

## Ep. 51: The organizational "Why"

Welcome to Sword and Shield, the official podcast of the 960<sup>th</sup> 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)

Welcome to another episode of the Sword and Shield. I'm Chief Master Sergeant Christopher Howard, 960th COG superintendent, and acting Command Chief for the 960th Cyberspace Wing. And today with me, I have: - Tech Sergeant Recoder Garcia. I work with the 960 COG CSS. - Okay. And, - Tech Sergeant Belinda Ford, and I'm part of the 960th Group CSS, as well. - Awesome, thank you for being here today. Right? A lot of these podcasts start off with a set agenda, a set conversation. And what I think that I'd like to kind of get after today is, we're able to have conversations in the office quite often about what's on your mind. I just kind of wanted to take the opportunity to actually bring that to the rest of the gladiators about some of the things that we discuss. So I didn't know if you had anything in particular, or if we can just kind of pick at anything that's on your, on your mind. - I do have a question, and the question is what kind of culture does the 960th wing have, or what kind of culture are we trying to build and pass down? - Okay. No, I mean, that's a fair question, right? So when we talk about culture, it's, it's an ever-evolving thing, right? You can't have it meld just solid, right? As we have new individuals coming into the, to the wing or to, into the organization, that's going to have different effects. What we're looking for within the 960th cyber wing is really an operational culture, right? So when we talk about operations, it's about having that forward mindset, right? When we look at what Chief Brown brought out with, you know, accelerate, change, or lose, right? We want to develop a, a culture where we're getting inputs across the board from every individual, that individuals feel like they have a seat at the table, and just kind of being able to bring the best to bear. Well, what does that really mean? Right? The idea is that we're going to give everybody an opportunity to succeed. We're going to set expectations. We're going to set goals. Some of them are going to be lofty. Some of they're going to be high, right? But the idea is that with those being out there, that we're going to develop each airman to meet those goals, meet those expectations, while all building each other up, right? We want to build a positive culture. We want to be able to an inclusive culture. We want to have a culture that's going to allow each airman to be the best airman that they can be, and give them the opportunity to succeed. Quite often, we talk about the "why," right? So I'll challenge you with a question of, why did you originally join? - So, I grew up in a military family. My dad was in the Marine Corps. My uncles joined and I have been around that culture ever since I was little. And that was a type of, in the Marine Corps, that type of culture is everybody's a family. You know, everybody was at the house every week. You needed something, somebody was there, and it was just kind of one of those lifestyles that I just couldn't get out of. And it's something that I

wanted to be a part of. So I went through high school, and I knew since day one that I wasn't going to go to college. I was going to wear the uniform. So straight out of high school, I enlisted. And then when I got out, out of my four years active duty, I had torn an ACL and just the physical aspect of what they or what they demand, like the physical part just wasn't gonna work. - Gotcha. - So my dad said, why don't you join the Air Force Reserves? And I'm like, you're right. Why, why not? And it just worked out perfectly because I had a rough time transitioning into the civilian life. It was one of those where you get used to, you know what you're doing, you have a purpose, you know what that purpose is, Monday through Friday. And then when you get out in the civilian world, it's like, what do I do? You have to adjust. And you try to make yourself a schedule and, you know, try to find that purpose. - Right. - So when I came back into the Air Force, it was like, okay, I know my purpose. I know what I'm supposed to do. And it's like, I belong. This is, this is where I belong. - Okay, awesome. What about you, Sergeant Ford? - I think mine is almost similar to hers. All my cousins were military. Most of them like Army Rangers, or some part of another branch of service and they were all males. So my thought process was, hey, I'm a female. Females can do whatever males can do. So I waited till my daughter's old enough to understand, hey, Mommy's leaving, but Mommy's coming back as well. But I just want to show her that whatever you put your mind to, females can do just as well as males can do. - Right. No, I mean, right. Set that example, and have that driving "why." Right? So the next piece really comes to, you know, what we originally started with is might not be the same reason why we still serve. I know that when I came in in the nineties, the big push was, everybody wanted to come in for the college education. Well then, 9/11 happens. Right. So then you see that shift. And I think that that shift doesn't just change, doesn't just change with the timeline, but with each individual, right? You've re-enlisted more than once at this point, correct? - Yes sir. - So every time you reaffirm that oath, every time you re-enlist, you have to do that gut check again, right? And what are some of the things that you think about during that gut check of why? So we'll start with you, Sergeant Ford. - I think my main reason the why is because I'm serving my country, number one. It makes me feel like I have a sense of purpose just helping other airmen develop and build in the military as well. So my daughter, she sees what I'm doing, knows like, hey, if I go to school first, and then if I want to go into the military, I can become officer first and then, you know, get a better education while in the military as well. So I think it just, it's just like a tumbling block. It keeps tumbling. So if I show her what I can do, she can show others, and her peers like, hey my mom did this, and I'm going to try this cause my mom did. So it's just like a domino effect. If you help one person, they can help someone else. - Okay. What are some of the things that you consider when you re-enlist? - Kind of along the same lines. You know, me and Sergeant Ford have kind of the same thought process on it. Mine is, you know, my first re-enlistment with the Air Force. It was, I was kind of debating, I had a little rocky start, but then you find that mentor and then that mentor kind of gives you like a second chance. Right? And you're like, okay, you know, I can do this. I have a purpose. I am able to move forward in my career. And I'm, you know, I'm kind of good at it. And not only that, but being able to help the new airmen develop, and have them understand, I guess, the core values that the Air Force has. But not only

the, the core values of the Air Force, but I think it's important to know the core values of all branches, because everything ends up intertwining. - Right. - And I enjoy mentoring airmen. I enjoy helping the airmen out because that's something that I didn't have. But at the same time, I have a different thought process. At the same time it's, with mentoring, I'm still going to be strict. I'm going to still be stern. I'm going to hold them to the core values and everything that the Air Force represents. - Right. No, I think you kind of hit on a good point, and, that I want to pull on is, you know, when we're going through that process and thinking, okay, do I want to stay, do I want to go, do I want to continue to do this? Quite often, it comes down to that relationship with that mentor or that supervisor or that organization and understanding, you know, where you fit in that. So, I mean, would you say that mentors are very important to that decision making process? - I will say yes, because when I first enlisted in my first enlistment, I didn't have a mentor and I just felt kind of lost, didn't know if I want to be in or not. But once I found a mentor and he talked to me, he kind of guided me in the right direction on the path I need to take as far as for my career, go back to school, what classes I need to take and all that, I felt like I had a sense of purpose, and someone cared about me and my career and where I was going. - Gotcha. What about you? - Mentors are very important. I view being engaged with the airmen and understanding where they're coming from and what they're going through is super important because then that shows them that we're building that culture of, we care. We're one team, one fight. We're a family, regardless when you're wearing the uniform or you're in your civilian attire. One of the rough patches that I had was, I had gotten my gallbladder removed one month. The next month I had a motorcycle accident, and not one point when I was home and doing, you know, the regular TR duty, did my supervisor ask, Hey, how is it going? How are you doing? And of course, new to the Air Force, I didn't know that I had to submit my paperwork to medical or see medical. Well, guess what? I end up failing the PT test. - Gotcha. - And it was just one of those things. It's like, well, why did you fail? And I was like, well, I had all these things. He goes, why didn't you tell me? And I was like, how, how should I know? You know, you're not engaged, so. - Right. No. Yeah. So that, that, that relationship, right, as a supervisor. And now that you're both supervisors, right? Being involved, being engaged, you know, I guess the term that's been coined recently, used a little bit more often is intrusive leadership, especially during COVID, right? You know, that's a good example of where if as a supervisor, as a mentor, because they're two different people, in most cases, and it can be the same in other instances, if we're actually asking, hey, how are you really doing? How are things really going with your family, right? And how are things just evolving in your life? If we're seeing engaged intrusive, then we can make that positive impact. Right? It goes back to the culture, you know, what kind of culture do you want to be part of? You mentioned family, you know, we mentioned about someone that, that seemed genuinely engaged in caring about your, your career, Sergeant Ford. So if we kind of look at that, and look at what the culture is, what are other things that we wanted to develop in, in those relationships? What are the other pieces that you think that we need to bring to our, - I think we need to, need to build the airmen up a little bit more. As far as understanding it's okay to get knocked down. It's okay that you're going to be told "no." It's okay that when it comes to

promotion, promotion is earned, and we go that route. It's not trying to be mean, but it's just one of those things where we're at, where are you at professionally, like work-wise, how are you being developed? Right? - So it goes back to goals and expectations. - Goals and expectations, and it's also, I guess it goes back to why, why are you here? Right. Cause as far as me, you know I want to know what I'm doing wrong. And if I'm doing something wrong, I expect, you know, my supervisor to be like, hey, this is what you're doing. This is what I need you to do. And it's always good; yes it's good having that mentor. But at the same time you need to take a time, take some time and reflect, and see what are you doing to advance your career? What are you doing to try to move forward? Because this is, you know, like you said, chief, some people's "why's" are different. - Right. - So are you here just from a nine to five, or are you here because you truly want to be here, and make the organization better? And I think that's something that we also need to take, like we need to bring down to the airmen is, it's okay that you're going to get knocked down. - Are you going to stall out? - Are you going to stall out, and how are you going to get back up and prevail? How are you going to beat this? - Right. - And with that, I think that builds the person. And I, we'll have, I believe, a better force, moving that way. You know, with the new generation coming in, you know, as a generation Y, I guess that's what they say, which it's okay to ask questions, but at the same time, it's we, or I, you know, teach my airmen is, I'm going to give you a task, but I want you to ask yourself why is she giving me this task? And I want you to kind of think through the process. And I want you to start thinking of, okay, it's probably because A, B and C, and if you want clarification, and if you're thinking, you know, or if you're still not understanding, then come and ask me. But it's like that critical thinking aspect is what we need to start getting the airmen to do as well. - Right, and I think that, you know, really, if we set the tone early, intro program for, for instance, or the first few weeks or months of a TR coming in, or a new staff member, explaining the organizational "why." Right? Why is this unit here? Why are we doing this particular mission, right? So when we talk about the 960th cyber wing specifically, when we look at what we're charged with, with having six different weapons systems within the Air Force, right, we're the only cyber wing that has all six of those weapons systems. So when it comes down to the individual airmen in each one of those locations, and any work center, right, throughout the whole enterprise of, why are we here? You know, we, we take the why of the individual. Right? Well, you know, like for instance, Airman Howard came in because I was always told that, you know, the only way to kind of progress in life was to join the military, learn electronics, serve your country, and then retire, and you do something else. Right. So that's, that's what I was told at 12, 12 years old. And then you take that and you put it into if we tell them as supervisors and as mentors that, okay, so, why is the 960th so important? And then let's drill it down to why is the 960th COG so important? And why is unit X, Y, and Z so important? Why is the work center so important? And it comes down to that each one of us has a key role, right? A lot of individuals have spent a lot of time figuring out how many people we need to do each mission. How many people we need to have in each one of these locations, what ranks, what skillsets, for the ultimate end goal is, that we're going to put warheads on foreheads. Right? So how do we get there? From a cyber perspective, you guys are both Re-FOS,

correct? - Yes. - Yes. Right. So it's one of the, the forgotten AFSCs that makes everything happen, across all the Air Force. So how often are you two told that, if it's not for you, I can't get this warhead on that forehead? And let me explain to you why that's important and how you actually do that. Right? So let's take an actual order for example. The fact that you may process this order you're validating that everything's good on it. You're putting it in this system. It gets loaded in the system. That generates a chain of events that we have. An airman called the orders, right? So they come on, now they're in status, which is important for their particular job. The pay cycle happens. So that airmen gets paid. Okay. If they're traveling to locations, that gets everything put into place. So now I have one of the biggest weapons systems in place. I have my airman. All right? And that all starts with you. Now that airman then is able to, let's say, load that bomb onto an aircraft, or in our case for cyber, what they're going to do is going to sit on console, right? They're going to get up on that console. And they're going to make sure that we have our perimeter, our cyber perimeter, defended. We're going to make sure no one can see what we're doing and make sure we have complete access and control of our domain. But that allows us now that the orders that get generated for that aircraft to be executed gets put in place. Okay? So the president says, I want warhead on that forehead, go. That kill chain goes down. That gets ordered. But because you put that order into place, now that airman's in place. So that information gets from point A to point B. The next person gets spun up. That warhead gets put on that aircraft, that aircraft launches, that pilot pulls the trigger, that bomb hits, mission accomplished, right? And brings it all home. And that's every single time. And we could take that for just about every AFSC. But if we don't take the time, and make the effort to tell our airman, that's why you're here on a UTA. That's what you're learning today. Right? UTAPS, again, another one of those things. If I don't pay you, you're not here. If I don't take care of you, you won't stay. All of the parts and pieces that come into place. And the explaining that to them on a regular basis is that baseline for the culture. So that first question that we asked is, if we're taking care of the biggest weapon system here, which is our airman, and we're being great stewards of the, of those resources as supervisors and mentors, we're giving each one of those individuals a purpose with their own why, whether you came in because this is what I believed in, and serving my country, whether you're following that family history, or just because I have a sense of purpose to be here, or even starting the education. I don't know, what do you guys think? - Yeah, I see your point chief. I think that's why it's very important for us to do the ACAs. That's how I learned like, what, what are your goals? Why are you here? That's why, that's how we answer ask and answer all the questions as to what they're here for, and what they're expecting to get out of this. So, - Right. - I think that's where it starts doing, when we initially get them, sit down with them, see what, see what their goals are, see what they need, then see what, see what we need to get the mission going as a unit whole. - Right, and as a supervisor, I would ask you, is that easy? - It's not easy. You know, diversity is like, one person can be of this culture, or you can think this way, but it's always good to be open-minded, and listen to what they have to say, even if you don't agree with what they have to say, listen to it, be open-minded and say, Hey, I don't agree with what you say, but I hear what you're saying, type of deal. - Right. What do you think?

- I thought I was just a paper pusher. (Chief Howard laughs) - Gotcha. But you're a great paper pusher. - Thanks, yeah, I almost got caught in the shredder the other day, but it's okay. - That's how accidents happen. Next thing you know, your line badge is sucked in and you're like, no! But that's all right. - No, she's right. You know, it's doing the initial ACA and it's also just taking the time to get to know your airmen. It's caring, cause honestly, at the end of the day, not everybody is meant to be an NCO, and not everybody's meant to be a mentor. - Right. - And that is okay. It's not easy, but it's just, bottom line it's, who are you here for? - Right. - What do you want to accomplish, and what do you want to leave behind? - Right. - And with me it's, I want to leave behind a force, you know, that is strong. I want my airmen to be strong. I want them to be able to accomplish anything that they set their minds to. And if they get a little kickback then they're going to be okay, you know, and ram through that door. And that's what I tell my airmen. I want you to be better than everybody else in the room. And I don't, and that's what you're going to do, one way or another. Because when I'm gone, who says that you're going to get somebody like me? You're going to get somebody different. You're going to move to a different unit. How are you going to fit in? How are you going to manage the stress load? How are you going to be able to accomplish the mission? You know? And I, I want them to be able to do it without any questions asked. - Yeah, right. And the why comes down to, because we're family, right? You know, it goes back to the culture. We all wear this uniform, right? And this, we're here for a purpose. Some of it's personally driven. Some of it's organizationally driven. But ultimately what it comes down to is that everything else aside, we are in arms, and we are here to defend our country and take care of one another. And more often than not, when we decide to stay, it's because of the relationship I have with you, and the relationship I have with you, and everybody else, that I promise that I've got your six, Sergeant Garcia. I promise I've got your six, Sergeant Ford. And then that's the piece that keeps us moving forward, right? - So how do we push that down so everybody's on the same page? - That's where it comes down to you, right? As the first-line supervisor. And the shameless plug is you as the president of the Rising Six. So you have the challenge, right, of getting this, this message out to the area. - My question is, it is our duties as NCOs, - Right. - So when we do make those hard decisions, is senior leadership on the same page to back up the decisions the NCOs make? And, and the reason I ask, - Okay. - Is because, you know, we're in the culture of kind of, why. You know, some airmen, yeah, some airmen, regardless of rank, sometimes don't like the answer that is given. - Right. - And it's like, then they go around the train and be like, well, I was told no for this. Or I was told no for that. Or she, you know, whatever it may be. So how do we develop this culture in a way to where it's actually going to move along? And NCOs and senior NCOs are on the same page. - Transparency and consistency. Right? So if, to answer the question directly, are you going to get support from senior NCOs and senior leadership officers alike? Ultimately, it's going to be yes, but there's always a "depends." What if you're wrong? Right? If you're wrong, then there has to be a different kind of conversation. It goes down to, again, expectations, goals. If we set expectations and we set the guidelines you're complying within those guidelines, and then you're executing your mission appropriately, and that you're being transparent, and you're being clear and you're communicating then you're

gonna have that support. Now, if you run in the door and just start screaming and throwing things at people, that's not really what's within good order and discipline, right? But if you've given an airman, hey, here's what I want from you. Here's the expectation. I've trained them. I've given them the opportunity to excel. They did not excel. Okay. I counseled them. I developed them again. I gave them the opportunity and they got to the no, and it just wasn't there. Well, sometimes that is, they're just going to go around. It happens, happens all the time. Happens to me, happens to everybody at one point or another, if not consistently. But what it comes down to, if you as a supervisor, as a leader, as a mentor, are consistent, and you're transparent and you're communicating, and you're actually doing what you're supposed to be doing, then it doesn't matter if they go around you. You're going to have that support. Right? Unless of course, it's something completely wrong. Right? But if you were consistent and you were doing something legal and just moral, and nothing unethical, everything tends to be just fine. Right? We're going to have differences and there's going to have to be some give and take, some people's feelings will get hurt. You hurt my feelings on a regular basis. - Obviously I'm sorry. - I'm just joking. No, I'm joking know, but you have to take a little bit of levity to it. The idea is that, yes, but if we're, if we're honest and we're genuine, and we did do the efforts, that it does come into play. Okay. So I think to answer the question, yes, you'd have the support with that in mind. - And it has a lot to do with trust too. As long as you have that great communication in your chain, you feel like you can just that those people in your chain, the process will go way much smoother. So it's all about learning the airmen and knowing how they operate too. - Well, just like anything, right? You, we end up kind of really getting into the, these subjects and it's always a great conversation, but there are things that we also have to get after, so, Awesome. Well, I want to tell you guys, thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to chat with you guys. Thank you for sharing your guys' views, right? This is a, this can be kind of nerve-wracking. So the fact that you guys were willing to do this and sit down and talk to me, I greatly appreciate it. I hope that your fellow gladiators out there actually appreciate it as well. Again, you know, we're just trying to get some insight, looking forward to more of these conversations down the road. I want to tell the gladiators out there. Thank you for your time. Thank you for your service. Thank you for your dedication, and keep on stabbing the enemy in the face through cyberspace. - That's cute, that rhymed. (Electronic music)