

Ep. 50: Discussions with a career advisor

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Welcome to another episode of the Sword and Shield. I am Chief Master Sergeant Christopher Howard, Superintendent of the 960th COG and Acting Command Chief. And today with me I have... - Master Sergeant Jovan Bryant, a career assistance advisor over here at the 860th Cyberspace Operations Group, Robins Air Force Base. - Awesome! Sgt. Bryant, I want to tell you thank you. Thank you for taking the time to talk to me today. I look forward to kinda diving into a little bit about how you became a career advisor and some of the things that you've learned as a career advisor. So thank you for your time and obviously, thank you for your service. - Thank you, Chief, and thank you for this awesome podcast form. - We kinda like it, I think for the most part, right? We definitely are able to get more information out to our airmen. And one of the things that I really like to talk to or kind of get to our airmen today is, what made you decide to be a career advisor? - So roughly about two and a half years ago, I was E6, so I kinda got to the last position that I could. So I was at a position where I had to cross train or leave the current unit that I was at in order to progress up. - Okay. - And during that time, I did reach out to my two career advisors at the unit level. Which they sort of counseled me in a way, but it was like an impromptu like "What kinda got you in?" And then once I got on my spew of things, First Sergeant kinda came up. So I was able to do some temporary First Sergeant things at that time. - Okay. - But then it pivoted, too. I'm getting out there. I'm speaking to a lot of individuals and their sharing pertinent details that were towards the career side versus a First Sergeant sort of thing. - Okay. - So I was actually introduced to pick up that additional duty as well, down at the unit level, but I never walked those footsteps while I was there. So a few months later, this position became available and my commander at the time, recommended me for that position. Which I'm now in that seat at the group level. - Okay, awesome. So when you talked this through with your mentors and your career advisors, what were the things that kind of stood out to you that made you want to do this job? - So looking back just over my career, I came from active duty 15 years and then the last five years have been with the reserves. Everyone comes in for many different reasons, but they're not keeping track on whether they're checking those off. So the mentors that I've had over the time, Chief, I've had one that told me to write down my next five-year role and keep that in my wallet. And if I'm not checking those off, I need to adjust my course. - Gotcha. - So a lot of the members that I've started talking to at the Tech Sergeant level. It turns into they're even having problems speaking with their direct supervisors or their supervisors aren't around because of deployments. So they get stagnant. So they're looking for any help that they can. And

just pulling from the history that I've had from active duty timeframe, there's a thing called CJR that I had to get prior to me continuing my career. And then we've had some riffs over the years to where I was in voluntary set, but I wanted to keep going. But I've even had times where I wanted to get commissioned. So just having mentors step in and kinda give me those tools, allowed me to do the service that I've been able to do and I want to reciprocate that. I don't want members, our Air Force members, to get out not reaching their full potential because they didn't have the information they need. So that's really what drives me in this position. - Right. Looking back, I think that a lot of us can cue in on a couple of those mentors or those key conversations. There's a couple of people that come to mind from my career that kind of helped set the baseline. And that's what I find that the career advisor is a great catch for when we do have some missteps or misunderstandings in that development plan for airman, right? - Right - I think that role is definitely there. Plus you know, it's a kind of a checks and balances piece. Much like the shirt is in some ways. What are some of the things that you're seeing, when you're catching these airmen on their way out? - So I've seen airmen that they came in for educational purposes. So they knocked out the CCAF. They might be rocking and rolling towards a bachelor's but then their jobs, they get sort of bored around the Senior Airman, Staff Sergeant range, which they're looking to cross train. But then they don't know that process. And then ultimately they don't either identify on the SRP, which I would like to talk about that in a little bit. But they never see that. So nobody ever approaches them until it's the last second and they've already reached over to the outside. And sometimes it's money that draws them away. Or sometimes they just lose that sense of wanting to put on a uniform. That's what I've seen since I've been in this seat. - Gotcha. So as a focal point, you have a lot of conversations with airmen. Ideally, right? Us as leaders are having those conversations as well as those supervisors might have them. I guess this is kind of pointed towards that first time supervisor. What words of advice could you give that supervisor or some questions that they could ask their airmen? So that maybe we could get to the airman faster. Not that last week. That last moment where they're making the decision or the decision's already been made. And we didn't have time to really inform them appropriately to make a good informed decision. - So I believe as a supervisor, a lot of our conversations are informal. We don't have to have that "airman at attention" sort of stance. So it should be a natural conversation to where a flag should go up in your head. To where if somebody is telling you what's keeping them motivated as in stepping away from the education. Well, let's just say that this airman or NCO has had somebody progress early in their career because they had the opportunity, excuse me, to do a special duty. There are Airmen that don't know about special duties. They don't know about the reserve vacancy. So at that time that's where I would key in and sit them down on a computer and walk them through it. That way, they have another trajectory to potentially go up. - Right - That's some of the things that I like to hit on. Keep it as informal as possible and let the members show you their map. And then we aid as supervisors - Gotcha - With the information and myPers is an awesome source that I'm pointing a lot of my counselees, if you will. But a lot of my brothers and sisters in arms. I'm bringing them to myPers. I'm showing them how to navigate it. - Gotcha. So with those airmen that are kind of

indicating that money might be an issue. With that, the grass is greener on the other side. How do you approach that subject? - That's a very good question. So I always like to bring up whenever we raise our hand and come in and put this uniform on every day there's key benefits that we tend to just go through and utilize on an everyday basis. So whether it's we're in and out of education, throughout the years. Leaning towards that bachelor's. Possibly pursuing a master's or even a CCAF. That's all paid for. So it's really just the time that we're committing to that. And there's also airmen that might want to transfer those benefits if they have children. That's another thing that they might want to utilize. So prior to them jumping out and having to assume a hundred percent responsibility of that, that's a conversation I tend to lean on the airmen that I speak to, the NCOs that I speak to. Even some of the seasoned members that are getting out, Sir. - Okay - And I kinda try to leverage that to have a full on conversation, maybe get a little bit more thinking behind that move, Sir. - Gotcha. Yeah, great points there, right? Some of those benefits that we take for granted or don't necessarily see as a hundred percent benefit and pointing that out as good. But I also like to point out to airmen is the networking capability, right? So I've talked to a number of Chiefs. I've got a Chief that I'd like to talk to more depth sometime maybe as a podcast. Right now things might be going well in the career field that you're in. Maybe things are going quite well. But as we've seen in other dips and changes, especially within communications and cyber, that bottoms out. So being engaged in a reserve unit allows for a network that you just wouldn't have access to. It gives you an opportunity to keep up on some skills and keep up with what the latest trends are as well as where the industry is shifting and being engaged with some of those movers and shakers that are associated with the wings. So that's an intangible you just can't get other than being part of this organization. - Oh, 100%. - Once that airman's made that decision after we've been able to crack that nugget and crack that egg on that airmen. And they've decided that, "Maybe I wanna stay." What's the process for our airmen to then re-enlist or extend. - Great question, Sir. So whenever a member enlists, they're normally on a three, four, five, six year contract, so that establishes an ETS. So the ETS is how we determine when the SRP will get triggered and sent out down to the member and the supervisor. So this is roughly the 14-month milestone that we look at. Where we want to sit the members down and we go over the AFI that's utilized, - Okay. - You know as the 36, 26, 06. But what that breaks down is how is the member performing? - Yeah. - We start to go over the potential. Does their grade skill level match up? There's a lot of important things that the supervisor can hit and highlight with the member to let them know that this is a really good fit for you. Let's continue to exercise some of these capabilities that the members are going for, right? - Yeah. - So with that, that's when the supervisor lets the member know that they're a great fit for the military to continue on and they would recommend. - Gotcha. Who initiates the SRP? - The SRP is system generated. And then it comes from the wing career advisor down to the group, and then I'll separate those out from my GSUs. And I would send those to the unit career advisors to which they would reach out to the supervisor. We did have a couple of hiccups during pandemic where a lot of this went via email. But as we're starting to come back in person, these will get handled typically during UTA with the supervisor from the unit career advisor perspective. - Gotcha. And that

automatically gets out at 14 months out from the ETS, correct? The system's supposed to generate the SRP that goes to the supervisor. The supervisor has to look at the record. Look at the member and then make a determination. But that's really one of those moments for feedback and also to initiate that unit career advisor conversation, correct? - That is correct. That way, the member knows what side of the fence they're on. That gives them enough drive to push towards those proper benchmarks that are set before them. - Gotcha. And so that goes that approval process, right? So the supervisor says, "Yes, Airman Snuffy is the best airman that I've ever had. It's a pleasure serving with Airman Snuffy because they're absolutely the best airman." Then it goes to the superintendent, correct? And then the superintendent signs off on that? - So it'll go from the supervisor to the unit career advisor and they would process it so it gets in front of the commander. - Okay. - And based on those recommendations, that commander will make his final decision on the member. So he would either recommend and then send it back up to the group or send him back up to me, as a group career advisor and I would do the updates for that. - And that opens the gate. So now they're allowed to reenlist the code is loaded. And then, that's where we open the window for when they can actually do the reenlistment, correct? - Correct and a big determining factor for that is six months out from the ETS, you're eligible to re-enlist. But if you're in the incentive program, you'd have to wait until 30 days out, because we have to make sure we pay you what we owe you. Because you want to put you're participating. We have to give you that 12 months to rule that in. - Okay. Are there any circumstances other than incentive pay that adjust when you can re-enlist? You know, like a PCs potentially, or appending assignment, or a school? Anything like that that may drive you to re-enlist prior to that? Later or earlier than six months out or anytime in between? - Yes so retraining is one to where we can look at potentially extending. Depending on the timeframe that you can accept it and pick up for the retraining. But then there's also members that exercise the ACR program. So if you're leaving from a traditional reservist going into an ACR, we would have to look at the amount of time that you have to enter in for that contract which we would allow a re-enlistment and/or an extension. - What determines the difference between an extension and a reenlistment then? - The SRP is definitely the first step. So the first step we would have to have that indication on whether the member is eligible for reenlistment. But prior to, there's some prerequisites that the member has to go through in order to make themselves completely eligible. One being medically qualified to go forward. So if, I'll just use that for this example. If the member has sent off their documents to their medical facility and they are approaching ETA and they haven't received clearance back, that's grounds for potentially a six-month extension that we can utilize one of the rules that are in table 921 of the AFI to where we would extend. And then once they met that requirement, they are signed off medically. Then, they would be eligible to re-enlist. - Okay. - That's how those two items work together. - Gotcha. So we've covered the positive side. Let's just say that for some reason, Airman Snuffy's just not meeting the mark, right? And that as a supervisor, I think that I've got proof. I've developed Airman Snuffy. I've given him opportunities to succeed but we're just not hitting the mark. What if I wanted to deny that reenlistment? What does that look like? - So if the supervisor denies and then it gets

to the commander and the commander concurs, - Right. - That's where the next action goes forth. So the commander with the unit career advisors assistance, they would bring up in the Air Force Form 418, which is the Selective Reenlistment Program Consideration. It's a document where they have to spell out why the member is an ineligible. - Okay. - And then a clear-cut way that the member can make themselves eligible with a timeframe. Because at that time the member also has the ability to appeal that choice. So that is a process that we have to allow to happen. So we make sure we educate all commanders on this, as well as the unit career advisors, to where if it is a non-Reg the member will have the ability to appeal. And it has to be documented on a form 418, that will come up to the wing level and ultimately up to headquarters. - Gotcha. So then, that's really determined based on the fact that we're going 14 months out. This is where the determination is being made. So we're giving Airman Snuffy 13 to 14 months to kinda hit that mark, right? - To hit that mark. Yes, Sir. - Okay, awesome. Now I think that we've gotten some great information with this conversation. Just wondering if as a group career advisor, what other pieces of advice could you give to our gladiators out there? - So for my gladiators, that are tuned in right now. I've got three educational resources that I want you to jot down and actually just utilize it for yourself and utilize it for the members that are underneath you. So the very first one is Air Force Virtual Education Center. If you are chasing your CCAF or wondering when or not you're even close to it. That's a great place for you to go visit. If you're trying to do a TA request, that's where you would stop to actually push towards and knocking down these educational milestones that you have. And also milConnect. I spoke earlier about potentially transferring your benefits to maybe even your spouse or your loved ones that are your dependents. You would actually go to milConnect for that. - Okay. - So milConnect is another resource I would love our gladiators to make sure they educate themselves on and just make sure there's an awareness while you're serving. - That was the Air Force Virtual Education Center - AFVEC. - Yes, sir. - We get that through the portal, correct? - That's right there on the portal. And the portal home page is sort of changed with the quick links there, but if you get into quick links type in AFVEC. Then it gets you right there to the Virtual Education Center and also milConnect. - Okay, awesome! What other resources do you have for them? - There's also the Air Force Learning web page where you can get free resources that just help you improve your network security for one, for all my cyber gladiators out there. There's also some supervisory tools out there. Some management and leadership tools. It's just some things to kinda stimulate the brain. Sort of keep you re-blued. So Air Force Learning, that's another website that you can utilize when you're off site. - Gotcha and I can access that through the portal as well. And that's different than myLearning correct? Or is it connected with myLearning? - It's connected with myLearning, Sir. - Okay, awesome. I'm old. I'm trying to jot things down as you speak. So sometimes I'm a little bit behind. So what other advice can you give them? - For all my members that are in my GSU's or just all those that are listening, find out who your unit career advisors are. And if there's an opening, if you're a 7 to 9 skill level, we'll be glad to bring you on board and actually train you up. That way you'll be educated and we can spread this wealth of knowledge. So that's my one little nugget for our career advisors out there. Because this has been a

great opportunity for me. Coming from the unit to the group level and its just changed my whole perspective on what we do. And I'm really glad to serve in this time in my career, at this level. - Awesome. I appreciate it, Sgt. Bryant. Definitely some great information there. Some good key advice on how to get that first conversation going on. Obviously, I think you and I can both agree that we shouldn't be having that conversation at 14 months. We need to be having that conversation during our regular feedbacks. We need to be having that conversation, in general throughout. And visiting with our airmen and make sure that we're making that connection. Understanding their why, helps develop them. Understanding what drives them, helps focus them, right? - Right. - Actually, that career advisor, that supervisor, all of us as a leadership team, as a development team come into play. And then, breaking down that SRP and how that goes. So I really do appreciate that, Sgt. Bryant. - Sir. - So I think we're closing this out. Was there any other great gladiator words of advice from you, Sgt. Bryant? - Well, definitely say, as you're serving any capacity, just make sure that we are taking care of each other. Just through conversation, I mentioned earlier. It doesn't always have to be rigid and robotic. Just keep it as fluid and natural as possible cause you'll never know who has the information that you'll need to succeed. - Right. Great advice, Sgt. Bryant. So all those gladiators out there, definitely understand what resources you have available. Do some good research. Find those mentors. Ask your unit career advisor about any of the programs going on. They'll help you understand and navigate through the need to know pieces of getting re-enlisted, continuing your service. So, I hope you guys have a great day. Thank you for your service. Thank you for your support. Thank you for everything you do out there and getting after our enemy. And remember to stab them in the face through cyberspace. Have a great day! (Cheerful music)