

## Ep. 66: Diversity and inclusion

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 Sword and Shield. I'm the host of this episode, the vice commander of the 960th Cyberspace Wing, Colonel Silas Darden and today joining me for this episode is the wing Command Chief. You want to tell everybody who you are? Yes sir. Chief Billie Baber. I am the I don't want to say brand new command chief because I've been here for about two months now. That's Colonel Harris tells me 30 days is the limit. I can't say I'm new. So I am the command Chief of the 9/60 cyberspace wing and very glad to be here today and just everybody knows, I'm sure you know, if you're a longtime listener chief has already done more podcast than I have and so this will probably be my last time hosting have only appeared on one of these. So I don't know if that's an indication that I at doing this or that they're just trying to keep me off the mic. I did have grand ambitions of singing at some point. Um but they did not let me do that. So I will not try to. So the topic of the of this podcast is going to be diversity and inclusion. I'm happy that the chief gets to has an opportunity to join me today because I think we got loads to talk about including the pre conversation we had just about the topic. So as the vice commander, I am the program manager for the wings diversity inclusion program. Um it's been a critical component to uh wings success also been a key in this area of me over the course of my career. When chief just started the conversation, you know, I talked about it a little bit ahead of time. Um if I were asking you the question, I'm going to ask myself the question about, hey, what about diversity inclusion and why is it important to you? I will tell you the story of, you know, my dad being a retired command start major and kind of in graining into me that day one, the thing you need to do is to be a subject matter expert at your job right before anybody is going to know anything else about you. They're going to know whether or not you're good at what you do. And so starting out in the Air Force, that was a um that was my mission to be to be, to be great at anything I did. Of course I failed a number of ways. Sometimes I was just good and sometimes I was below the mark. But it was always that desire to be good at whatever I would do it. But as I increased in title responsibility rank also noticed that um people that looked like me were unrepresented in the rooms that I was in. Which kind of back in the question whether or not um I was paying more attention to the other emphasis areas like diversity inclusion as well as being good at my job. So chief, why don't you tell the listeners a little bit about your story? So you know, you start off that. Why is diversity and inclusion important to you? And you know, there's just a myriad of things that run through my head when I think about why is it important to me? Because it truly is. And you know, when I when I first came into the to the Air Force,

my first assignment was in a security forces squadron and I was in the orderly room and at the time I don't know if I should date myself when I came in, but it was around 1996 around that time. And we had a female chief in the unit. And you know, and that was important to me at that time. So I would sit back and watch her and watch how she led and watch how you know, she was just she was amazing. But I also watched the barbs that she would take and the jokes that they would say behind her back and I knew right then and there that you know, like you had stated before representation matters and I've also watched her be isolated. She was an amazing leader, amazing chief, amazing security forces person. But I would see her be just completely isolated. I would watch her. She would have nobody to talk to. She would not be able to have anybody, you know? And I used to sit there and think like, how does she get through her day? And I knew right then and there. I was lucky to have such a mentor early in my career and you know, her personality, my personality weren't different. We're different. And I just knew that I could not be that kind of leader to be isolated and not be able to have confidence around me. And so that is how I kind of structured my career going through the ranks. Because inclusion is hugely important to me because nothing is worse than sitting in a room being underrepresented and not feeling comfortable. And it's not always about the being underrepresented, but it's also about not being heard and sitting in a room and not being heard because that's happened quite a few times with me and saying something in a meeting and it just kind of being dismissed. You know, you kind of have to go about it different ways. Like how can I get hurt? How are they going to hear me? And like you said, being the expert in your job is hugely important and that's just for everybody, but coming in the room with having value to say was a huge, huge way for me to move forward in the ranks and being heard because that was very difficult, and I've watched that even now sometimes in my career, and you know, I just, I still in awe, look at the women leaders in the Air Force and try to pick up on all the positive things that they were doing, you know, how did she get to general, you know, when they come in a room and they commanded? So there's you know, little things throughout my career that I knew I would have to do just by watching this female Chief of security forces for two years and knowing in my heart that I would hope as I would get up in my career, that I wouldn't have to be isolated, that I would be heard, and I think, you know, the Air Force has been amazing through that, and through the many changes with, with women in the Air Force and you know, you're talking maternity leave, you know, when you know, when I had my Children, I had six weeks, I had six weeks to get back and not only fit back in my uniforms, but be ready to pt test, so things have definitely changed, you know, throughout the years now you get a whole year. Um, and that's just amazing. That's amazing. And things like the difference the hair, you know, even those things are huge. They don't, it doesn't seem huge, but it is huge. And that was the one thing that back in security forces, she would tell me remember your hair is too tight, you're going to have to, you know, let that kind of go. And at the time I was like, you know, I'm gonna, you know, I want to look sharp, I want to do things and boy, was she right? Because you know, as you go through the years, you're the headaches, the all the things that come with, people don't think about having your hair. So the changes that are recently changed and even the mess dress, we get to wear pants. Now, I'm

so very thankful of that. Uh, you know, that skirt was just horrid and uh, so just these little changes that are making such an impact on the force. But I'm glad you mentioned and which an example of gender so often now in these conversations, the challenge conversations that we haven't been squadrons are at the unit level, we go directly to race as kind of the critical conversation to have with respect to diversity inclusion. You brought up another area that that is not necessarily discuss as much in the diversity conversation, which is gender just remind everybody when we're truly talking about diversity, inclusion. We're talking an amalgam of racist genders, uh religion, social, economic set essentially everything that makes our Air Force Creek. And it's not just about, it's not just about race. Although race is a critical component to the conversation, touching on something you said about kind of all the initiatives that are going out on today um uh in support of diversity inclusion initiative. Which one do you would you consider to be the passion area of yours are kind of the most important, the passion area, You know, I think, gosh, there's so much and again, you know, the inclusion part of it because you're absolutely right, diversity is just a myriad of so many different things, diversity of thought, you know, diversity of culture, diversity of all those. And I love that the Air Force is embracing all of it and we're able to have those conversations that we were unable to have back in the day. You know, you kind have sidestepped around the controversial topics and now we are able and just being so diverse. And I was at a basic training graduation yesterday and this is the first time I saw a young Muslim female graduate basic training and she had the headscarf and the long sleeved black underneath her blues and it just I was just amazed like this is awesome. This is so incredibly awesome that the Air Force has embraced religion just so many different aspects of diversity and we're making it where it's comfortable and we're making it where it's comfortable that we can ask those questions so we can learn from each other. And that's I think where my passion is. So you know, I want to be able to understand that airman that is sitting across the table for me and not just you know, where they're from, family, but culture, all of those things that they can bring to the table and just make it better and bring us together as a team. So I'm going to put you on the spot a little bit because comfort. Right? So the command chief, uh some of these topics are sensitive, right? So what advice to you would you give to the squadron commanders out there? The Superintendent's out there, generally the leaders out there, even the chairman about, you know, how do I how do I ask that uncomfortable question? And you and I know before the podcast there was a situation where we're talking about uncomfortable questions, right? And how to bring those up. So what would be your recommendation that asking an uncomfortable question of somebody? So good question. So when you, you know my advice to if you have to ask that uncomfortable question, I mean just always be respectful and I don't think you can go wrong if you're respectful and you truly want to know and understand because if somebody wants to truly know and understand me, they're going to ask the question. And you know, sometimes questions are disrespectful. I don't think intentionally, but sometimes they are and I will address that, you know, hey, maybe you came at that a little bit wrong. But I always encouraged to ask the uncomfortable questions because those are, that's how, again, that's how we learn each other and that's how we can be comfortable with each other in a room when we start to learn those

things. You know, and I always encourage it not just with the leaders, but you know, with my subordinates and with people that I am over that you have to ask those uncomfortable questions. And you know, and I learned that more so as a command chief than I ever had, you know, with, with the civil unrest and everything happening in the world today. Uh when I was at ARPC, I was asking those uncomfortable questions and the things that I thought I knew I didn't know. And that was a chief being a chief command chief in the United States Air Force for over 20 years asking those questions really brought a lot of light to what I thought I knew. So you know, to go in my career for 20 some years. And I think I know the answers and I don't, we need to ask those uncomfortable questions. Uh, and I second that and we'll tell you the importance of networks, right? So folks, folks, you trust was fortunate in squadron command to have kind of a group of squadron commanders that that graduate at the same time as I had that I could I could reach out to that didn't look like me or didn't have similar life experiences, I could say, hey, what about this? And uh was also happy to be a kind of their mentor in a number of ways with respect to some of those conversations with stuff I had kind of taken for granted on my life. The easy example of was a squadron commander reaching out when I was in, squadron Commander asked me about shaving waivers and razor books saying that that he had never heard of that until he had a waiver in front of them and was trying to figure out what this what this thing was because from his perspective, it was a an airman that just wasn't trying to um uh wasn't trying to shave and meet the standard and what does that look like. So just the second what you said, and throughout the importance of having a group of folks you trust that you can go to the conversations with in kind of a non judgmental way and what gives you both the response feedback and kind of harming your tool box with the information you need in order to be successful. So we talked a lot about, you know, uh your experiences as a command chief. I just want to talk about kind of the human interaction and stuff outside, we live in Texas rate why don't live in Texas, but you live in Texas. And so how is diversity inclusion as a citizen airman? Um important outside of the for me it's hugely important. And you know, again, diversity is an inclusion is something that I try and live really daily in my life and raise my kids and you know, the family and making sure that we are in a diverse population and by my Children are exposed to as much as they can be because you know, I really do think when, you know, you talked about the Shaving waiver, it wasn't bad intention, just that commander had never seen that before and it doesn't make them bad, it doesn't, you know, it just makes him just, he didn't know . And so he had asked the question and reached out, but those are the things that you know, not just the shaving player, but other things that I want my Children exposed to. And I to me that's what I value and I find that hugely important in in Texas, you know, we're unfortunate in san Antonio we're military city, so you know, you're lucky enough no matter where you go, it's going to be a pretty diverse population and that really does matter to me to make sure that my family, my kids are exposed to absolutely everything they can be. And you know, growing up an army brat, I was fortunate enough to be able to grow up in just hugely diverse communities and didn't realize how important that was until I was no longer a member of the military community and missed it and missed it. And that is one of the huge reasons why did come into

the Air force was that family, that community, that acceptance that we have. And I think that is hugely important even on the outside of the military to find that. And so for those of our listeners that are not located in the military cities, right? The number of geographically separating units out there, Media and one of them writes, I live in the national capital region, which is kind of a uh there's diversity all around us. However, depending on where you live, there's also pockets of non-diverse environments. And so in some cases that has you have to create the opportunities for diversity and place your kids and inclusive environments in order to get that aspects of it. So I think I agree. I certainly at that point. Um, but some of the stuff has to be a lot of deliberation and you have to be delivered in creating those environments for those ones you love. Um chief uh you know, we're kind of winding this down, but I want to offer you the space or opportunity to offer any sound wiser advice to folks out there. Yes, sir. So, you know, like I had mentioned probably quite a few times, diversity inclusion is huge in my world, in my personal life and my professional life. And one of the things I don't like to tolerate in any in any setting is anybody not feeling included, anybody not feeling a part of the team. And so I do ask when you are in a room regardless of gender, of race, that you pay attention to those things that you pay attention to the to the individual who is not participating. And kind of figure out why is that individual not participating? Because if we're not all participating, were not reaping the benefits of what we could possibly be reaping. So that is the advice I would I would definitely give to the folks out there is just make sure, you know, where the military were, the Air Force, we need to be a part of a team and we need to feel a part of a team. And regardless of what your political thoughts are or your, whatever your thoughts are, we need to make sure that we are including all of our folks and that they feel included and they feel like they're part of the team because there is no absolutely no reason being a member of the Air Force that you don't feel heard, that you don't feel included. So we definitely as leaders and just members of the Air Force should be working towards a more inclusive organization wise words definitely Chief always like to double down on command Chief's remarks with both a challenge and a task. So my challenge for everybody that's listening today is to do exactly that. I've been telling people that since I've been the Air Force that if you treat everybody in uniform as a brother and a sister, uh you will respect and more and your organization's will be more effective. Um uh you talk to your siblings a certain kind of way. If you talk to your brothers and sisters in uniform, the truth in the same way you will be better off for the challenge. That's the challenge. The task is uh if you're paying attention um the Air Force just released its update to the review of the racial disparity a report. And so that information is available on [www dot Air Force dot mil](http://www.dod.mil). I encourage everyone out there to review the results of the report and to digest the information in it. Um it's clear that there's work to be done. We at the wing love are committed to doing that work for you and I look forward to continue this conversation with you along with our boss, the wing commander in the community. This includes this episode of the podcast. I want to thank everybody for listening and look forward to the next time they let me host or not.