



UNITED STATES
AIR FORCE ACADEMY

**DEVELOPING LEADERS OF
CHARACTER FOR THE
21st CENTURY**

MARCH 2021

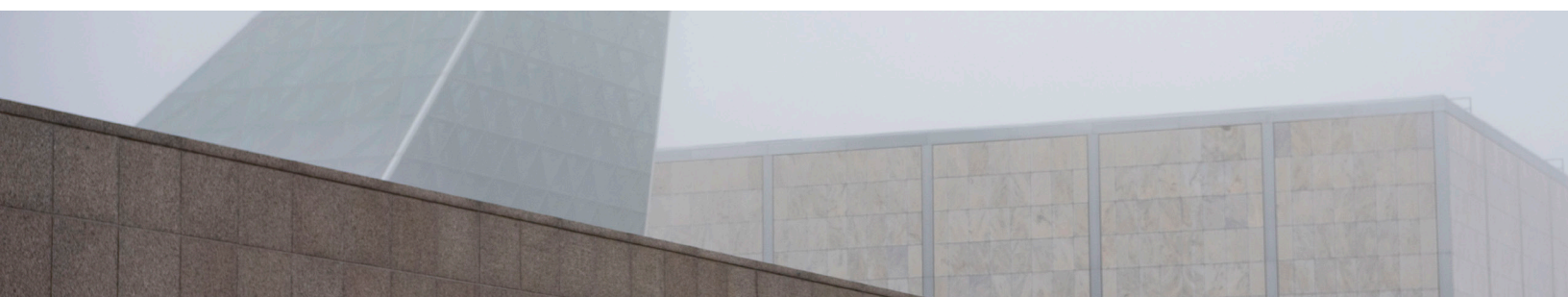
**LT GEN RICHARD M. CLARK
SUPERINTENDENT**

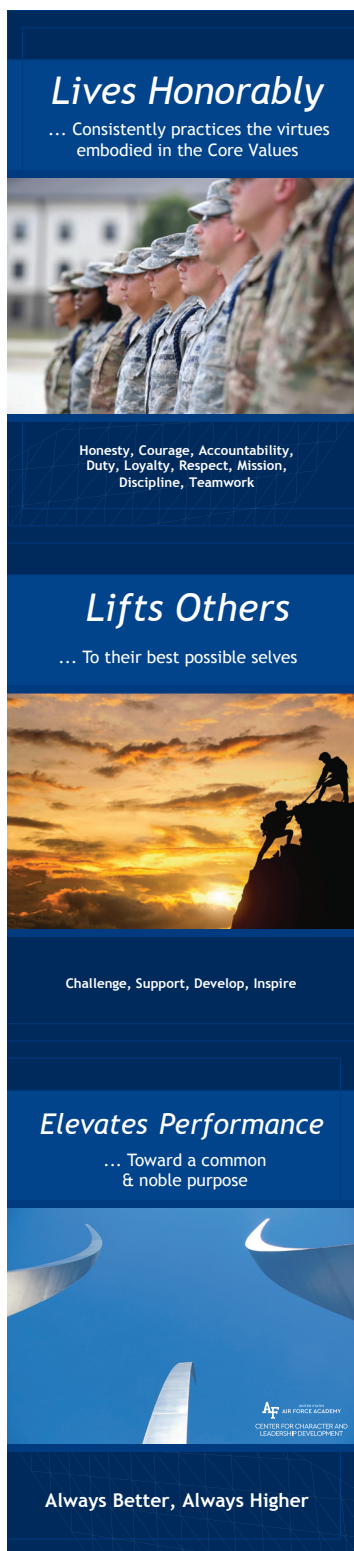
DEVELOPING LEADERS OF CHARACTER FOR THE 21st CENTURY

In 2011, as the U.S. Air Force Academy's Commandant of Cadets, I authored the foreword to a foundational document, *Developing Leaders of Character at the United States Air Force Academy: A Conceptual Framework*. At the time, I explained that the WHY of our Academy is "to develop leaders of character who our nation can count on: leaders equipped to respond to the complexity, uncertainty, and asymmetry of today's world because they possess a firm and stable character that reflects the virtues embodied in our Core Values." This purpose remains true today as we seek to grow leaders of character in support of the USAFA vision, as well as future combat leaders to lead our Nation's Air and Space Forces in a highly complex and uncertain environment.

Character development is a journey not a destination. The Leader of Character (LoC) Framework is the road-map for that journey. It not only defines what it means to be a leader of character, it also provides guideposts to challenge *ourselves* and *our teammates* along the way. Each of us must 'own' our individual character and leadership development journey and recognize that leaders grow leaders. We must embrace virtues like Honesty, Courage, Dignity, Respect, Duty, Teamwork, and more. We cannot simply grow in character for our own benefit, we must also reinforce this process in our superiors, peers, and subordinates in order to elevate performance across the enterprise.

I urge each of you to learn and integrate this Leader of Character Framework into your organizational processes, strategic plans, and most importantly your speech. Those who *live honorably* consistent with the Core Values, *lift others* to be their best possible selves and *elevate performance* toward a common and noble purpose are exactly the leaders we need to win the high-end fight of the 21st century. The LoC Framework is OUR road-map to character and leadership development. This is a journey we all need to take seriously, but also one to enjoy along the way.

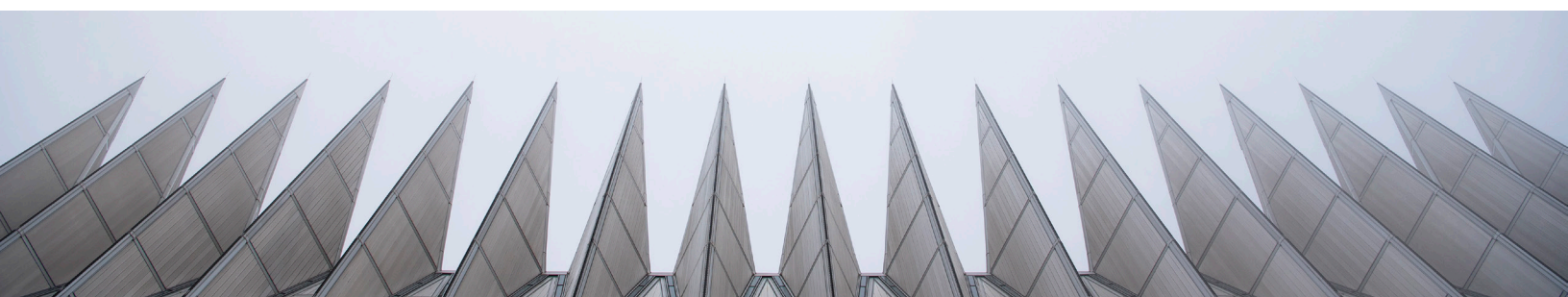




A “leader of character” is someone who...

- 1. Lives Honorably... Consistently Practices the Virtues Embodied in the Core Values.** We are bound by a code of behavior that defines our chosen profession—the Air Force Core Values. Every Airman knows the Core Values: Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All We Do. Nine virtues underpin these Core Values: Honesty, Courage, Accountability, Duty, Loyalty, Respect, Mission, Discipline, and Teamwork. When we ‘live the Core Values’, our behavior reflects these virtues.
- 2. Lifts Others... To their Best Possible Selves.** Each one of us has the capacity to pursue the best of who we are, our best possible selves. Leaders help others become their best possible selves by recognizing, supporting, and lifting their strengths, talents, aspirations, and diverse perspectives. Lifting others is about valuing human dignity and recognizing the inherent worth of everyone.
- 3. Elevates Performance... Toward a Common and Noble Purpose.** A leader of character goes beyond the minimum standard of expected performance and transforms how things are done. They focus on the common good instead of self-interest. Always striving to be better, a leader of character continually seeks to improve.

Leadership and character development is both a process and an outcome experienced by an individual. It is not an end-state. Each of us can change and improve our character, no matter our age, duty title, or job description. It is developed by the virtues we choose to practice, which then informs the choices we make. We must be responsible for our *own* development - from purposeful engagement and practice, to self-reflection and reinforcement.



Own

Pursuit of your identity

1. Your attitude & effort
2. Your duty
3. Your commitments
4. Your role in development

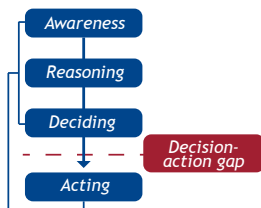
Engage

Purposeful experiences



Practice

Habits of thoughts & actions



A Leader of Character

*Lives Honorably
Lifts Others
Elevates Performance*

The Leader of Character Framework rests on three key actions:

1. **Own... Pursue Your Identity.** USAFA seeks to provide an environment to help future combat leaders find and grow into their identity as members of the Profession of Arms with an unyielding commitment to Integrity, Service, and Excellence. A leader of character fully embraces and integrates the values of the profession. They consistently apply these values in how they think and act. Owning the process means owning one's attitude, sense of duty and commitment, and initiative in character development.
2. **Engage... In Purposeful Experiences.** The individual and the organization share responsibility in creating the context for leadership and character development through purposeful experiences. Purposeful experiences and shared relationships are intentionally threaded together. Engaging relationships and experiences create meaningful, sustained, and inspirational character growth.
3. **Practice... Habits of Thoughts and Actions.** Developing as a leader of character requires extensive and sustained practice and intentional reflection. Besides being attuned to cues that favor opportunities to live honorably, lift others, or elevate performance, leaders of character should also reason and decide on best courses of action, demonstrate the courage, discipline, and commitment to act, and reinforce this process in others. Developing leaders of character is not without life lessons and learning from mistakes.

This roadmap is essential for USAFA to advance its mission of developing leaders of character, motivated to lead the U.S. Air and Space Forces in service to our Nation. As we grow in character and leadership as individuals, we must also become leaders who develop other leaders of character. Through ownership, intentional engagement, and practice, we can collectively become a cohesive team that lives honorably, lifts others, and elevates performance. This is the foundation the U.S. Air and Space Forces require to win the future fight that will feature complexity, competition, and ethical dilemmas. If we 'win' without being men and women of character, we really lose.

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