

BULLET BACKGROUND PAPER

ON

BRIDGING THE CORE VALUES GAP

As evidenced by recent violations highlighted in the news media, the Core Values, especially Integrity First, have lost connection to mission accomplishment in today's United States Air Force culture. This paper outlines, from a Company Grade Officer (CGO) perspective, the contributing factors of the problem and recommends three complementary steps to correct the problem. These findings are derived from research that includes historical case studies, research on moral theory and organizational ethics, interview panels, and focus groups.

Contributing Factors of Core Values Violations: The disconnect between Core Values and mission accomplishment is identified as a Core Values Gap. Various factors can contribute to this gap and drive Airmen to make poor moral decisions, regardless of Core Values knowledge or individual moral understanding

- A culture of metric-driven performance with zero-defect standards can instigate micromanagement down the chain of command and an environment permissive to integrity violations in exchange for actions that enhance the unit's image of achieving perfection
- Misapplication of the Wingman Concept inadvertently creates an environment that fosters taking care of peers over adherence to standards, losing connection with personal and peer accountability
- The Core Values are assumed to be intrinsically embedded in the consciences of Airmen; however, a gap exists between education of the Core Values and the application of those values in daily operations
- Institutions available to deter, investigate, and punish violators of the Core Values often have overlapping and conflicting policies that disincentivizes the use of viable reporting avenues for Airmen

How to Bridge the Gap: We propose three cooperative steps designed to reconnect the Core Values to mission accomplishment: empower leaders to fix the problem, equip them with tools to teach ethics, and develop institutional mechanisms that promote confidential reporting of Core Values violations

- Step 1: Incorporate the concept of a Core Values Check into the operational and strategic decision-making framework of Airmen, which encourages aligning operational decisions and actions with the Core Values
- Step 2: Leverage the USAFA's Center for Character and Leadership Development to build a curriculum based on educating leaders how to train ethics in an operational setting, and promote dialogue about leadership ethics and the contributing factors to the Core Values Gap
 - Provide an ethics curriculum to the Air University Group Commanders Course and eventually filter it to other AETC leadership courses—including Sq/CC and SOS courses, SNCO NCO Academies, and ALS
- Step 3: Equip leaders with a suggested ethics training toolkit, while maintaining flexibility for leaders to employ their own style and content to fit their unit's mission and needs
 - The toolkit may include case studies, book lists, video clips, heritage examples, or the use of social media to promote Core Values concepts using the original 1997 Little Blue Book
- Step 4: Propose institutional policy reforms through the IG to encourage reporting of systemic issues
 - Ensure mechanisms are in place to provide early limited protection for voluntary reporting
 - Enable a root cause investigation by the IG or the commander so that problems can be identified and addressed
 - Develop specific case studies as guides from real investigations for units to train on lessons learned