

## Ep. 78: Mentorship styles

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.

Welcome to another episode of the sword and Shield. I'm Chief Master Sgt. Christopher Howard 960th COG SEL, and with me today, I have Sergeant Estes. And you are? I am the 960th Cyberspace Wing First Sergeant. Awesome. As well as the 854th COS First Sergeant. We also have the Sergeant Vielman. I am the first sergeant for the 50th Network Warfare Squadron. Well, sure, it's great to see you today. We get to interact quite often. So it's good that we were able to come together and kind of talk, uh, with some of the other gladiators. Well, I mean, the things that I love to talk to you guys about today is a mentorship, right? There's this belief for this myth that. It's, uh, you know, I only really like First sergeants and have that capability or chiefs. And I was hoping that you could help share some of your knowledge and experience of what it takes to be a mentor. Um, some of those attributes and know how to be effective as a mentor. So if someone if I was a senior man coming to you, Sir Ernest is saying, what does it take to be a mentor? What would you tell me? Yeah, um, in order to be a mentor, it's not. It actually goes to different ways. Unlike being a manager and a supervisor, Um, an individual can choose who they want their mentor to be, or an individual can go and say I want to mentor you. And so I think some of the key attributes for me would be, um, definitely availability and being able to follow up, being able to articulate you know what those milestones look like, as far as what the individual is trying to reach, understanding what their goals are and helping them reach those goals and give them some examples to follow. Um, kind of mapping out things, writing it down and going back and following up. Okay. What would you tell me? Yes. So I agree with, uh, with my fellow first sergeant here, and I would like to add that I think a lot of times we, uh, we do get in this box right or what Mentorship is like, um, mentorship can be an anything right Where there is, uh, individuals finances their career progression. It could be a family dynamics, anything. And so I try to interact with my members as much as I can. Sometimes, you know, maybe a personality conflict, and they're not going to take my mentorship. But I still try to offer that to them. I think in the reserve, one of the one of the things that I definitely focus on is, uh do you know how the reserve works? Because I think we deal with civilians who come to drill weekend for two days, and we expect them to know an f I s we expect them to know how everything works on the reserve, and they're very disconnected. And so I try to focus more on that as a first sergeant because that affects a lot of there where there is their finances and morale and how they navigate their career as a reserve member. So I try to put again, you know, I offer that mentorship and I take mentorship to we have a lot of individuals coming into the military. Now. They're incredibly savvy with, you know, whether it's, uh, the digital world, right? Um, my, my era was not as digitally driven,

and so I tried to learn as much as I can from them. So I think mentorship is definitely a two way street. So I try to I try to look around and see you know, those members that are engaged and that there are enthusiastic about learning and they want to be able to teach me something as well, right? And then also there's no mandatory rank or grade or anything that kind of plays into, into effect. I mean, I can say that, Vielman, you've mentored me before on a number of subjects as well as you. You know, both of you guys have stood up and said, Hey, chief and talk and talk about this and and or I reach out to you guys for your input, um, and expertise so that I can learn a little bit more, right? I'm pushing my emotional intelligence are pushing some of my skill sets as well. So I really do appreciate that. Um, so I was wondering if you could share a moment that may highlight some of those attributes that we're looking at are the interaction as a mentor. So I want to be a mentor to somebody. How do I go about opening that conversation or as a mentee? How do I open that conversation? So from experience, Um, from what I've seen other people do with me, and then also, what I do is I try to find a common ground, try to find a common topic to start it off with, to kind of break the ice and, um, definitely effective listening. But I just go and approach people, right? And just see what they're doing, what they have going on. Um, if I'm ever approached by somebody, uh, for mentorship, you know, just listening and making sure that I'm restating or understanding what it is that they're trying to do. We do have some tools that we use, uh, you know, on the portal. I know my victor is a big one, um, that we're trying to get into. We're encouraging everybody to go out and build their profiles and set all that up to make sure that, um, they can use those tools to effectively mentor with that piece of it, but making time for individuals, you know, looking at your calendar and being available. I mean, I know, Chief, you have a lot of people coming to your door all the time, and you have never seen you turn anybody away. And so I think that's I think that's important, though, to be available, um, you know, making time to have those meaningful conversations with No, I agree. Right. So one of the best investment we can make and one of the most meaningful, uh, investments we can make is time right. Um and time is important individuals, right when we talk about our leadership team and some of the key aspects that they hit on time is one of them, right? But also just being able to take the time to interact. One thing that you said I didn't want to highlight and kind of pick out is, uh, those active listening skills and the piece about you know, what is a active listening look like, uh, and one of things that you highlighted is, you know, kind of taking what this person said and then giving it back to them a little bit differently to keep that conversation. That feedback loop there. Right? So now an individual feels that they've been hurt because I'm hearing some of the same things. It's not necessarily affirmation of what they're saying, especially if we're trying to get through a problem. But necessarily just reaffirming that feedback loop is there so that someone understands that, yes, you are listening to me, and then that opens up the communication a little bit more. And that helps you build that connection. Um, do you have any other advice? I don't let them talk to you if I just I just give them my opinion. I know you're just joking, but anyways, no, no, no, no, I think, Yeah, my victor. Like she was saying, it's a great tool, you know? We try to do briefings that in my unit that's one of the things that I harped on. When I when I came to the unit was there's a lack of knowledge across

the board, right? So a lot of times we expect supervisors to do their job and they look at senior and seals like, Okay, you know everything because you're a senior N c O. And we're all kind of the same boat of what we're just, you know, stumbling in the dark when it comes to the reserve, right? Like, where do I go for this? And I hear people asking each other all the time. So what do I find this and what I find this and thank you? So, you know, we try to do briefings at the unit. So we did a briefing on my vector. Uh, and I'm always excited about those briefings. You know, I'm probably the only nerd in the room who finds excitement, and that's when we did the only really their nerves, in a different way different their nerves in a different way. So, um, so we had Yeah. And so, you know, I was like, look at all the cool thing. You can do my victory, you know? And my hope is always there. Like, you utilize that because it's only going to help you right out to find a mentor within your career field that you've never seen. And they can advise you on career path pathway. So please go out there and please use that victory. My victory. It's a really, really awesome tool right now. I'll pick it my vector for a moment. All right? I have a number of individuals that, you know, I guess connected from a mentor mentee perspective on my vector. Um, and the challenge there, too, is much like time, right? You must make sure you make the effort. So anytime someone, uh, asked for me to be his or her mentor and say yes. Congrats. And then if you look at my back door, there's a number of things we can do we can set about playing can set goals. And so one of the first things I do is okay. Tell me a little bit about what you're looking forward. Tell me a little bit about yourself. Um, what specific goals are you hoping for? Uh and then I set goals, and I set challenges for people on my vector. And when they complete that, they're supposed to get back to me and then we can move to the next piece. Right? So part of that is building your own network for mentor being a mentor, right? Find other mentees and find other mentors. And then kind of build that up? Because, um, I think there's a couple of different types of mentorship out there, right? There's that career progression mentorship. That's the job performance, the expertise piece. And then there's just mentorship in life and interaction, right that there's two different specific pieces there. My vector is really good, uh, tool for, you know, where am I going to take my career? What are some of the things I need to do? What are some of the things I need to look at? But it's that one on one time piece that helps develop the relationship mentorship so that we can get into, you know, more serious topics and have serious conversations that mentorship has led me to have you know, some serious deep conversations with both of you. About why gambit of subjects, you know, uh, Ernesto's we've talked about, you know, mental health. We've talked about, you know, emotional intelligence. Same thing from Vielman. We've talked about emotional intelligence and then relationship building from a leadership perspective. So I think that's, you know, also some key indicators to as a mentee. What am I looking for? And which route do I want to take to get there and then also understanding how we learn? Am I an active listener and my visual do I need to see it, you know, on paper and so forth, and then the piece and hopefully you guys can help expand on. This is the interaction piece. So as a mentee, if I come to you and say, Hey, I need this and you provide something, and then I don't do anything. How do we get to the next step? So I'm glad you brought that up because I was thinking that as you are talking, holding

people accountable, um, following back up, trusting and verifying, right? So, you know, in order to I guess, keep that piece of it successful. Maybe setting some dates in the future said, hey, you know, on every Tuesday, you know we're gonna reconnect and see where you're at or, you know, setting a calendar and saying Okay, I'm going to reach out to them. And so and so stay and email them or call them or text him and see how they're doing and see where they're at. So just kind of going back and giving them deliverables and get them into a habit of, uh, you know, not only writing those goals down and setting them, but also following up and, you know, kind of marking off. I'm old school. So I have notebooks and I have boxes and they have to check the box, and then I have to line through that line just to make sure. Yeah, just to make sure that I, you know, I did what I was supposed to do. Um, So I would say, you know, just following up with that member and making sure that you have time, a lot of every week or month or however much you're going to meet and making sure that you're actually following through, but understand, making sure that they understand that you both know Hey, we're going to meet this time this day, you know, every month. Um, so when you walk away from that individual, both people understand what's going to happen next because time is investment, right? Any other. Um, so I tend to disagree a little bit. I think so. No. And I get I get about the follow up and everything, right. But I think, you know, realistically speaking when we come in for the weekends, got our time is pressed is ridiculous. I mean, we're like the marathon. We are. We are. And so whenever, if somebody says, hey, you know, these are my goals. I give them the tools that I think will help them and, you know, come follow up with me if you need more assistance. Um, I think that if you really want to do something and you have a goal, you're going to do it. And so I don't need to be on top of you like, did you do it? And you follow up with them. That's just how I see it, right? Because if I tell you, this is what I want to do, Um I'm going to say, you know, you need you need a pathway. Here's the pathway. Now, if you get stuck, you let me know. But I'm not going to follow up with you because I trust you. This is your desire. This is your goal, right? So if you want to do it, you're going to fight through Helen Water to get to it. And so let me know what I need to do to facilitate that. But I'm not going to keep checking up on you because I trust that you're That's something that you want to speak and you're gonna You're gonna follow it. There's nothing wrong with following up. I think that's great. Because for some people, that works for me. If you If I tell you, Chief, this is what I want to do. Can you help me? And you tell me about blah, blah? If you come back next week like, hey, we're not going to be like Chief, Please. I'm not a five year old. Can you be? That's me. Because that's my personality. And so I think I approach it that way with some people. You know what I mean? Like, if you tell me you want to get your PM ME done, you want to do it in six months? All right, well, here's the pathway. Here is the schedule. How you should work it out in six months. I don't want to make you feel like by coming back and let you do it and you're like I didn't because you are going to feel like crapping. So it's like you already know that's your own, you know what I mean? That's your own desire. That's your career progression, and that's what you're trying to fight for. Do it or don't do it. You want to make time for the gym. You know what you have to do, does it or don't do it. I can help you give you my tips, but that's as far as I'm going to go. I'm not going to keep calling and

checking up and that you do any to do it. So, yeah, that works for me. So again, you know, obviously every mentor is different, so I will give you what you need, and then I'm going to step away and let you let you go and fight for that. No, I don't think that either direction is wrong. Necessarily. It's different approaches. It's like many things in life. Um, the way I sell him, probably a mix between the two here is if you're willing to invest in you, I'm willing to invest in you, right? So if you're not doing any of that self-investment. If you're not making the time, if you're not making the effort, I'm going to do some follow up, right? It's going to be a short-term gig that I'm going to Hey, where you at? On the goal. Are you getting there that's holding you back? Okay. And then if it's just a lip service conversation, are you really invested in yourself? So that comes to get check moment, right? As a mentor, right? If you've asked me to be your mentor, if you've asked me to be, um, that leadership, uh, leader leadership in this, uh, this goal, then I'm going to follow up a little bit and make sure that you're investing in yourself. But if you don't make that investment in yourself, um, there's a There's a time that I'm gonna have to cut bait, and then I'm gonna have that have that moment of good check like, Hey, look, you told me flat out. This is what you want to do, right? Yeah. Okay. Um and I've asked you a few times, but I'm not seeing the action. So is it really a goal or did you think that I just want to do 12 here, right? The reality is here is I don't give a rat's patootie about what that particular goal is. It's not about me. It's about you, right? And, uh, I need you to have that gun checked of this is this really what you want is if it's not no hard feelings, right? But I'm not going to press you, and I'm not going to invest in this this goal, it's a new goal. And let's be honest about what that goal is, right? So why did you want to do the P m. E? And you're using your example? Is it because you want to get promoted or do you want to accomplish this right? And I understand why you want to get this done. Well, I just need to check that box. So it's really not that valuable to you other than you feel like you have to say this to me. So you're just leveraging me to be that force when it needs to be in the internal pieces, which what you're getting at the moment, that they need to have that internal desire to accomplish that goal and then we, as mentors are there to stoke that fire, to get them past that point, not necessarily to grab him by the collar and drag him across the finish line. I think that's what you're trying to hit us as this is to keep that fire stoked and have that follow up to make sure they are we getting there and making sure that is that goal that they want, right? Um, and then, from a mental perspective, I can tell you it's frustrating. What about you? Well, uh, just really quick, Chief, to sum up with both of you said. And I guess some of what I said also is heard this quote before tough love still into love. And so you're more of the tough love peace. And I am, too. But his question was, if you have somebody that's not really meeting those goals, how do you, you know, bring them back in? And so that is a mentoring session in itself where you're sitting down and you're trying to understand. Okay. Why did you have these goals in the first place? What is your real intention and where do we go from here? Because that might be the end of that mentorship session. But that's like that that might be with that individual needs to kind of push them in the right place because you don't really know what they're dealing with. You know, like you said, civilian life, reserve life parents. It could be a number of things that, um, put you in a position to even more mentors to that person, depending on what they have going

on. And so I did forget the question that you asked me because I was thinking about, you know, I guess summing up everything that we that we were talking about, Um, but tough what you find tough about if you're mentoring somebody in there, not pricing. Well, just getting to the bottom of, you know, why are you not progressing like you known? What do you have going on? How can I help you? Um, I guess figure out what it is that you need to do next. Because what I don't want to do when I mentor somebody is tell him or her how to do things. I want them to come to that conclusion of what it is they need to do to get past that finish line and That's what I learned being mentored by another person who was actually a counselor. So she helped me figure out what my issue was and how I was going to get past that finish line. She didn't give it to me. She helped me push me to figure out on my own. Yeah, yeah, and I think that's a gift, right when you when somebody can do that and help you, I don't have that gift, and I'm very I'm very honest about that. I don't and so I use what I have and what I have is tough love. And I know that I've seen people that come out of nothing and build themselves up very strongly. And so, therefore, when I look at people, I'm like, it's in you, you're just not tapping into it for whatever reason. So whatever it is a unique we need to figure that out. So let's work through it. But I don't have that fortitude or that patients or that gift that some people have. So again, my tough love works great on some people, and it doesn't some people and it does not, and some others right and so and I'm okay with that. When people are like, I cannot talk to her, she's I'm okay with that. You have other people, though I'm not the only one. I'm not the only being around here. You know, you have other people who are much better at this, who have a gift, who have the patience and who don't use tough love as you know, as their tool. Now I do have patients, and I do believe you know what? Some people need help. I know, because somebody helps me along the way. People are still helping me today, so I don't do things on my own again. I think whenever that frustration happens, Chief, like, if I see that I'm like, Okay, this is what you need and you're stagnant. The way I look at it is I'm not helping you. You need to go find somebody else that can. Because my tool is not working for you. I'm not turning around. I'm turning. I'm turning around, but we're not getting anywhere. So you need to go maybe talk to Master Sergeant Estes or somebody else that has a different skill set than I do. And if she doesn't do it for you, somebody else. Then it's you like you need to figure out what's going on with you. You know what I mean? Like, stop lingering onto whatever it is because a lot of times, that's what, happen. People get stagnant in their own in their own, um; situation, and they don't progress. So that's how I deal with the frustration. You know, just let's get you with somebody else and may be able to help you better. Gotcha. So, no, I think that, uh, you hit on a good point. I would throw, uh, one last theory out here before we close out. Think mentorship is much like Have you heard of love languages? Right. Everybody has his or her different style, right? And everybody has his or her way of connecting that. I think mentorship is very similar to that. Um, like you said, you've identified from a much more tough perspective. Um, and then there's other types of that language for mentorship as well, and find that balance so as a mentee, you know, finding which one you respond to get to your goals is important too. That's the beauty of my vector. That's the beauty of mentorship. It's not a transactional relationship, necessarily. And it's not identified

on paper that I can only use X, y and Z or these three options or whatever it is I can find a mentor anywhere across the board. Um, to get, um, that inspiration that nudge or that clarification on what my goals are and how one-way to accomplish that. Um, you have anything that you want to part with this? No. I mean just to sum everything up with mentorship. It's not a one hospital. You know, you can choose who you want to mentor you by evaluating the individual and understanding that you are as a person and what you need. You can go select that mentor or the mentor can select you. So it's just, you know, Hey, like I said, no hard feelings. I didn't get what I need from that individual to go somewhere else. So in humans, the Red Forman of mentorship there does that mean so if you've ever watched that 70 show, Red Forman is the father, right? And I'll show that off update exactly some of those details. But basically it's, you know, let me get to that moment where you get the idea that this is the way we need to go. I think, though, in the beginning of the mentorship session, the mentors should, like, honestly, state what type of mentor they are just to set it off. And it's like if you're not going to if you know, if I'm not the type of mentor that you're looking for, then you know, I think if somebody comes to you, they've already looked at you and that I'm going to go and ask for advice. I don't think because I've never had a perfect stranger come to me and be like, Hey, can you mention me? You know what I mean? I think they've already been around me and they're like, Hey, can I ask you a question? They already know, you know, it doesn't take too long to figure out how the way that I am because, you know, I can come off harsh. I can come out and I'm an I'm a freaking sweetheart. But, you know, a lot of times I come across very, very harsh individual, and I'm okay with that because then you just have to work a little bit harder to get to know me. But the point is, I think at that point, they already know what they're getting. And so they're coming to me asking me for mentorship. I'm not going to be like, you know, tough love, right? They already know that. So, like my members of my unit, I can guarantee you there's some that are like, I cannot stand her. And there's something that I really love her because I would go through hell, hell, water to fight for them to help them out. And so I think in that sense, they already know what to expect. You know what I mean? And so to a degree, right? And I fully agree, you know, for those out there, don't get me wrong. Certain elements got the heart of gold. I mean, you're definitely, um when those individuals that will go to the mat for anyone and everyone, um uh and they usually know where they stand. Sometimes in leadership, they just know. Hey, that person is in a position. Um, and the piece I would add to that is when someone asks me, will you be my mentor? I always tell them that if you're willing to invest in yourself. I'm willing to invest in you. This is what I want you to do. I want you to connect here or get on my calendar. Two things if you don't invest the time or if you don't make that effort, then this was a lip service. Doesn't mean that I won't get engaged. I won't follow up because people say, Hey, I want you to mentor me. I would love this, get on my calendar, and then if they're not, or if I can't handle it in that moment where I get on my account, Um And then I fall love later on. I haven't seen you for a little while. So you want to talk? What's going on, um, and make those investments. But ultimately, it is a relationship that we both have to be engaged in as a mentor. Mentee and we all invest a little bit of our time and development and then okay, from a leadership perspective, or from a mentor perspective, finding

what languages Yours, honing it, defining it, developing. It makes you either a good and effective mentor. Because you know what you can do. You know, when you identify with a lot of things, which shows a lot of introspect, which is great from a better perspective. And from a leadership perspective, as you know, this is the box that I'm working with. This is what I can do, you know, these are the areas that need to work on. But here's what's going on. And I would say that you're the same way as far as this. You know what tools you have as a leader, and you know what? Areas of your strengths and you'll move people along as a mentor to other people. So, yeah, for my closing comment, I just want to say that I'm constantly looking for mentors without letting them know that they're mentoring. I'm one of those silent mentees I really am. So like, I'll tell you a perfect example. Sam, Um, Samantha, which is? She's the one to do in the podcast, right? So she doesn't know a bit, you know, inadvertently. She's mentoring me because she's very free spirited. She's, um, very accepting. She's not. You don't see her coming off as standoffish or harsh with people, which is the complete opposite of me, right? But we get along great like we can sit there and have a conversation and crack up about just silly stuff. And there were days when I would be like, you know, you know, I need to be a little bit more a little bit, just a little bit more lighthearted like she is. But I never told her that. I mean, obviously, I'm telling her now, but I know and so I think a lot of times, you know, with without knowing, we're mentoring people, I think. And if we have something and I think everybody has something good to offer, you know, everybody, even the people that think, you know, I don't have anything. You're impacting somebody. You're mentoring somebody without knowing it. That's why a lot of times we have to be mindful of what we're doing and how we're carrying ourselves, because somebody is looking up to you and somebody is going to mimic some of those things that you're doing, and they will never tell you that they're doing it exactly. And so we're imperfect beings, right? I'm incredibly imperfect and I try to put my best foot forward and I stumble a lot of times, but I always tell myself and I tell God when I pray, let me be a better version of myself today than I was yesterday, because that's all I can do. And I go forward and try to do that. So thank you, Sam, for, you know, for the little mentorship sessions that we had. And again, mentoring is, uh, isn't an ongoing thing. So thank you for this opportunity to have this conversation started feeling. I really do appreciate you sharing your insight, your thoughts on mentorship. I think we could probably go on this for probably another hour if we really had the time. And maybe we'll circle back some other time and do some more. But thank you for your time. Thank you for your dedication. Right, You guys, rules, as for sergeants, is, uh, challenging one, right? You take on a lot of things. I think we've had the conversations as a group and individually where you know where my heart realize I was a previous diamond where, um and I know what kind of load that work is. Um, it's not necessarily administratively, but emotionally, there's a lot of work there. Um, you know, there are a lot of demand signals. There's a lot of service before self and sacrifice. So on behalf of all of the gladiators out there, I want to tell you to specifically and to the other shirts out there. Thank you for that sacrifice. Thank you for that dedication. Um, and thank you for all that. You do gladiators out there. Thank you for your dedication to the mission. Thank you for all

that you do in our domain and with our airman. Um and then always remember, stab our enemies in the face through cyberspace. That's right. That's right.