

THE PROFESSIONAL: ELEVATING PERFORMANCE FOR THE FUTURE

Air Force Identity series
Kirtland Air Force Base
October, 2015



Intention

You will leave this workshop:

- ↪ Inspired by the possibility of creating a professional culture around you
- ↪ Able to make a tangible connection between professionalism and high performance
- ↪ Able to identify the currents of conversation that are shaping your organization's culture
- ↪ Equipped to speak and listen in a way that shapes a culture that is marked by professionalism

Ground-rules

- 人 Food/Drinks
- 人 How to participate (raise hand/open discussion/etc.)
- 人 Restrooms
- 人 How long the session will be

Introductions

- 1) Name/Affiliation
- 2) What knowledge and expertise do you already have regarding professionalism?
- 3) What are you interested in learning about the topic?

Laying the
Groundwork:
Discuss

- 1) What traits/qualities do you think characterize an Air Force Professional?
- 2) What traits/qualities characterize a professional unit?
- 3) To what extent do you believe you embody what it means to be an Air Force Professional? Where do you see room for improvement?
- 4) In which areas would you like to see a greater level of professionalism displayed in your work environment?

Laying the Groundwork: Definitions

PROFESSIONALISM:

A personal commitment to loyalty to Air Force standards and expectations framed within an environment of shared trust and guided by the Air Force Core Values.

PROFESSIONAL:

An Airman is a trusted servant to our nation who adheres to the highest ethical standards and is a steward of the future of the Air Force profession. Professionals are distinguished by a willing adherence to high standards of character, judgment, and competence at all times .

Based on these definitions,

- What would a professional Air Force culture look like?
- What is the relationship between performance and professionalism?
- What is the impact when a lack of professionalism exists in a unit?

PROFESSIONALISM:

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A culture of professionalism creates the conditions necessary for performance

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The question then becomes, how do you impact the culture to elevate performance?

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Organizational culture consists of networks of conversations:
*The conversation you are is perfectly correlated with the results you are
able to achieve.*

Culture as Conversation

- 人 Every organization has currents of conversation
 - 人 formal, informal, gossip, jokes, complaints, rewards, punishments, etc.
- 人 An organization's culture is shaped by the existing conversations
 - 人 In a few words, how would you describe your organization's culture?
 - 人 Identify the conversations that contribute to that culture.
- 人 The conversations in an organization create what is possible for the members of that organization in the future

Exercise:

Distinguishing your organization's conversation

With a partner, identify the different conversations that are happening on a daily basis in your unit.

- 1) What are your Airmen spending their time talking about? What are they saying/not saying?
- 2) What do people joke about/complain about/gossip about? What kind of stories do they tell?
- 3) How are the formal conversations different than the informal ones? Which carry more weight?
- 4) What challenges are you currently facing? How much time do members spend talking about those challenges?

Exercise:

Distinguishing your organization's conversation

Reference the list you created regarding the nature of a professional culture and discuss the following questions:

- 1) In what ways is your organization's culture consistent with professionalism? In what ways is it inconsistent?
- 2) What kind of conversations are happening where you identify areas of inconsistencies? Is it formal or informal? Who is participating in those conversations?

Exercise:

What level of performance does the conversations in your organization allow for?

Identify how the prevalent conversations constrain what is possible for your organization:

- 1) What reality is created by the current conversation? What is the prevailing mood?
- 2) What consumes the majority of your time?
- 3) What level of performance is possible/not possible?
- 4) Would you say the currents of conversation in your unit are taking you in the direction you want to go?

Creating Our World Through Language

“It is inaccurate to think that the only function of language is descriptive (representational).

That is to say, it is an illusion that with language there is only words fitting the world accurately or not.”

~ John Searle, 1969

Shape the Conversation, Shape your Culture

- 人 As a steward of the future of the Air Force Profession, YOU are accountable for creating/maintaining a culture of professionalism
 - 人 *Steward* -- “one who actively directs affairs”
- 人 The conversations are an incredible leverage point for shaping culture
- 人 It takes intentional (active) effort to intervene in the “current of conversation”
- 人 You often don’t realize the strength of the current until you begin to move in another direction

Shaping the Conversation

- 人 What you say (contribute to the conversation) and what you listen to (allow to be said around you) makes a difference.
- 人 There is certain type of language that makes a difference in shaping the conversation to create a professional culture.
- 人 Generative vs. Descriptive language
 - 人 Commitment-Based
 - 人 Future-Oriented
 - 人 Possibility-Focused

Shaping the conversation

Descriptive vs. Generative Language

Descriptive

Language that refers to things

Explanations/Stories

Justifications

Opinions

Reports

Assessments/Criticisms

Judgments

Reasons

Complaints

Generative

Language that creates possibilities and makes things happen

Vision

Values

Declarations

Command

Promises

Requests

Offers

Exercise:
*Your role in the
conversation*

With a partner, look at the conversations you identified earlier that are happening in your organization:

- 1) In which areas is descriptive language is prevalent?
- 2) In which areas do you see generative language is prevalent?
- 3) Where do you see **yourself** currently engaging in descriptive conversation?
- 4) Where do you see **yourself** currently engaging in generative conversation?
- 5) Where are you contributing to the default conversation?
- 6) Where are you creating your organization's conversation?

Shaping the Conversation

- 人 Professionals manage the conversational domain of their organization
- 人 An organization's conversation is a leverage point for performance.
 - 人 A new conversation will lead to a new result
- 人 The conversation you are is perfectly correlated with the results you are able to achieve.

Exercise:
*Managing the
conversation to
generate results*

With a partner, explore the following questions:

1. Where would you like to raise the level of professionalism of your organization?
2. How would that change elevate the performance of the unit? What new, tangible results do you want to see?
3. What new conversation could you start to facilitate that shift?
4. What conversations may need to be stopped?

Sharing to Complete

- 1) Where are you going to make a difference in creating a professional culture in your organization?
- 2) What results are you going to create as a result?
- 3) Where do you see an opportunity to begin a new conversation to bring that result to fruition?



Which Language is Driving your Organizational Current?

Are you spending more time talking about where you're going or why you can't get there?



“You’ll either end up on the moon or with a million reasons why you didn’t.”

~ Unknown