

## Chief Chat Episode 4 Transcript

Hey , what's up teammates ? Welcome to the Chief chat podcast . I'm Chief master Sergeant , Eddie Diaz Command Chief at the United States Air Force Academy . I'm a student of life followership and leadership . You know , throughout my military career , I've discovered that within every organization , there are enlisted airmen and guardians with lots of experiences who are wanting to share their examples on followership and leadership with you . In this podcast , we'll delve into the dynamic world of enlisted life and the US Air and Space Force giving our enlisted members a voice . So join us as we explore the intricacies of followership , leadership , technical expertise , and the unique experience that shape the journey of our military community . Get ready for engaging discussions , personal stories and a deep dive into the heart of the enlisted experience together . Let's uncover the untold stories and valuable insights that make our military community strong . Hey , ladies and gentlemen , welcome back to another episode of cheap chat . I am so glad that you're joining me today where we're gonna dive into the conversation and topic of followership in the booth with me . Today is my man , a gentleman that I've had the opportunity to work with for some time . Mass Sergeant Pete Ruiz . Tell us a little bit about yourself . Oh , well , uh , thanks for having me for one . It's good to see you chief . Um , from Texas . Uh , you know , grew up near military installation , uh , didn't , didn't join until a little bit later . But , um , yeah , I mean , got a family . I love , uh , the outdoors photography , things like that . Yeah , I just , uh , I'll do anything once . Try it . Awesome . Well , I'm glad that you're here with me today . Hey , but before we get started , I'm gonna throw you a really curveball type of question , you know . So if you were an insect , what insect would you be and why ? Oh man , I'd probably just go with a , a cockroach , man . Those things don't die , you know , not see that coming , live anywhere , get smushed , you're gonna keep walking , you know , you just keep up , you just get up and keep walking . May not be the most liked , but I'm gonna survive . Absolutely . I love it . Didn't see that coming . But yeah , a cockroach . That's , that's pretty good . I love that ser Louise . Hey , so let's get this going , man , as we think about cockroaches for a moment . But uh hey , so today's theme uh podcast is all about followership . You know what I believe about followership . Um That's the most important part about leadership , uh especially in an environment here at the Air Force Academy where we're so focused on developing leaders of character , you know , if leadership is important to performance and followership must have something to do with it too , right ? Um Yet , unfortunately , followership just doesn't really get talked about that much . It's a small fraction of the conversation about what leadership does . You know , followership is a straightforward concept if you think about it , um it's the ability to take direction , well , to get in an in on a program to be part of a team and to deliver on what is expected of you . Um You know , that's one idea , one definition of followership . How do you define followership ? Mine is as simple as it can be . It's the ability to follow . Now , if you're following a mission , you're following orders , you're following a task . Um It's a role that you're playing . Um Everybody wants to be a leader all the time , but sometimes that , that may not be your , your current role and you'd be able to not , not be in control and you'd be able to just follow orders um to the T um and develop yourself along the way as well . Um Because a lot of the follower characteristics just match the same as a leader . It's just your role isn't the leader . Um So that's kind of how I see it is just the ability to just to execute whatever is given to you . Yeah , and then that ability of executing what's given to you having the comp competency to actually be able to do that . Yeah , you gotta know how to do it . You can't , you know , and if you don't know how to do it , then that's when you start leaning on others . Like , you know , this is not for me or you start finding ways to do it and not being afraid to ask the questions . And it's like going to the leader and saying , hey , I need a little bit of help here , you know , so as a follower , uh because I know you've done that a lot in your period , uh Will you give some specific examples where followership has been vital to your success ? Like where you've been AAA follower and , and how you've transitioned from your success or , I mean , excuse me ,

translated uh for your successes as a follower into the leader that you are today . Yeah , I think uh in , in , you know , in my journey of , of , you know , becoming a leader . II , I did a lot of following because it's the best way to , to learn is to follow and observe , observe um the leaders that you're following . Uh you pick , you know , what , what you feel is right ? And what uh you don't want to be like and emulate . And um I think over time , you , you know , your , your leadership philosophy develops um from that follower role , you know , and then at some point you're gonna be tasked , hey , you're leading now and then all that stuff you've learned , you should be able to apply it . Yeah , I mean , being , it sounds like from your experiences , being a follower , what you have gained from that or the opportunity to see how other leaders do things and then you kind of picked and pulled on the things that you like or the things that like , I probably wouldn't have done it that way . And then it's kind of led into the way you are a leader today . 100% . You know , I I kind of feel like that I'm always following e even as a leader , you , you know , you're still learning even from your follower . So you , you don't really stop being a follower uh per se . Um It's just when you become a leader , the responsibility changes of your role , you know what I mean ? So that , that's kind of how I see it . Yeah . Awesome . Thanks for sharing that . It's , you know , being a follower is really like being in the sandbox of leadership development . So , yeah , yeah . So , hey , no pun intended here . But have you ever heard of the Peter principle ? I have actually , yeah . So you know what is the Peter principle ? It , it's a concept derived by Doctor Lawrence J . Peter , where he describes in his philosophy about employees within an organization that will advance to their highest level of competency and then be promoted to and remain at a level at which they are incompetent . So it's like they're getting promoted one position higher than they probably should have . Have you seen this happen before in an organization ? And how has a follower , you know , you as a follower , did you take direction and , and your feelings on being part of that team where somebody is like in that Peter principle realm and then work through those challenges out of what was expected from you . Ha ha . Has that ever happened to you ? Yeah , 100% . You know , and I think any time I've ranked up , you know , I'm doing the rank for the first time and , and I've only seen it , I haven't done it . I've only seen it . So you kinda almost start from ground zero every time you rank up or not necessarily rank up . But you start a new position that you've never done before , you're back to the bottom of learning what that position is and like , um you don't know anything . So like coming , you know , to my current position , I have to go to the schoolhouse to learn about it , you know , and you , you build upon that . Um But yeah , I , I think that's , uh that's exactly what happens in our realm of work . Um You know , we get , we get moved up a rank because people see potential in that next one . So , and you're probably already operating in that , that , that realm of maybe the skills and it's like , let's let's go and give them that opportunity to , to do it and have it , you know . Yeah , I like how you carve that out . Like , it's a potential . Like , congratulations . Hey , you're a tech sergeant and we're gonna promote , you know , master sergeant . I'm gonna give you more responsibilities because we see that you have that potential . Right ? But a lot of times we see where folks revert back to the rank that they were , you know , and as Chiefs , uh , you know , the Peter Principle talks topic , it's something that we chiefs talk about from time to time . And when we get together , we have our discussions , especially when we have master sergeants on our team that have recently transitioned from technical sergeant , you know , a rank that uh their roles require expertise in their craft . Uh while directing small teams , directing small teams , right ? Um Transitioning to master sergeant is a big step in our enlisted leadership from E six to E seven . And what we discover , you know , in our new master sergeants is that they revert back to technical Sergeant ways of doing what they're asked of them to do , right ? Um You know , as a fairly new master sergeant , you know , sergeant re you've been a master for almost two years now . That's correct . Um What has been your biggest challenge and your transition from technical expert to a leader of people and a manager of projects and programs ? Yeah . So I , you know , I've thought about this for , for quite a bit . Um , so coming from NCO Corp to , to a , to a higher rank , you know , as the NCO Corp , you're , you're , you're , you're , you're

leading people , but at the same time you're , you're waiting for orders , you're waiting for instructions on what to do next and how to execute uh , your team and use them . But when you , when you become a master sergeant above it , it's , it's a little bit different , you're still following a mission , you're still following uh some rules and guidelines . Um , but the responsibility is a little bit different instead of waiting for things to happen , you're , you're just doing them because they need to happen . Um , and I actually wrote some notes down on this because I didn't want to forget . But , um , um , there , there's a responsibility you are with the rank and , you know , instead of waiting and asking for asking people on what you should do next , you know , the mission , you know , what needs to be executed and you can just go do it , you know , there's no permission anymore . It's like you , you're , you've got the responsibility , you have the authority to do that , you know , and that's what I think is expected of us is to not necessarily stop asking questions but stop waiting for someone to tell you to do something and go do it . Um And , and where you're going with that and I find myself in , in my current role . Um As long as I'm in line with my commander's vision and the vision that we're doing here , me moving forward shouldn't have , um , um , um , I wouldn't , I wouldn't have any hesitation because I know where we're going . I have my heading . It's just , I'll just go , do it , I'll go , go that , go that direction . Um , now , along the way , I may have to clarify some things , but , you know , I still moving forward and not necessarily just waiting on the sidelines for someone to say , hey , go that way . So that's kind of how I saw that . Now , that's a great way of describing that . And , you know , our technical sergeants and below , we're always asking them or telling them what to go do . So they're waiting around for us to tell them what to do and they have the technical expertise to go and do it . That's why we asked them to go do that and , and the way you describe that is like , hey , you , you know what's expected , you know , what needs to get done , be bold and go do that , right ? And there's a , there's , there , there's some great tech sergeants out there that do that . They , they , they , they , they're just go getters . Um But I think um people play it safe and they just wait , you know , because they can't be wrong if they're just waiting or necessarily wrong , but they , you know , they're just waiting , they , they're staying in a very short lane . Um But for those go getters and , you know , master , you have a wide lane , use it , you know . Yeah . And I'm sure that this is something that you've learned in a short period of time from your transition to technical sergeant to master sergeant . And I'm so thankful that you brought that , you know , sharing that with us today , you know , as part of your transition from technical expert to a leader and a manager and I'm sure you've had to re invent yourself multiple times throughout your entire career . Right ? And you're doing that right now . Um Are you getting it right ? You know , I'm doing the job for the first time . So I know I don't expect that I do get it right . But , you know , III , I feel like it , like I said , I'm , I'm learning and I'm following in the same way as I'm leading , you know , at the same time , I'm not necessarily trying to build aircraft as I'm trying to fly it . But , uh I'm definitely , I'm definitely not , uh , thinking in terms that I know everything to the team learning . I'm , I'm trial and error sometimes , you know , and that's , that's the respon responsible part of being a master sergeant is you take ownership of being wrong , but you're gonna do it anyway because that's , that's a risk of , you know , that , that I've been given , you know , I'm taking a little risk by just attempting something . Sometimes that may not work . I don't I don't know . But that's , that's part of being a leader . There's a risk being a leader . And I think we forget that sometimes that um uh there is risk . Sometimes it's people , sometimes it's mission , sometimes you get wrong . Sometimes it wastes money . Sometimes it's , it wastes time . But that's why we've , you know , giving you the opportunity to , to grow and develop and lead . Uh If you're , if you're , if you're thinking clearly and you're following the mission most of the time , you're probably gonna get it right . And it goes back to what you said earlier . Like you , you know , what needs to get done , go do it but do it in a manner where you're not afraid to make mistakes along the way and take those opportunities that you learn from those mistakes and keep moving forward . You know , up to this point , I'm sure in your military service certain ways you have developed a leadership philosophy or you're

continuously modifying that leadership philosophy that goes in line with everything we talked about followership , the importance of it , how you've transitioned uh those challenges that you've endured as , as you're now a leader and a manager of programs . Um How has , you know , how has being a follower helped you develop your philosophy and your transition into leadership responsibility ? So your philosophy , how has that helped you ? But I , I would ask , well , first , what is your leadership philosophy ? So it's definitely changed over the years yeah , as I've grown and , and learned . But , um , you know , and I , I take leadership lessons from movies and books , you know , from life from , from anything I see . You know . And , um , it's so hard to , to quantify into that , to , to a philosophy but what I , what I feel , uh , like the personification of a leader is the person that loves people . You know , we're talking about leading , we're talking about moving people forward . Um And there's nothing that um you wouldn't do for your people if you love them . And I feel like leaders gotta love people unless they're probably not gonna be a good leader because leadership is about people . So , you know , I , I feel the greatest personification of leaders though a person that loves people and is willing to do anything to , to develop them and move them forward . Yeah , I love that love , right ? And I , you and I have experienced that over the years , like the best leaders are the ones that truly share our care and our compassion about us and genuinely show their love and appreciation for us . So , yeah , Sergeant Ruiz . Thank you so much for getting in the booth with me today to talk about the followership and sharing your experiences with us , talking about your philosophy . I can't thank you enough for being here and sharing that . Thank you for having me chief . We want to express our gratitude to our dedicated listeners and the incredible enlisted airmen and guardians who are the backbone of our services . Your commitment to followership , leadership , technical expertise , and sharing your experiences is what makes our military community stronger . Remember your stories matter and your contributions are vital too . So until next time , stay resilient , stay inspired and keep making it count . This is your chief Steve . Thanks for tuning in .