



Welcome to the Edge #7

This issue of *The Leading Edge* brings you a look at the role of the flight commander. As with previous months, the reverse side of this newsletter contains ideas and prompts you can distribute to your flight-level leaders to help define their role, including some time-tested methods they can adopt to improve their units.

Published online by the Global College of PME, *The Leading Edge* is designed to generate ideas for your leader development courses. It also serves as a bridge between flight-level leadership expertise at Air University and course directors, lesson managers, and individual leaders in the field. We recommend you forward the AFPIMS link via email, post a copy on your organization's social media platforms, or send copies out via email to previous, current, and future flight-level leaders, the targeted audience for this FCE material.

Course Director Corner

"The single best way a leader can learn and grow is through reading ... So many of our best leaders develop and enhance their ability to lead through endless contact with books."

-- ADM (ret) James Stavridis, US Navy

How does one learn to be a flight commander? *It depends.*

There is no single correct answer to that question. Every unit is different. Every base is different. And we, by our very nature, are different. The *Flight Commander's Edge* provides a framework for you to deliver content based on your commander's expectations and the perceived need at your base. The approach we take to teaching leadership is a proven, discussion-based model where participants discuss their personal lessons-learned with their peers. Through discussion, learners come to a shared understanding of what it means to be a flight commander.

But our approach is not the only way. Another time-tested method to learn leadership is through media. Reading about leaders, their successes, and their failures. Listening to stories about projects and teams. Watching tales of history to learn what was done, and what not to do. Today, we have unlimited access to materials which support our self-development. As a course director, you should plan to inspire your participants to pursue a course of leadership self-study as part a lifelong learning approach to growth in the profession.

Admiral Stavridis, former Supreme Allied Commander Europe, asked over two hundred senior flag officers about their reading habits and favorite books. He (and co-author R. Manning Ancell) spent years compiling the answers into one compelling work -- *The Leader's Bookshelf* -- a summary of key leadership lessons designed for anyone who wants to improve his or her ability to lead.

You can leverage this same kind of approach in your Flight Commander Leadership Courses. How? See "Preparing Your Participants" on page 15 of the *Course Director's Handbook*.

Ask your participants to choose a few of the below question prompts when they conduct their pre-course interviews with their commanders, and to bring the answers with them to the class session. Also encourage them to include the responses as part of their Professional Development Plan (PDP), as well as refer to them during class discussions. These answers and ideas can help create a local leadership book discussion group.

Question Prompts (For participants to ask their commander)

- What are you reading now?
- What is a book that you read as a junior leader?
- Which leadership books did your mentor or boss suggest you read as a young leader?
- What would you recommend I read given my interest in (fill in your personal interest area)?
- Are there any books you wish you had read earlier in your career?
- Is there a leadership author or a leadership book series you recommend?
- Are there any books that changed your perspective?

Leadership Library Book Suggestions Activity

This activity can be used as an icebreaker or after a break.

Divide participants into their small groups and ask them to compile a list of recommended works on leadership (based on their commander's suggestions). Record the list on a whiteboard or chart visible in the room (so other groups can see them) for the duration of the course. Then discuss the following questions: (a) Are the same books recommended from different commanders? Why? (b) What books which you have read would you add to the group list? Why?

Course Directors should encourage both presenters and participants to refer to and update the lists throughout the course. After the course is complete, compile the lists and curate a base-specific list which you can use to further encourage out-of-class leadership development.

Nothing matches the tasks of "real" leadership -- but vicarious experience is invaluable. Several military leader [blogsites](#) teem with book ideas. Suggest your participants view the [CSAF's Leadership Library](#). Reading for professional development, self-improvement, as well as entertainment and relaxation is something to be encouraged.

Leadership is a *practical*, not theoretical, art. There are, therefore, limits to how much of it can be imparted in the classroom. Leadership is more a matter of self-study than of formal instruction, and that is highlighted in the recommended first lesson of a Flight Commander Leadership Course (FCLC), *The Role of The Flight Commander*. Consider adding the suggested book reading prompts to your FCLC preparation. See the "Facilitator Resources" section on the AFPIMS site as well as the *Flight Commander*, and the *Squadron Commander Discussion Guides*, and the *Leadership Library Question Prompts* handout.

Visit the AFPIMS page to download FCE experiential lesson plans and lesson guides, plus the *Course Director's Handbook* for ideas on how to organize your own program, face to face, or online.

Consider starting a Leadership Book Club*
view "Leadership Library Question Prompts" in
"The Role of the Flight Commander" lesson area
www.airuniversity.af.edu/GCPME/Flight-Commanders-Edge/

**Curiosity cultivated: Blogs, Books, Movies, Speeches, Fiction, Non-fiction, Graphic Novels, Podcasts, Media-moments.*

(Tip: Open this newsletter in your browser, then save page 2 as a PDF file to create a 1-page flyer you send out to flight-level leaders!)



"The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership."

Harvey S. Firestone
Founder, Firestone Tire Company

The Role of the Flight Commander

Read

[AFI 1-2, Commander's Responsibilities.](#)

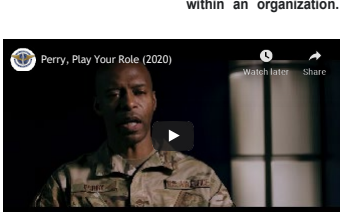
In many units, the flight commander is the first line of leadership.

[Build Up Your People](#)

D. Michael Abrashoff, former captain of the U.S.S. *Benfold*, relays some of the simple methods he used to build his team's morale. Perhaps some of these techniques can be used in your flight.

Watch

CMSgt Nathan Perry, while the USAF First Sergeant Academy Commandant, talked about leadership and the importance of first sergeants during COVID-19. In this four-minute video, he reminds us of the importance of understanding your role within an organization.



Questions to Consider

What is your Commander's Intent?

How do you welcome new members to your flight?

Ask these questions of yourself and your flight members

What are the top characteristics of an effective leader?

When listing traits, consider this: A few should be specific to your current role. Others should be enduring and apply to leadership in general. How does your list align with the four duties and responsibilities for commanders outlined in AFI 1-2, *Commander's Responsibilities*: lead people, improve the unit, manage resources, and execute the mission? If your list doesn't align...should it? Why or why not?

What is your role as a flight commander?

Discuss your role with your commander. Talk with other flight commanders about their daily tasks and what they perceive their role to be in their units. Listening to others' experiences provides context for your own leadership development.

How are you developing yourself?

What are your commander's expectations for you and your team? How do your commander's expectations affect your own Professional Development Plan?

How are you developing your team?

Developing your team begins anew whenever a new member arrives. Organizations that deliberately welcome new members and have a plan for acculturation help them off to a good start. Newcomers need to understand their role in the organization as a whole, learn expectations, and begin to transition to their job. Their experience in the first few weeks will have a significant bearing on their level of commitment and ability to become productive. Welcoming new Airmen or Guardians to your flight is great way to grow the team and encourage them to feel valued from day one.



Contact *The Flight Commander's Edge*

If your unit would like to create its own Flight-level leadership course using professionally developed resources from Air University visit

www.airuniversity.af.edu/GCPME/Flight-Commanders-Edge/

FlightCommandersEdge@us.af.mil