

The standards for military professionals are higher than those for society at large.

Integrity

Gen. Ronald R. Fogleman is the Chief of Staff of the Air Force. Here are excerpts from his remarks on November 8, 1995, to the cadets of the US Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, Colo.

Great Concern

“One of the founding fathers of our Air Force, Gen. ‘Hap’ Arnold, addressed the importance of integrity in 1942 in his book *Army Flyer* [written with Brig. Gen. Ira C. Eaker]. In that book, he said: ‘It is an unwritten common law in the English system of jurisprudence, that an . . . officer’s word . . . can be depended on to be the absolute truth. . . . The military profession takes great pride in its reputation in this regard, and its senior professionals never forgive any deviation.’ In my view, the fact that such deviations may still exist should be of great concern to all of us in the military.”

Integrity First

“The Air Force Academy strives to develop your individual appreciation for the importance of integrity—first, by identifying it as a cadet core value; second, through the Academy’s Honor Code; and third, by striving to develop officers with forthright integrity, officers who do the right thing in their professional and private lives and take responsibility for their choices.

“Last spring, when the corporate leadership distilled the core values of the US Air Force into three ideals, we took a page out of the Academy playbook and cited ‘integrity first’ as one of the hallmarks of the Air Force professional. Over the past year, some of you may have heard me speak of my four pass-fail items for Air Force leaders. One of those is that leaders must have absolute, bed-rock integrity.”

Special Profession

“As a practical matter, why is it so important that Air Force officers—Air Force leaders—demonstrate integrity? In short, it’s because of the nature of the business we’re engaged in. We belong to a very special profession—the profession of arms.

“The US Air Force exists for one reason, and one reason alone. That is to fight and win America’s wars when called on to do so. That’s the only reason we exist as an institution. The Air Force is not a social actions agency. It is not an employment agency. The Air Force Academy does not exist to provide a first-class education to some of the brightest young men and women in America. It exists to produce leaders of our Air Force.”

Avoid Careerism

“Not all [of you] will become general officers because becoming a general officer is not what an Air Force career is about. It is about being a leader at whatever level you’re assigned and to whatever level you may rise.

“When I graduated from the Academy, I was told that if I had a full and complete career, I could expect to become a lieutenant colonel. I still believe that this should be the goal for young lieutenants entering active duty. It is not easy to become a lieutenant colonel in our Air Force. If you are fortunate enough to achieve that rank and be selected to become a colonel, then you will become part of our Air Force senior leadership.

“The general officer rank is something that occurs more through stroke of luck than it does any other way. But, the fact of the matter is that careerism is not what should be taught at or taken away from this institution.”

Higher Standards

“The Air Force exists to fight and win wars—that’s our core expertise. It’s what allows us to be called professionals. We’re entrusted with the security of our nation. The tools of

our trade are lethal, and we engage in operations that involve risk to human life and untold national treasure.

"Because of what we do, our standards must be higher than those of society at large. The American public expects it of us and properly so. In the end, we earn the respect and trust of the American public because of the integrity that we demonstrate."

Bedrock of Integrity

"In addition to [taking the commissioning] oath, we also subscribe to what the noted British soldier-scholar Gen. Sir John Hackett calls the 'unlimited liability' clause. Simply said, in the pursuit of the profession of arms, if you are called on to lay down your life for your country, for your family, for your fellow Americans, you're expected to do so. And it is no big thing. It is just a part of this profession that you've embarked upon. No other profession entails such a commitment.

"When we ask those whom we lead to take such an oath and to accept 'unlimited liability,' it's essential that the leaders in this profession of ours possess an absolute bedrock of integrity and self-discipline.

"It must be so. In this way, you assure your troops they will not be used in a frivolous or wasteful manner, and you sustain the trust of the American people who count on us to take good care of the nation's most treasured resource—its sons and daughters."

Here and Now

"This isn't something that will only happen on someone else's watch.

"In late September, twenty-four members of our profession—twenty-two Americans and two Canadians—died when an AWACS [E-3 Airborne Warning and Control System aircraft] crashed on takeoff from Elmendorf AFB, Alaska. Their ranks were spread from lieutenant colonel to airman. They were an Air Force team. . . .

"When that crew reported to their duty station that morning, they weren't thinking about giving their lives for their country. They were thinking about the training mission that was coming up. It was a mission to hone their skills in anticipation of an upcoming deployment to US Southern Command to take part in counterdrug operations.

"They believed in what they were doing, and they trusted one another. They were all part of the military profession on that fateful morning, and they gave their lives for the countries they served.

"It's because we ask people to put themselves in a set of circumstances that could lead to this kind of outcome that we must, as leaders, have bedrock integrity. Our people must understand and know that. In this manner, your integrity will provide the basis for the mutual trust, the confidence, and *esprit* that is so critical to the effective operation of a military organization."

When No One Is Looking

"What does all this mean in practice? What will it mean to you in your day-to-day activities as a future Air Force officer? Frankly, it means that sometimes you will be disappointed and you will feel lonely because, unfortunately, you won't always work for people of integrity.

"But also it means you must demonstrate the utmost integrity and honesty in everything you do—on duty and off duty. You must be straightforward in your dealings with superiors and subordinates alike. You must set the example of principled behavior for all to observe, and you must do the right thing, even when no one is looking.

"It is this example that inspires troops to demonstrate similar integrity and self-sacrifice. When they know your word is your bond, then confidence and trust will permeate the outfit. On the other hand, nothing destroys an outfit's effectiveness quicker than a lack of integrity on the part of its leadership."

Good, Bad, and Ugly

"Air Force officers must create an honest and open atmosphere within their units. Their troops must feel comfortable in coming to them with bad news as well as good news. When you become part of the leadership, don't shoot the messenger because that will just discourage others from giving you the honest feedback you need to run a unit.

"You should report the good, the bad, and the ugly up the chain to your superiors. It's much better for your boss to find out about problems directly from you than after the fact, when you've failed in a mission or

unnecessarily endangered lives or resources."

Don't Lie

"We must also clearly establish the standard within our units that Air Force people do the right thing. We don't pencil-whip training requirements, we don't violate tech data, we don't falsify documents, and we don't make inaccurate reports. The bottom line is we don't lie.

"When an NCO or a maintenance officer signs off a write-up in the aircraft forms, the crew accepts their word—their signature—that the aircraft is safe and ready for flight. This is an act of trust and faith.

"When a young engineer certifies that a rocket propulsion system is ready for launch, the owners and operators of the multimillion dollar satellite system on top of the launcher take his or her word at face value.

"Inevitably, a failure to comply with established requirements and procedures unnecessarily places at risk lives, equipment, and operations. Time after time we've seen instances where training, maintenance, or operational activities have not been documented, have been improperly documented, or have been untruthfully documented, and these have resulted in tragedy.

"We can ill afford such behavior in a business like ours that deals in lethal instruments and the lives of people. There is no substitute for honesty and integrity in our profession. What we do is just too important."

No Scapegoating

"In the end, integrity means having the courage to take responsibility for your actions and those of your subordinates. Don't quibble, don't try to shift the blame, don't look for scapegoats in your outfit. If you fouled up, then fess up and press on. In doing so, you will set the right example for your troops and earn the respect of your subordinates and superiors alike. . . .

"I remember [a] quote from my professional reading—a quote from Gen. Robert E. Lee. He said, 'Duty, then, is the sublimest word in the English language; you should do your duty in all things. You can never do more. You should never wish to do less.'

"These are good words for all of us to reflect upon." ■