



FOUNDATIONS OF AIR FORCE LEADERSHIP

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From its inception in 1947,¹ the Air Force has recognized its distinctiveness as a Service and the importance of leadership in the accomplishment of the mission. For a variety of reasons, the Air Force focus on the foundational leadership elements—people and mission—has evolved over time from an emphasis on one foundational element over the other, to today’s more balanced approach.

The first effort to codify leadership for US Air Force Airmen, rather than US Army Air Force Soldiers, was Air Force Manual (AFM) 35-15 (1948); its thrust was in emphasizing the psychological aspects of leadership, taking much of its tone from a 1943 National Research Council study, *Psychology for the Fighting Man*.² The emphasis was on the “art” of leadership:

The very fact that leadership is an art should discourage your becoming a mechanical leader. Leadership does not provide formulas, rules, or methods which will fit every situation. Leadership is an intangible quality which cannot be seen, felt, or measured except through its results. Moreover, you cannot predict the results with mathematical accuracy. If you have skill as a leader, however, you can predict results within the limits of your objectives.³

The manual emphasized seven “aspects” of leadership and discussion of them was interspersed throughout: Mission, Integrity of Character, Responsibility, Influencing Men, Knowing Men, Unity, and Morale.⁴ The current definition of leadership owes much to the emphasis on the mission and the people (Mission, Influencing Men, and Knowing Men), and the current Air Force core values are foreshadowed in the other aspects (Integrity of Character, Responsibility, Unity, Morale). It also listed six “attributes of a leader:” Integrity of Character, Sense of Responsibility, Professional Ability, Energy, Emotional Stability, and Humaneness.⁵ The attributes individualized the seven aspects, by applying them to the officer as a leader. The current Air Force core values trace their origins directly to these attributes.

¹ The National Security Act of 1947 (as amended).

² AFM 35-15, *Air Force Leadership* (1948), p. 1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 48-53.

Admittedly, the manual recognized the lessons incorporated were based on “an organization similar to a World War II air force unit composed of civilians who had to be quickly trained as soldiers.”⁶ It acknowledged that the future Airman will function in more intricate organizations with more complex duties, requiring the Airman to become a more “complex being whose behavior can less and less be placed within any simple pattern.”⁷ The entire publication focused solely on the Air Force officer. Its discussions revolved around both leadership and command for officers, with no direct information written to address the leadership concerns or challenges of the enlisted force or civilians.

In 1955, the Air Force published AFM 50-21, *Living for Leadership*. It represented a dramatic change of focus from its 1948 predecessor, with chapter titles such as Patterns for Living, Convictions for Living, and Courageous Living. Heavily illustrated, it provided insight into the culture of the day as interpreted by the Air Force for its officers. This manual was a product of its time, which emphasized Western faith and values to combat “the faith of the Communist.” In the aggregate, the document is a time capsule of America, giving guidance for how to live, vice how to lead.

In 1964, the Air Force returned to AFM 35-15 form and structure with the introduction of AFM 50-3, *Air Force Leadership*. The aspects of leadership and attributes of a leader are identical to the earlier edition but focus more on the mission and place a greater urgency in deterrence and readiness. The chapter on “Mission” highlights this edition’s emphasis, appropriate for its time. Then-Secretary of the Air Force (SECAF) Eugene M. Zuckert (1961-1965) was quoted to establish the overarching responsibility of the Air Force, hence the Airman’s perspective at the time:

Ours is the primary responsibility to prevent the domination of the aerospace by any power or combination of powers whose interests are inimical to freedom and national independence on Earth...Space is a medium of possible military action. As such, we must view the operating problems in space as an extension of those in the atmosphere. That is why we in the Air Force call it the aerospace.⁸

With the United States engaged in a struggle for nuclear dominance with the Soviet Union, the CSAF, General Curtis E. LeMay placed his emphasis on how Air Force officers should lead (the document continued to focus exclusively on officers): “We maintain our aerospace forces in readiness to respond to any kind of military challenge the Communists may make. We must be prepared to emerge victorious from a general war should it be forced upon us.”⁹ Consistent with AFM 50-3’s emphasis on the mission, LeMay went on to say, “No matter how well you apply the art of leadership, no

⁶ Ibid., p. 2. The term “soldier” was still used to describe members of the Air Force at this time.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ AFM 50-3, *Air Force Leadership* (1964), p. 10.

⁹ Ibid.

matter how strong the unit or high the morale of your men, if your leadership is not directed completely toward the execution of the mission, your leadership has failed.”¹⁰

In 1985, the Air Force recognized the importance of balancing the people and the mission which led to the development of Air Force Pamphlet (AFP) 35-49, *Air Force Leadership*. This pamphlet simplified the Service’s discussion on leadership, defining the term in succinct language: “Leadership is the art of influencing and directing people to accomplish the mission.”¹¹ It also provided a new list of leadership traits for the Air Force, most derived at least tacitly from the leadership attributes from AFMs 35-15 and 50-3: integrity, loyalty, commitment, energy, decisiveness, and selflessness. In addition, it provided leadership principles, similar to the earlier leadership aspects: know your job, know yourself, set the example, care for people, communicate, educate, equip, motivate, accept your responsibility, and develop teamwork.¹² AFP 35-49 was “a basic guide for the new and for the aspiring Air Force leader.”¹³ Unique to this Air Force document on leadership was the removal of its explicit application to officers only. The document referred to all leaders, without regard to rank or command authority.

Finally, AFDD 1-1, *Leadership and Force Development*, the predecessor to this volume, was signed by General John P. Jumper, CSAF, in 2004. Aspects and attributes of leadership became core values, supported by enduring leadership competencies, which now have been updated into the Service’s institutional competencies. This current version is based on that document’s framework, expanded to meet the needs of today’s Air Force. The figure, Evolution of Air Force Leadership Dimensions, illustrates the evolution of leadership dimensions from attributes, to traits, to core values—*Integrity, Service, Excellence*—which now provide the underpinning for leadership in today’s Air Force.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

¹¹ AFP 35-49, *Air Force Leadership* (1985), p. 1.

¹² Ibid., pp. 2-5.

¹³ Ibid., p. 1.

AFM 35-15, Air Force Leadership (1948)	AFM 50-3, Air Force Leadership (1964)	AFP 35-49, Air Force Leadership (1985)	AFDD 1-1, Leadership and Force Development (2004/2011)
Attributes: Integrity of Character Sense of Responsibility Professional Ability Energy Emotional Stability Humaneness	Attributes: Integrity of Character Sense of Responsibility Professional Ability Energy Emotional Stability Humaneness	Traits: Integrity Loyalty Selflessness Commitment Energy Decisiveness	Core Values: Integrity Service Before Self Excellence in All We Do

Evolution of Air Force Leadership Dimensions

