

## Ep. 30: It's a new year for the wing!

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Welcome back to the Sword and Shield podcast. I'm Colonel Rick Erredge. - And I'm Chief Master Sergeant Chris Howard. - Hey, Chief, are you ready for the holidays? - I'm definitely ready for the holidays, right? So, when we talk about spending that time with the family, just taking a few deep breaths and being able to reflect upon the year, I definitely look forward to it, sir, yourself? - Yeah, I am too, in this way or after the holidays, so I'm sure that we had a wonderful holiday in the Erredge household. So, I'm predicting it. - (Laughs) Gotcha. I don't disagree with you, right, I already know that there's gonna be a little bit of angst, but there's gonna be more joy than anything else, and, you know, then we get to start looking forward to next year, right? - Absolutely, yeah. So, it would be good here to take a deep breath and start to look forward to what's going to be coming in 2021, and there's a lot of optimism. I know it's maybe hard for some folks to see, but I think, going forward in the next year, you know, we've got plenty of things out that we're thinking about that we want to accomplish. - Yes, sir, definitely, right? It's much like a performance report period, right? You know, when we look at the calendar year, we get to snap that line again and start fresh, right? And I think that that really opens up the door to conversations about what we're looking forward to and what we kind of expect from our airmen. - Yeah, expectation management is always something that's really important, and I always think about it, in any context and not just when we deal with airman, but what do I expect over the next year? And I kind of think in one year chunks, and I think about when I need to do my performance feedbacks with my members when their OPRs are due, or people moving, any decorations that are earned. So, I kind of take a look at that, and then think a lot about our, and then our performance review process with the civilians as well comes up in April. So, when I think about, did people meet expectations, I turn around and look at myself and go, did I set clear and consistent expectations for folks that they can meet? - Right, yes, sir. Right, we set those expectations, we start laying out the calendar for the year, we start looking at what our goals are for the year, and then also kind of aligning them with those appraisals and those conversations of, this is what I would like you to get after, this is what I'm hoping to see, and then we open the door, right? From an enterprise, the good thing about the new calendar year, we get into things like step two, so we start building up those packages, knowing that they're not due till June, but we here at the Wing, you know, with Chief Bischoff's guidance, it's helped us devise a plan where we start looking at them in January, and we take a methodical approach through the whole package to be competitive through June, and then we talk about some of the things coming up, all of the DT boards coming up with My Vector changes, right? So, R-EDPs used to be through myPers. Now we're talking

about how we're going to get those veterans through My Vector and hitting some of those boards for not only the AFSC, but the key billets, with E9 boards being split this year versus last year. - Yep, the officer DT is also going to be in My Vector, so it'll be interesting to see how that works. For those of you, there's probably only a few out there that've been part of the DT process from the board angle, and we're using an access database that's super large. It's a little bit unstable. - Cumbersome. - There's a lot of work that goes into prepping that, and now this My Vector tool is really gonna take a lot of the work off the staff and have that process available throughout the year so that we can mentor people, not just that board time, or not just that DT time, but all throughout the year. And so, I'm looking forward to how that's going to work and set up some new expectations with people about how we use that tool. - Yes, sir, and that goes right into one of the priorities that you set for this year, right? Some of the outcome from that that spans both, or all the way through priority one through priority three in that talent management and airmen development, we've looked at where the Air Force is going with My Vector. We will see more guidance coming out to our airmen about how the Wing specifically is going to leverage on My Vector for an individual, and how we're going to be able to invest in our airmen through that program across the board, right? So, one of the biggest problems of developing airmen in a Wing like this is the fact that we're geographically separated so far. So, how do we make those touch points, you know, with Chief Bischoff or, you know, Chief Sawyer or myself at the groups of how are we going to put all that stuff together, and My Vector comes into play. And that's where I'd like to set that first expectation to the airmen out there, is invest in you, get to learn My Vector. Understand that there's some intuitiveness to it, as when we talk about software programs, but there's a lot of things, the nuances, that you're going to have to learn. Get in there, get involved, look at it, ask questions, but then actually find that mentor, put that information in, and that guidance at how we're gonna handle it with the group in the Wings will come out here in the near future. - Yeah, I'm looking forward to that, doing some more deliberate mentoring. One thing that, you know, you and me and Chief Bischoff and the other old sixes and chiefs always hear is more mentoring, more mentoring, and I think how people think about that is all different. And so, if we can rally around a tool like this that's going to be launched and use it in a number of different ways that it will really help us be more deliberate with our mentoring tool. And it doesn't mean your supervisor has to be your mentor, I think you can reach across to anybody and use My Vector tool to contact them and get some mentoring. And personally, myself, I use a couple of different people for ideas inside and outside the Air Force, people that I've run across in my life that give me just another data point to think about something else or a question that I may have. - Correct, you know, a big differentiator between R-EDP and Myers, you could still have a mentor, you know, go back and forth one at a time. With My Vector, it's, I can ask for multiple mentors to look at my information and provide me feedback in a timely manner, so that speeds up that process, and then helps you get a little bit more 360 degree view, right? If we're talking about development and critical thinking about ourselves and how we lead, it opens the door for a lot more input and feedback to where are we successful, where do we need to grow. The argument that comes back from a lot of these things is that, you

know, when provided some of that guidance and provided some of that feedback, especially from leadership, how are you taking that, and then, how are you moving forward on that? - Now, there's a lot of opportunity there for you to get some data points, not to get people to agree with you and get them to understand the way you think, right? You're looking for other points of view. - Yep. - And then, I think, getting a wide group of people to take a look at that at different levels and organizations is helpful, again, to help you make some decisions. And we know that being a reservist is hard, especially traditional reservists, just trying to balance those things, and I know I've talked before about it. It's not a balance, it's more about what can you deal with at any one point, your civilian job, your family, it all kind of ebbs and flows over time. And I think finding some of those mentors that had similar experiences or had different experiences can help you make some of those personal decisions to help guide you. I mean, I had a conversation last night with an officer outside of the Wing that I've known for a really long time. He posed some really hard questions to me, and, you know, I think it helps me think through too what I'm talking to about people and about my experiences, and helps shape my thoughts. So, it's not only good just for the mentee, but it's good for the mentor as well. - Right, no, agreed, and I challenge going across all tiers, right? So, for the chiefs out there, ask an airman to look at yours and be your mentor. Hey, what are you seeing from your perspective from me, right, or what do you see that I could do better, and where can I engage, at the NCO, senior NCO, other chiefs, you know, officers across that board to kind of see, where are you fitting within your organization, how are you affecting your organization, and then, how can you communicate more effectively, right? We're not looking for popularity, what we're looking for are results, right? We're looking for individuals to be able to take some feedback, engage with that, and make sure that they're getting that message out and being effective as leaders. - Yeah, we're going to try to use this podcast as one of our channels to explore just mentoring and leadership and personal development. Throughout the next year, we're planning to have some really interesting people here that Chief and I will talk to, and we'll bring you maybe some different perspectives that you won't necessarily get any other way, or access to some of these people that, you know, to the entire Wing, that not everybody has. So, we're really looking forward to having those guests throughout the year here as well, and I know Mrs. Martinez, as the Director of Psychological Health, has some great guests lined up each month as well. So, really looking forward to how we can evolve the podcast. We're talking about doing a video series as well. Maybe Chief's going to try to capture his mentoring moments and make those from a video, make those available through a video series. I'm thinking about doing a video series as well, short snippets in the next year to give people yet another channel to kind of consume information. - Yes, sir, and that also sets the stage for some of the other nuances, right? So, we talked about how we're going to engage with airmen, and a podcast has been a good push for this past season, and now we're talking about the video, but you're looking at doing some in-persons as well, correct, sir? - Yeah, absolutely, and so we're gonna, Chief and I are gonna drop in on some Commanders' calls or unit all calls throughout the month and hopefully be able to answer some of your questions, provide some information and just kind of sit and listen, and really do more listening to what your concerns are and help you

understand, like, where the Wing's going and what kind of things that we're focused on. Hopefully, we can start doing some in-person visits as well on all the group staff, and I know Colonel Estlund and Colonel Janicki, as new Group Commanders, want to get out and meet the people as well as we do. So, I'm thinking, really, probably the second half of the year is going to be a better opportunity for us to do that, by March, April, and May. There's a good plan that a lot of us will be vaccinated by that point, and we'll be able to do some more traveling, and meet some folks, too. - Yes, sir. - And I know the group's interested in doing that as well, and talking about what's next, and so, I think, Chief, the big elephant in the room is the UEI in June, right in the middle of the year there. So, what are you thinking about? UEI-wise, what comes to mind for you? - I stick with that expectations management, right? So, I think that being that we're a little bit longer in the tooth, a little bit more seasoned as airmen, that we know what it used to be, right, UEI was, it wasn't ORI, right, so the whole wing got spun up. Everybody was worried about how many red pieces are in my checklist, how do I get it to green? One of the things that I have to take into thought here is the way we've changed it with the UEI, just understanding that the expectation no longer is everything's green. The expectation is that we are managing truthfully what we have in hand, identifying what's really yellow, identifying what's red, what risks are we taking? And then also putting our airmen at ease with the idea that the expectation isn't that it's perfect, the expectation is that you are doing good work, that you're identifying these things. The problem comes in when you hide things or you are not aware of them. - Yeah, when I was a Lieutenant, I remember going through a first inspection. They gave me several boxes and said, put it in your trunk, take it home, bring it back after the inspection. Like, that was the mentality at the time, was to try to put, you know, lipstick on a pig and make everything look good. - Yep. - And we spent all of our effort and time doing that, right? I really like where we've evolved, and we're at a point where now we're worried about non-detected compliance. And so, as long as we are detecting everything, we're assessing where our problems and our LIMFACS and challenges are in that we're making a risk-based data decision on what we're going to do and what we're not going to do, I think we're in a good place, and I feel like we've got the framework in place throughout the Wing where we're going to do really well. And I'm looking forward to it 'cause I want to kind of get that validation and draw that line in the sand of where we are, and then build the next step and the next course for how we're going to do better and what we need to focus on. - Right, and kind of going back to some of that recognition we talked about, I think that UEI would be a perfect example of how we can give recognition to all that hard work, right, with whatever that rating may be, where we know where we were two years ago and where we are today, and seeing all that hard work. That's what I'm excited about, whether you can kind of set us apart and say, yes, these are some great things. You know, they're going to identify some, probably, flaws and identify some areas of work, but that's a given. But I think that it'll definitely show that we've done a lot of hard work here. - Yeah, a little bit of validation, I think. I really like, you know, one thing you hit on, is it gives us an opportunity to highlight some airmen and all the great work that they're doing. So, if I'm a Supervisor or I'm a Commander, I'm a Superintendent, I'm the Branch Chief, whatever you are, I would be thinking, hey,

over the next year, I know I have a UEI in June, I've got a couple of airmen that've done a really superb job, I want to set them up for some recognition and be proud to show them what they've done, and I'm going to do that through setting them up for quarterly awards, and then giving them an opportunity to show off their program to the inspectors come June. - Yes, have them talk to the inspectors, give them that trust, right? Give them that opportunity to discuss what work they did. I want to really put that in the hands of airmen at the lowest level so that they can show where those hands are actually working on the equipment, where the keyboard marks are happening, where these individuals are putting in that elbow grease, right? - Yeah, they're going to give me an in-brief at the front, and then an out-brief on the backend, and the rest of the time is going to be with the airmen. - Right. - This is not about, you know, Rick Erredge and Chris Howard, this is about you out there, doing the hard work every day and being proud of what you do, and identifying, hey, I know I got a problem here, I know about it, and we've got a plan, we're gonna address it, or, hey, there's a problem here and we need some help, right, we need our headquarters' help. And then, we want to set those things up in advance and be able to have a story or some talking points around where we need their help, and this is a great opportunity to expose those things. You know, we know we're not perfect, we know we built this Wing kind of on a shoestring budget. We get that, we've been working at it since then, and just kind of, you know, the onesie-twosies are just picking away at it because we can't fix everything at once, and this is a great opportunity to kind of talk about that and show the good things, and then highlight the areas we need help with. - Agreed, sir. I definitely think that we're going to be surprised at how much really comes out as far as the good work that each one of these airmen did. - I think some of the other things I think about, right, so they're gonna have a chance, the UEI team's gonna have a chance to talk to some more mission partners, and I think the relationships that we've built, that you've built, have gotten a lot stronger, and I think we need to build on that the next year, to build that trust between them and us. And we're gonna talk to our mission partners about what that's like and what we're doing and how they can help, and I think it's important to continue to have those discussions and build upon what we've done so far. - Yes, sir, right, being integrated with that mission partner is one of the primary responsibilities of us as leaders. How do we get engaged, how are we, you know, getting what those requirements are, how are we getting feedback from our mission partners? I know that it's always a constant battle from time, right? So, we just talked about the UEI, how much time does that take on a UTA, but then, how do we keep that balance with our mission partners and move that mission across the board, right, and find it where that balance is so that we can get enough of the mission done, yet still focus on some of the administrative tasks that are at hand? - Yeah, I think it's important, and I say this a lot, our Reg AF mission partners, right, they view our participation through a different lens than we do, and we've got to understand that. I think it's fair to say that we need them more than they need us. - Right. - If you just think about it just real superficially, and so I think it's up to us to set expectations, again, with what that looks like, how we engage. I spend probably, I think that sometimes I spend over 50% of my time with our mission partners in setting, I set expectations with them all the time. I just got off the phone, you know,

half an hour ago with a senior leader in 16th Air Force, talking about those kinds of things exactly, and I continue to do that, and it's important for us to do that and have the same talking points about being clear with communication and documenting what that relationship needs to look like and what we expect of each other, and I think that helps us focus on, mission-wise, what we need to do and to understand what's expected. - Right, and without that relationship, they're not going to drive a requirement, right? I think that we have some mission partners that are fully engaged. I know we've had conversations in other venues about a couple of our mission partners, where they are actively pulling us in and getting our input and being mission partners. We're lucky in that, that particular relationship, and a lot of these relationships, even at the unit level, require our engagement to make sure that they know we're there and what we bring to the fight, and set that tone and that expectation that we're here to be part of your team so that they drive that requirement, and then we still keep our mission, otherwise they're gonna go somewhere else, right? - Yeah, and I think they're looking for capacity and capability, and I think we need to work hard on being their Ghostbusters. When they want to call, who are they going to call? We want them to call the gladiators; we want them to call the 960th Cyberspace Wing. And so, to the highest levels, we're trying to work requirements, which is basically in expectation of what they want, and we are working really hard to get the 16th Air Force and ACC to put in writing what they expect of us and what the requirement is to clearly define where they need us, and that's going to help us focus resources in the corporate structure on how we help them. So, we need to help them help us to help themselves. - (Laughs) Yes, sir. - If you kind of look at it that way. - Right. - And we're taking an active approach to that, and I think, next year, we're going to take a more active approach and be very deliberate about how we approach requirements and expectations. - Sir, I mean, we have to build a symbiotic relationship and not a parasitic one, right? And that's really where that view comes into place with some of our mission partners, is this symbiotic or is it parasitic? When you eat up my resources, i.e. you're in my space, or you're eating up my time, or you're eating up my dollars, are you symbiotic, or are you a parasite, and then, how do we break that down? And that's where that conversation really comes into play of, no, this is symbiotic because you're paying X amount of dollars, you're losing this amount of space, and this takes up this much of your time, but that's a small sliver of what you're getting, 'cause that may be 10% of total resources, but what you're gaining is a 40% increase in your capability and resources on hand at any given moment. - Yeah, right, that's a great story. We've got to be able to talk to them, again, and that's part of the communication, and deliberate discussion and setting expectations up early allows us to document, you know, what we're doing. And General Scobee says this all the time, and it's written, and every time he meets with Congress, he says there are force reservists providing 20% of the capacity for 3% of the budget. And so, I think, if we look at our business through that lens to help us understand, we're probably not exactly that, we're probably a little bit more just 'cause of AGR, but we're providing that capacity, and we need to get to a much greater ratio, I think, of what we're doing, and that's what we're gonna try to work through the next year. - Sir. - You know, and I think, as I think about the rest of the year, obviously we need to

continue our diversity inclusion efforts that I know we're getting ready to launch, our kinda internal Wing diversity inclusion efforts, and we'll spend some time talking about that. We just had, when the racial disparity report released from the Air Force IG- - Yeah, last night actually. - Yep, just got launched, and we're going to have some more discussions about that. We're going to ask you all to continue to have those discussions, small discussions. We're still not doing training yet, and so we haven't got the approval to do that, so we're going to expect to see that in the next year or two. And so, I think there's a lot of opportunity or an optimism, as the vaccine gets released, we'll do some unit visits. We've got the UEI, where we're gonna talk about requirements and kind of, we're doing a bunch of mission analysis about where we currently are and what that's gonna look like in the future, where we're exploring sending a gladiator to weapons school. - Sir. - We've got a bunch of great guests lined up. The My Vector, I think, is really going to be a huge help to us, especially since we don't see everybody all the time, like you mentioned. - Correct. - It's a great opportunity to connect on another channel, you know, to connect with our airmen at. - No, and, you know, to kind of piggyback on a couple of those items, right, when we talk about COVID and waiting for how this herd immunity is gonna come through with the vaccinations and be able to get more in-person, I think that we've been able to break a lot of that paradigm with some of these platforms, and I think that we'll see increases in capability. I think we'll see better usage of that, right? When we talk about the PDC that's done good things this past year, what are they going to move forward to this upcoming year? And then, even from a personal engagement piece, right, it's not that hard for us to go ahead and put it on our schedule to sit one-on-one, even in video, with our airmen and have that conversation, like we would have in the work center on a UTA. Hey, I'm gonna give you 15 minutes of my time, I want you here, here, here, and here, and line them up and see them face-to-face, even though it may be later on in the year before we can actually do that, where I can shake your hand or, you know, look you in the eyes directly within a (laughing) six-foot radius, right? But that video does go a long way of having that conversation. I know that we've had a couple of video calls. I know Colonel Estlund and I have had a couple of video calls that were just meant to, I got to see you today and make sure everything's okay, and then, let's discuss some business and move forward, right? - Yeah, it's really important. I don't think we're going to go back to 100% the way we were before, and I think that's a good thing, right? I think the airmen have asked for more innovation, for us to look at participation maybe through a different lens and a different way, and this has really forced our hand. - Yes, but, you know, that goes back to our point of setting those expectations and being engaged. We know that there's barriers and know that leadership is breaking down those barriers where they can, where we're making our points known. I know that you've advocated for the team's CVR to continue to be funded. That was a big concern when we first kicked off in the spring using that platform, which one's going to be funded, which ones are not, you know, and that information getting up to you so that you can fight for that, and then we make sure that these platforms are available, or that the next platform provides maybe more capacity or a little bit more nuances that allow you to do a little bit more, right? You know, our enemy is not slowing down; right, and we can't let this really slow us

down either. We just have to move and adjust, you know, kind of, you know, fire, move and communicate. - Yeah, yeah, shoot and fire, communicate, and I think, when I look back at the last year, obviously lots of challenges, but I'm really proud about how the Wings responded, about how everybody has stepped up. We found a way to continue to operate as best we can. Really, our number of our COVID cases is a really low percentage of our population, so I'm really proud about how people have taken this seriously. I think the measures we've taken to reduce, you know, based on the CDC Guidelines has really helped, and I'm proud that even though it was a tough year, I'm proud of the way we responded and I'm proud of what we got accomplished last year, and I think we're just gonna build upon that moving into 2021. - No, I fully agree, sir. I'm going to put you on the spot, if you don't mind. - Sure. - If we were doing this next year, right, and we're sitting here having this conversation again, what would you like to say we accomplished this time next year? - Yeah, that's a great question, and you didn't prep me for that one, so I'm going to go off the top of my head here. - (Whispers) Yes. - No, no, certainly, I think, for me, I think a lot about the UEI and, you know, I would like to really talk about how we, you know, we nailed the UEI and we identified everything, that we didn't have any non-detected compliance. I think that's a big, that's a big for me, and that we had a bunch of people recognized with best practices and processes that they're gonna take away and say, hey, the 960th Cyberspace Wing's got it right, everybody else needs to do it, you know, the way they do it. I'd like to see us all have something as basic as some sort of MOU or a plan signed between all of our units relationship-wise. I know we're still working on that. And certainly, I'd like to see us have more of our business processes normalized, and that we're thinking about bigger fish and not worried about all these little business processes that we seem to continue to fight kind of over and over again, and then have some success in the bomb cycle, meaning we're gonna grow. We're gonna grow this Wing and our capabilities, and not just people, but grow in mission and different areas that 16th Air Force really needs us to support, the ongoing, you know, conflict of cyber, I won't say warfare, but we are engaged with our, persistently engaged with our adversaries at a level below the threshold of armed conflict. - Right. Now, I mean, I'm a big advocate of pushing out our story, where we are one of two domains that is consistently contested right? We are not getting to the point of armed conflict, but we're right there, we're constantly tested. You look in the news, every week there's a new story about how our domain amongst the space domain is being just obliterated by our enemy in different ways, or exploited is probably the better term than obliterated, but how are we gonna get out from that in that great power competition, right? And then, how do our TRs and our AGRs make that impact from an operational and a strategic perspective? I know if I was to put that question to me in this scenario, I would hope that we would be able to say that here are some operations that our airmen were engaged in, these are the things that I think our airmen got to be part of. And then on top of that, how did our airmen receive the My Vector? How did our airmen engage and grow? And then, well, what barriers did we break down for them, right, and identifying some of those barriers, whether it's now we have this process clearly defined, and we're seeing great success in this process, whether it's vouchers, or the EPRs, right? We've taken a lot of effort over the last year to speed



up these processes, and then set the right expectation and make sure that we've clearly communicated to every airman what those expectations are, from EPRs to decorations, to missions, and so forth. - Yeah, those are all great things. I think those are worthy challenges that we're going to tackle in the next year, and I appreciate the chance, you know, again, to spend time with you and Sam in talking about these things and sharing our thoughts with everybody out there. We're going to put a rubber stamp on 2020, something nobody will ever forget. I don't think that's a year, right? And so, I took command in 2020. You know, it's unforgettable for a number of reasons, but certainly, you know, the COVID, not our challenges, is at the top of that list. So, looking forward to 2021, a lot of optimism, and we look forward to what the next chapter brings. Any last words, Chief? - Just, I want to thank you personally, sir, for, you know, opening the door. I think that, I don't want to toot our own horn with the podcast, but I think that it's a great opportunity for us to reach our airmen. I think that we've been able to clear the road and barriers for communication, and we fought through a lot of these things to make things happen, and I think, you know, the priorities that we set this year, the ones that you set forth, and the leadership that you allowed for individuals to take a hold is starting to pay big dividends. So, I want to thank you personally for that one, and then I want to thank our airmen for everything they did this year, despite everything that happened, right? This was a crushing year from a stress level, from personal stress to professional stress to societal stress, right? Every individual went through the rollercoaster. It's not over, but I think that they've shown that they are true professionals, and have been able to execute day in and day out, despite those stressors. - Absolutely, I'm proud of the way everybody's responded and look forward to continue to grow our relationship with you and with everybody in the Wing as we continue these, and we look forward to having a discussion again in 2021. So, with that, we're going to call it a wrap (crumbles paper loudly) on 2020. (Upbeat music)