they can touch. You know, that's like the education piece that when you're raising kids like people forget about that. Well, what can I do? Or what can I play with? And that's the same thing when it comes to this type of training what are the things that we're going to do to prevent? And let's educate about what a healthy relationship is and what it looks like when we talk about broken families and people joining the military, you know I've come from a divorced, a divorced family and growing up, I was like, I'm never getting married. Here I am married for 20 years with four kids. So, you know, you learn and adapt based on your experiences and grow. And you can go one of two ways you can go in a positive direction or negative direction. So it's up to us to talk to people about what it is that is acceptable and what is not acceptable. - I think you're absolutely right Francis. And one of the things from my experience that we began a program for the new incoming class on healthy interpersonal skills to give them that, to tell them, you know here's how you should talk to people. Here's how you should interact. Now. Some people may say on the front, well they may know that or someone may

understand that. Well, of course they should, but because they don't makes it our responsibility to develop in that those interpersonal skills. And the reason is, because of our mission and because of our jobs, right? We want the individuals that come in to feel like they're joining an organization where they can thrive. And they're going to thrive in a place where there are those healthy relationships. So somewhat we started teaching those interpersonal skills to the incoming class with a lot of good survey results that it was making a difference because in some families as you mentioned in some families, either the examples they saw or what they were told were not what we would want inside the air force. So we have upfront and direct conversations of what interpersonal skills should be between two people. - Yeah. I think that's important. And to, to mimic that behavior or demonstrate that behavior at the mediate supervisor and you've talked before about, you know all levels of organization have to be on the same page and they have take responsibility for making those relationships work. And I think that for that front level first-level supervisors sometimes gets thrust into a position where they've, you know let's say it's a senior airman going to staff Sergeant and they were senior airman. And they were just one of the one of the buddies in the pals. Then all of a sudden, now there's the supervisor and the relationship changes, and they may not have been equipped to deal with necessarily those things. And they've got all these other things on their plate now. And if they haven't seen good supervisory skills in the past and they don't have maybe a solid background and their own personal life or relationships that can make it really difficult to continue to make sure that they airmen are getting what they need. - Hi, Rick. I think you're absolutely right. It's and that point about all levels of leadership. And I also think it's important that we always have to recognize as you point out when someone moves into a new position or you know to a new level that we, also have to recognize that in many cases, they have to be taught how to do that. Because if, someone automatically came with all the skills that we needed, right, then we could make them a senior leader or we could make them a senior NCO, but we don't, we develop them over time. We expose them to situations where they can grow. And that has to be an important part of that that they can see how to interact with people, how what's an appropriate way to have a relationship, you know a professional relationship with someone. And that has to be taught. And there has to be accountability and feedback for people to understand what they should be like interacting with others. - And I liked that you talked about the accountability piece and I know in prior conversations that we've had we talk about like tolerating little things, right? What leads to sexual harassment and sexual assault is when you know, let me see what I can get away with. Let me see what I can do. I can throw this, you know comment out there and kind of get a feeler. And then the next step I can, you know throw this out there and kind of see what the reactions are and no reactions or that, you know, leader, that's a new leader. Maybe I was your supervisor before I'm tolerating that and that leads to other negative behaviors. - I think you're absolutely right Francis in and in many ways, that is the key that there are one way to view it is in a lot of cases there are baked in or we talk about unconscious bias, right? There's a, in some people there's an unconscious element too that comes from their background or their, you know, from their family. And in many cases people don't realize that what they're either

saying or what they're would their actions are, and for someone to hold them accountable for those smallest comments, hey that don't say that we that's not the way we should be talking to each other. That doesn't work here that accountability at the lowest level is where you can begin to make a difference. When someone puts out one of those comments that you describe as, you know see what they can get away with. And a lot of times it's really interested in a power play. They're trying to get some sort of advantage in a situation. And then when they're called out for it, even in a, even in the lowest level, I think that makes such a difference. - Absolutely. And you know, one of the other things that we really wanted to discuss with you, because you've had such a great long career in the air force is to tap into some of that knowledge and talk about, you know lessons learned through your career what are some things that you would wish you would have done or could have done differently? And then, you know, lessons learned as it relates to sexual assault prevention at the Academy. - Right. Well, thanks Francis 35 years. And I would have to say that I was blessed and just a privilege to serve and put on the uniform every day for that much time. And the people that I was around, it was just a real privilege to do that for that long and to lead in so many different levels. It was, I it's, it chokes me up. It was such an experience and, a real privilege to get to do that for airman and for all of the people that I have to work with, I think there's so many things that I walk away with about, you know, what I could have done better and what I missed and what I did. I always in the Academy I always joked when I would get the question a lot about you know, what would you tell cadet Silveria, and at the end what would you go back and tell cadet Silveria well first off what I would tell Cadet Silveria is study harder. - (Laughing) - So maybe I would have had good grades and maybe I would have had some other opportunities. So I would tell Cadet Silveria to study harder. But I think the other thing that, that I would tell cadet Silveria is to look up a little bit and look around at all of the opportunities and all that's there. And I arrived at an air force at a time and a family from a family. I didn't completely understand all that the air force has to offer. And over time I began to see it. And I, I think I would, I would tell, you know people that are joining now that you're joining a vast organization that does remarkable things in all directions. So look around, look around you. There's so much to do so much that you can participate in and so much that you can be a part of. I think your specific question about sexual assault and sexual harassment that I learned from my time there first off, I thought I understood the program. And I thought I understood what needed to be done to move forward and to advance in this area. But I, I did not understand it near as well as I thought I did. And in a, in a couple areas first was until you can get the entire organization engaged in a particular topic then you can't effect of the change that you want. And so it has, as we've talked about it's leaders at all levels and a consistent message and help them with the messaging because sometimes those leaders don't exactly know what to say. So you need to give them the information and give them the word. So if I think the lesson learned, I would have more a support for the leaders at all the levels to give them the support and that the information that they needed. I also think that there is absolutely no substitute for genuine care and genuine empathy by commanders to find out what's going on and to engage with their people and to learn that there is no substitute for genuinely

caring about making a difference, and people will see that. And when you have a summit and you have a, this program and you have this event and you that, but if you can be seen as caring than they, then they mean that much more. And then I think the last one is in a lot of ways what we were just talking about on the healthy relationships. I did not understand that in a lot of ways until I got there and began to learn both from scholars and practitioners on the healthy relationship side we have to teach people how to act and many may disagree because they think they should learn that from their family or, or as they, as they were raised. But we have to teach people how to act that we have to teach them. What's a healthy relationship between two people a healthy, personal, physical relationship? What does a healthy relationship between two people like and that involves upfront and direct conversations and education. It involves group discussions. It involves experts, it's demanding but that's the way that I began to see that we made a difference that that someone began to learn that perhaps the way that they thought a relationship should be that that was wrong. And so I think not only do we have to have our programs and prevention and response and accountability and education we have to have a program part of that, where we teach people what to do, not just what they shouldn't do. So I think, I think there's so much there, but I think when commanders are engaged at all levels, when they when they show caring that it's genuine to make a difference in each individual. And then we also take on the responsibility of teaching then I think you can really begin to make a difference. - Yes, sir. I think that's a great point. It feels like we continue to learn that lesson over and over again. And that's, you know, connecting with our airmen has been a huge theme here in COVID, and it has a direct impact on retention and recruiting. If we're creating the family that we want what the air force and our country demands of us, it makes it, it makes it easy for us to continue to grow and develop and become that organization that is there for America. And I think the connection piece for me is really what we're focusing on. And this has been a great opportunity for us to connect with you and for you to help us, you know, talk about this subject and connect with all of our airmen. And we're going to continue to do that a number of forums a number of ways. And I really appreciate the opportunity to spend some time with you and, and to learn from you and be able to see you in video now for history forever, to talk about these same things. And, and the fact that, you are so passionate about it and it's important to you in your life. And just making sure that all great Americans continue to have the opportunity to be great Americans to grow and support this great nation we have - Well, thank you, Rick. I am passionate about it. I'm I mean, I love airmen. I love the air force. I love, I love what we do, and I'm very proud to be an airman. I will make one correction. I'm convinced that the reason that that video among others went totally viral is that I think my mother was the one that was constantly clicking away and increased all the views. Right. So I think, I actually say it's my mother that caused it, you know X number of million. - I don't think so, sir, that was I don't even know how to describe it. I mean, I watched it again and made my kids watch it. I think the way you, the way you dressed it your just from your posture and your language and you could tell it was, it was coming from your heart and you had the entire team there. I thought that was really powerful as well. - And Rick, if I could say one thing about that moment that when it concluded in the end of

the day and we were wrapping up and I left my office and I got in my car and I was, I got in there. I was walking to my car and two cadets past me and said, good evening sir. And I said good evening, you know, I was on my way to my car, but after a long day and one of them turned around and said, Hey, sir. And I turned back around and happened to be African-American. And he said, sir, thank you for that on the Steph tower today. Thank you. And I tell you, Rick, what, whatever I did as a commander whatever I did and whatever on that moment, if one person felt empowered and believed in and cared about and supported in some way, that made a difference. One person, if that young man who said that to me that made a difference than, then that was all absolutely worth it. - Yes, sir. And if our gladiators out there that listening have not seen that video, I encourage you to find it. It's really easy. It's the first one that pops up when you type in Lieutenant General Jay Silveria air force Academy is probably a number of keywords that'll get it there. It's, it's an it's powerful five minute video. And probably the discussion probably was longer than that. But I think what got clipped is about five minutes and it's an outstanding opportunity and demonstration of leadership. - Thank you. Thank you, Rick. - So gladiators if you have been sexually assaulted and need assistance contact the DOD safe helpline at (877) 995-5247. It's anonymous, confidential, and they're open 24/7. Our 55th combat Comms will be recognizing and hosting April's sexual assault awareness and prevention months wing wide activity. So you can subscribe to the 960th cyber spaces cyberspace wing space book page for most up-to-date information on what we have going on. Again, General Silveria. Thank you so much for joining us for these last two episodes of our Sword and Shield podcast. We really appreciate it and hope to talk to you again in the near future. - Thank you very much Francis, thank you very much Rick for what you are doing. Thank you. - Yeah, Thank you, sir for helping us continue the conversation that's important and for all our gladiators out there until we see you next time (Outro Music)