

BULLET BACKGROUND PAPER
ON
TRANSFORMING THE AIR FORCE NARRATIVE

PURPOSE

Improve the Air Force narrative to better resonate with the American people. Decouple the Air Force from other branches of service by presenting Air, Space, and Cyberspace solutions to specific national and geopolitical challenges of importance to the public. Finally, propose a communication medium that will maximize the effectiveness of this message.

DISCUSSION

- The Think Tank examined the CSAF's question on how to improve the way the Air Force tells its story to the public. The fall of importance in the public's eye is an important issue to the service due to its impact on how our capabilities, culture and budgets are viewed.

- There are multiple reasons the Air Force is viewed equally to other branches

-- The Air Force has a culture identity issue between the differing roles it plays.

--- The complexity of how we describe our mission hinders Airmen's ability to communicate a unified story. For example, our mission statement is nine separate messages -- Fly, Fight and Win in the components of Air, Space and Cyberspace.

-- The Air Force has championed a joint vision seen in the "Critical Enablers" narrative.

--- This narrative undermined that we are the elite national power-projection force and the only one equipped to handle all of the world's vexing problems at the same time.

--- The service is failing to communicate the direct effect it has on worldwide operations.

--- The public, and many Airmen, now view the Air Force as a support service.

-- The Air Force only describes "what" it does to the public and does not properly describe "why" the service executes its capabilities or exists.

--- The story being told does not connect to the public due to this surface level approach.

- The group approached this problem by attempting to get to the emotional core of the public.

-- Gallup poll surveys were used to identify what military and national security issues most resonate with the public, known as "vexing problems."

-- Additional research was conducted on constructing effective marketing strategies, and an interview with a Nike executive was utilized to learn about branding and corporate culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Air Force needs to modify its story to start with the “Why, How and then What” approach.
 - Individuals respond to organizations after an emotional connection. A narrative that focuses on the Air Force’s solutions to the multitude of problems with a humanistic approach will connect emotionally and communicate the why.
- The Air Force needs to use an enduring narrative and not allow outsiders to define a narrative.
 - Enduring narrative: “Born of Necessity, Grown Through Innovation, Eyes on the Horizon.”
 - Previous mottos failed to describe why the Air Force exists. The motto “Defending America’s Horizons” describes the why and creates an emotional connection with the public.
- Push the storytelling mission to the 324,000 Airmen instead of the single CSAF
 - Utilize the “storytelling” culture similar to Nike at all levels of the Air Force
 - Create and publish short story competitions, use trained airpower advocates to publicize Air Force’s Heroes and its current, poorly publicized, Storytelling program.
- Utilize an integrated marketing strategy including print/story advertising, search engine optimization, strengthened social media use and video game or “app” development.
 - This strategy includes marketing to younger generations, considering generational gaps in messaging, and revitalizing the social media attack.
 - Create a Media Operations Center to unify PA and recruiting’s external message.
 - Generate Ground-up Campaigns using Airmen’s abilities and knowledge
 - Educate through Career Fair days, cross AFSC “Airman 101” lessons and external partnerships with corporations to build a network of knowledge sharing.

CONCLUSION

The Air Force can reverse its trend of viewed importance by starting with the “why” of the Air Force’s mission, connecting to the emotional aspect of the population, and using the story-telling abilities of the Airmen. While funding or recruiting may be a driving force for these changes, the truth of the immense impact the Air Force has on national defense should never go unnoticed. How the Air Force shapes its story will decide whether this truth is recognized.