

Ep. 3: Enlisted Development

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Welcome to Episode 3 of the Sword and Shield Podcast. I'm Col. Rick Erredge and today I'm joined by... - Chief Master Sgt. Chris Howard. - Thanks Chief, and I'm glad to be back with you again I have our next discussion. - Same here, sir. - Well, we're getting some great feedback out there. Keep it coming. And we wanted to spend some more time and do another episode on the final points of development and promotion that we talked about last episode. And we're going to try something new here. We're gonna use a keyword somewhere within this podcast, and once you hear that, you'll have instructions on what to do with that keyword, and we're just gonna do a random drawing of all the people that successfully follow the instructions and have the right keyword. And we'll draw someone that's gonna be able to get a two-hour pass to use on UTA, subject to your supervisor's approval still, you can't flash it like a Monopoly get-out-of-jail card, but it will be an opportunity for somebody to listen the podcast and hopefully enjoy it and then get an opportunity to be incentivized and rewarded for it. - I think that sounds exciting sir. - That's excellent. All right, so we're going to jump right into it here. I know we talked a lot about the nuts and bolts last episode about enlisted promotion, and you can find a lot of those rules and information in the AFI. We're gonna talk more of the final points, and some of the expectations that we think that really help people be prepared and be ready when it's your time. - Right, and I think setting expectations in the beginning, much like when we were talking about a performance report cycle, is very important. You know, we use ACAs, but even when we're talking about development, leadership and supervisors really need to lay out what some of those expectations are. So it kinda leads me to... What are some of your expectations sir, of your senior enlisted leadership? - Yeah, great question, and I think I'm going to talk about it in general terms. I expect the same things from our enlisted leaders as I do our officers, and our civilian employees as well. And first and foremost, again, we talked a little bit about last time, but it's performance, right? The reason we're here is to do a mission, and that mission is performing. And under that performance umbrella there's a lot of different things, and that includes being a good teammate. - Right - And being a leader, to lead at your level. It's really important to find a way to lead, and sometimes leading is by following too, and getting out of the way. - Yes sir. - I expect folks to take initiative, find opportunities to improve processes and innovate, and hopefully you're given enough space to do that. And we're really working on that, and trying to change the culture in the Air Force to be more receptive to risk taking and, frankly, just we should be allowed to fail and pick up pieces and put it back together and try different. - Yes sir, I mean, yeah. I think that's

a key piece there, right? We talk about failure, and you know, our arena, we don't like to use the term failure, right? We can make mistakes and we can learn from them, but we want to give enough space that we can control what that looks like, as well as making sure that we recover quickly, right? Some of the issues is just fail and forget is just a complete failure. An idea that doesn't meet the mark, which can be considered a failure, but we learn from it and are able to move past it and take that feedback to improve the process or improve the action. That's not a true failure. That's a learning point, right? - Yeah, and I think it's exciting too, as I'm hearing our senior leaders talk about risk taking and allowing us to have that space to do that. So I think we need to continue to push that and try to change that culture to make us more an effective fighting force. - Yes sir. A lot of times when I was growing up as a young enlisted member, I heard the term fire-and-forget-type of airman, right? And we've used the term in a number of things. And what does that really mean in this kind of context? Lotta times as leaders, we want an end result. So I want X, I want Y, I want Z. And a fire-and-forget airman is one of those individuals, I can give you what that end result is what I'm looking for, and you off and conquer it. You're going to have those trials and tribulations. You may fail at an option. You may be able to learn from a couple of pieces, but I'm not breaking it down and giving you every single step. I'm not laying it out to the point where I'm basically doing it for you. I'm giving you the end result. You're going out and conquering. That's that risk space, right? That's the decision-making space that we're talking about. - Yeah, that's a great point. And I think there's different levels of failure in times, right? And as a supervisor, we expect you to engage, understand when there's more space and more risk to be taken by somebody, and really letting them do the job and just letting them figure out how to do it and meeting your intent. And there's other times, when we deal with people, we probably need to be a little tighter with what we're doing to make sure there's less risk to be taken there when we're talking about managing people and families. We gotta be a little closer with what's going on. - Right, no great point. You know, one of the things that I always keep with me personally is I actually failed my CDCs the first time I tested, and my commander brought me in and said, "Chris, it looks like you dropped the ball," right? "What happened? We talked about some of the situations at the time. And he goes, you know what, "I'm gonna dust you off, "I'm gonna hand you the football "and I want you to take it across the goal line". And that was, that was inspirational to me, right? You know, here I am expecting as a young airman. I just, I failed at my job because my job was to prepare for that CDC test it was to learn my jobs skill set, and here's an indicator that I just could not do it. And my commander didn't chew me out. He didn't, you know, beat me up about it. He already could see that I was beating myself up about it. So he picked me up, dusted me off. And handled the ball told me to go on. So you know, we all go through it sir. - And we all have those opportunities to excel is what I was always told as Lieutenant captain. - Yes, sir. - And gain different grades, different expectations. Different experiences different expectations. And as a supervisor and a leader, we expect you to kind of be engaged in those folk's lives and understand when they need more and less. Well, that's a big, that's a big expectation I talked about. And finally, I'll leave you with, I really believe there's only two things in life you can control. And that is your attitude and your effort. - Sure. - And then that equals

performance. So if you have a great attitude, and you work really hard at it, great things are going to happen. And that means you're using the people around you using your resources that you have. And if you don't have those people or resources around you that you need, the expectation again, is the seek help and try to find those resources and use the tools systems and institutional processes that we have in order to do that. - Yes sir. - So I'd like to shift gears now and ask you a question. Last time, we talked a lot of professional things, but let's talk a little bit about on the personal development side. When's the right time to apply for PME? Unlisted PME specifically. - Yes sir. So, you know, there's a couple of schools of thought, when we're looking at this, the timelines really are fairly short between, one rank to the next rank, right? Predominantly two years to 18 months. A lot of the PME cycles when we talk about correspondence can take up to 18 months. The longer you forego signing up for that PME only extends out your capability of potentially promoting. When you move into a staff sergeant role and then detect certain role. Have you completed NCUA? You really want to focus on getting to that fairly quickly, right? Maybe not the first day that you put on that stripe. But within a couple of months, I would say is the prime window. Get the stripe on, get yourself settled. Get your head wrapped around your new role, your new learned responsibilities. And then step forward and take on the PME. Two reasons. One is the timelines, you don't want to be your own worst enemy by not completing it. And then eliminate a potential promotion, or at least a potential opportunity for promotion. You know, one of the other pieces of that is, is if we get it done fairly quickly, and we hit that window, let's say that you walked in the door, you've knocked out in CLA within the for... You've signed up in the first couple months of being a tech Sergeant, or Staff Sergeant and you're ready to go. And then you meet the gates for time and grade time and service. It doesn't mean poof, I'm ready for the next rank right? But getting to the PME early does two things for you. It helps develop you as far as the theoretical side of leadership of that tier of those ranks. And then it also tells leadership that you're serious about your professional military career. And that you're putting forth the effort and the education that's been set out in front of you. Senior NCOA is a big one, right? That tends to be one of most... The biggest laggards that we have within the enlisted promotion cycle. And people could wait two, five years sometimes. And that it depends on the personal side of the house, but what it really does is it starts to stifle some of those opportunities. Past Master, right? When you're looking for that senior strike, just not going to have those opportunities without actually having senior NCOA done. The other drawback is there's some myths out there that In Residence is better than by correspondence. There are some good arguments to be made, that In Residence is a better from a networking capability, and applicable application from the school itself, that it may be a little bit easier in some cases. But the reality is, is that you get some tangible items out of it. But by waiting because of the cycle and the availabilities of seats, you're actually doing yourself a disservice by waiting too long. What I personally advocate to my enlisted airmen is I want you to do the correspondence so that we can get that taken care of right? That doesn't mean I cannot fight for a seat for you to do it in - Residence as well. Double Down, learn a little bit more, get take the opportunity to one actually go to the class, but don't put yourself behind able or at a disadvantage

by not completing it. - I think that's great... Great advice. When I was young captain, Lieutenant Colonel Glenn Weaver told me how come I hadn't applied for SOS by correspondence yet, and I like he just pinned me on like a month and I wasn't even thinking about it. - Right. - But what that taught me was, you never know what's going to happen. You should always be prepared for every door. That's going to open and by taking care of your PME, early and often, then you know that you're ready. Maybe you're not personally ready, but somebody maybe thinks you're ready and they're ready to push you. And maybe you don't think you... You're going to pursue something in the future, maybe life's changes. I had one very good friend of mine who was going to retire as Lieutenant Colonel AGR wasn't gonna do his Air War college, happily married daughter was gonna get ready to graduate high school ends up in a divorce situation. Now he wants to try to make go six doesn't have enough time to do his Air War college daughter says I'm going to college out of state. So there's no reason for him to stay there. He put himself in a position where he didn't have the flexibility to continue his career. And that's what I want to tell our enlisted folks to is enrolling your PME right away, knock it out, get it done. And if you believe and leadership thinks that that experience in residence is really important for you then do both. - Right? - I mean, I did them both. I did SOS correspondence, and In Residence, and I did senior development education, correspondence and residence and they were completely different experiences for me and I learned in both environments. - Now I completely understand. I think COVID is a good example of why waiting for those opportunities is problematic as well. You know, if we were waiting for courses, all these courses start going away. We're having to put in waivers for people to actually execute or to be able to promote because they weren't able to take the test. You know, if we wait too long, you don't know what the environment is going to change up. I hate to make it seem like it's box checking, because it's not. It's something that you're definitely going to learn from. But without having that that opportunity could be very distance. And in certain cases that we can all come up with an example of where one of our stellar airman I was ready to move them forward, and I just couldn't because they didn't have it done. And now that they're not even enrolled, so this window where I can hire for this position may only be for a month, you're not going to get senior NCOA knocked out in a month. I mean, you might, but you're really not learning. You're cramming, right? And you're trying to do your best and I don't advocate for that by any means. But that's almost a bridge too far in most cases. - Yeah, I agree. I mean, make sure you're ready as an individual. And then and I think you... Should bring up a good point about the box checking. And we hear that a lot on the officer side. The institution believes that PMEs important. - Yes. So we believe PME is important. And we believe that you do learn things from it whether, you know, I know air War College for me was super painful. But when I went In Residence I reached back on that, on that learning that I had and was able to pull that forward into what I'm doing now. - Right know and when I can bring up a number of examples where... When talk about inclination in PME Specifically, I've leveraged to the matrix that I was taught in ALS and NCAA and senior NCO number times of where they are sitting as far as those boxes, right? Are they inclined? Are they knowledgeable? Are they engaged? You know, and what kind of skill set as a leader I have to use, whether it's

coaching, whether it's, you know, being more demanding as a leader. - Alright, so I'm gonna... We're going to take a quick shift gears here and our public affairs officer Samantha is going to share with you the key word for us, too... So here's what we need you to do. And Sam is going to tell you. Sam over to you. Thanks Colonel Erredge. So what y'all are going to do is you're going to submit the key word which is "Gladiator", to the 960th Government or box, which that email address is 960cw.pa.pa@us.af.mil. That email address is in the global if you just look for 960 CW/PA, it should come right up. The other way you can submit for the keyword is to go to the AF Connect app. So if you add 968 as a favorite, you can go to the function called share your thoughts, make sure you filled fill in the optional blocks just because we need to know who you are so you can get your reward. And also missions are due by Sunday of the July UTA. So that means I will take submissions up till midnight. Thank you and back to you, Colonel Eric and chief Howard. - And then we're going to do a random drawing for everybody that answered the keyword correctly and then we'll share that we'll share that with everybody about who the winner was. And then you can present that to our past to your supervisor to use at your you and your supervisors discretion. - Awesome. And if I can I want to take a moment to thank Sam has been our audio engineer and having to Kind of listen to us on a regular basis. She makes a lot of this happen for us. So thank you, Sam. And thanks for being part of this. - And producer, and executive producer and editor and - director, director. And as we do as we walk in here, sit down and start talking and we get up and leave and she makes all the magic happen. So, chief for reaching towards the end of the podcast again, but I do want to address one other topic and I want your thoughts on where some of our enlisted folks should think about fitting in their civilian education and or how the CCF kind of fits into their overall personal and professional development. - Right. So over the years, we've had a back and forth when it comes to the CCAF specifically, right? Why is it important? Why is it not important? How does that rack and stack with the civilian education where I already have a bachelor's already have a Master's Why do I need to CCF the mentorship that I always got over the years was the CCF is not about the education. I mean, it's partially about education. That's why it's accredited. That's why, you know, our universities spend so much time with it. But it's also specifically meant that you're taking the time to add a little bit of education towards your career. Each one of those CCF that you receive is based on your AFSC and that skill set. So the CCF is really about taking the time to refine your knowledge in your career field and be part of a little bit more of moving the ball in that particular arena and being that SME where that rolls in with your civilian education is also a starting point for a young airman who might not... Have decided to go to college right out the gate for whatever reason, personal, financial, whatever it is. At least it gets you the starter road, right so it's kind of like gateway drag towards a civilian education, as they would say. It's supposed to spur the idea and the love of knowledge. You know, the Air Force really encapsulates the fact that we want to be very knowledgeable. We want to be highly technical. And one of the ways that we can use that in the continuum of education and learning is not just the OJT not just a hands on piece, not just the CFETP items that we have to learn. But then on top of that, the Extended Learning for critical thinking, when we talk about college, why is college important? It comes to the

critical thinking piece, right? We teach very technical skill sets, we teach very checklist oriented skill sets, and we teach individuals to know what's in this book by doing an a multiset classroom environment or some of these other things required with the CCF and then into your bachelor's and master's degrees and doctorates for some of those EAs that critical thinking a little bit to correlate multiple items from different genres and put it all together. - Yeah, that's great. And I really do believe that, that everybody takes their own path. And that path is completely fine, right? They need to find what works for them. And when the right time is for them and their life and it's going to be different for everybody, but the continuum of learning you talked about is really important. And clearly what we're expecting our airmen today is much different than when I joined the Air Force 26 years ago, it was just, you know, get your CCS, get your upgrade training, and then get CCF - Right That was it. - Right. It was kind of almost box checking And then as we transition from old school performance and old school thought, on that well rounded airman, the whole airman concept really comes into play. And that's where the CCF thought process and the learning continuum has changed. We're no longer just about a box. Here's the minimums. The idea is consistency in the continuum of learning there, sir. - And the other thing that you that you nailed I think is really, really important is that Critical thinking. - Yes sir. - And we're so lean right now. And so many people are the one program manager or the ones SME for their program that we expect people to think really hard about it and apply problem solving techniques and tools. And you get a lot of that. And you get that broad education through a number of venues and some of that CCF some of that is personal experience. Some of that is your mentoring. And some of that is some civilian education. - Sure - In our institution is set up to really support people with tuition assistance. And right now too, there's a number of organizations that are doing scholarships for military people and there's a lot of resources out there for people that maybe want to do it but have different roadblocks, - Right. Well, there's different programs, scholarships, like I said, Air Force school. There's ways of testing out based on your CFETP as well. Some of it requires some of your own money, but there's a lot of free teaching out there. LinkedIn is another example of some places and there's a number of certifications especially in cyber not just from a cyber perspective but leadership and development human resources for leaders. It's an, it's almost like the wild wild west of opportunities out there you know. - It's really great right now there's tons of those opportunities and kind of wrap it all up I guess my final expectation is that we expect people to invest in themselves in some of that is through what the institution or the Air Force provides. And some of that is personal development and finding their way and we really want to encourage that and especially as traditional reservists we don't have touch points with everybody all the time. And so trying to keep people engaged on investing themselves, you know, physically and mentally through any of these avenues is really important in their development and really shows well rounded you know, whole airman. - Yes sir, and the commitment to the mission and commitment to themselves. - And I think the more educated you are, the better the organization gets and becomes and it can Stay focused on really mission accomplishment. - Yes sir. - All right Chief, do you have any... I'm going to leave you with final parts for this. - Copy I'd like to leave it with is remember that

this is a continuum, right? And it's not linear. It's not one path. It's not one-way, it's not going to be the same for everybody. We all have our own story. We all have our own pathway. And we're going to have to take different forks in the road to get to where we're going to get to in the end, right? Sometimes it's about balancing what your goal is with what the unit's goal or the air force goal for you. A lot of times you can find correlations there to get to where you want to be. But don't be afraid, right? Talk to a mentor, talk to your leadership. Talk to your friend about some of the options you might have, and find what pathway works best for you, your family, and then coincides with what your goals might be militarily. So that's all I have, sir. - All right. Excellent. We'll be back with episode four next week - And I look forward to it, Sir (soft music)