



Setting Your Compass

SOME THOUGHTS FROM A (FORMER) DJAG

BY MAJOR GENERAL CHARLES J. DUNLAP JR., USAF (RET)

While at Air Force Academy recently for some speaking engagements I had the great pleasure of visiting the Academy's legal office led by Colonel Dawn Zoldi. Colonel Zoldi very kindly invited me to speak to her staff, and I took with me a talker of sorts developed while still on active duty. It summarizes one person's thoughts about the JAG Corps, the Air Force and — in a way — life itself based on just over 34 years in uniform.

Though I haven't really thought about it much since retiring, the talker reflects ideas I found helpful in my career. Of course, each individual must develop a personal "philosophy," so to speak, but I thought seeing an example might help some folks get started. I hasten to add that I certainly don't think I have all the answers; I would simply say that although I did not always follow my own advice, the admonitions in the talker remain an important part of my personal aspirations.

VALUES THAT HELP YOU FLOURISH

As you might expect, some of the observations are idiosyncratic to my view of the world. For example, I said I especially value "service-before-self" and that remains true. I added that I "greatly admire work ethic, initiative, and a positive attitude." I still think a JAG or paralegal can distinguish him or herself in a very positive way by demonstrating those values, and — importantly — they don't depend on having superior talent or even a great intellect. There have been lots of smart people with genuine

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potential who did not flourish in the JAG Corps often because they lacked the complimentary qualities that determine success in the proverbial ‘real world.’

cover-to-cover, and working your way through the two or three dozen leading Supreme Court cases related to national security. Obviously, these aren’t easy tasks, but becoming the



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THE POWER OF PARALEGALS AND KNOWING THE CLIENT’S BUSINESS

Other ideas are, I think anyway, perennials. Here’s one aimed at young JAGs: *Never forget that paralegals are the real “power of attorney(s)”!* It is still true that “experienced paralegals can help you learn about the JAG Corps and the Air Force — if you let them.” Another enduring principle: “get to know the client’s business.” All the knowledge of the law in the world won’t help you if you don’t understand the facts involved, or the context in which it will be applied.

MANUAL FOR COURTS-MARTIAL AND SUPREME COURT CASES

True, a couple of the recommendations are decidedly ‘old school.’ For example, I recommend such labor-intensive activities as reading the *Manual for Courts-Marital*

professional you should want to be has never been — *and never will be* — easy. Appreciating that truth is a key step in your development.

You might ask: why, in the age of instant online research capabilities, should anyone bother to read through texts and cases that might have no immediate relevance to the issues piling up on your desk? Allow me to suggest two things: In the first place, while you may not remember the specifics, there is enormous value when confronted with a new issue to recognize that “there is something in the Manual about that” or “I think there is a Supreme Court case that has some helpful dicta.” Actually, you will be amazed at what an asymmetric advantage this will give you.

Technical Sergeant Calvin R. Johnson prepares a power of attorney for Ms. Carol Johnson. (U.S. Air Force photo illustration/Ms. Thomasa Paul)

THOUGHTS ON LEADERSHIP

- **Always remember that your word is your bond. Trust is indispensable in our business.**
- **Aim to be a force-multiplier; the best JAGs are all-purpose (not just legal) problem-solvers for command.**
- **Welcome feedback, and give it to others (including your seniors!) at the appropriate time and place.**
- **Training is the key to operational success — invest in your future, *even when it hurts!***
 - It's especially critical to make sure that you are ready to go in harm's way, physically and mentally.
 - **Self-study** and self-preparation are the hallmarks of the true professional.
 - Read the classic Supreme Court cases on military and national security issues.
 - Read the Manual and other basic documents cover-to-cover, not to memorize but to ensure you know the topics that are covered...get in the habit of looking at source material, not secondary sources.
 - Read Air Force and military history: get to know the 'client's business'!
- **Appreciate your leadership and officership responsibilities.**
 - In the Air Force you are a leader from "day 1" — act like one.
 - Get to know the problems, values, work habits, motivation, etc., of your subordinates.
 - Never ask others to do anything you wouldn't do yourself.
 - Have standards, make them known, and enforce them.
 - Aim to be sincerely and honorably respected; if you are also popular along the way, that's great!
- **Be sure to have a personal physical fitness program.**
 - This has as much psychological value as physical.
- **Don't let concerns fester.**
 - Communicate with your leadership — directly to TJAG if you need to do so.
 - Especially avoid becoming a rumor monger — you don't want that reputation!
- **Bad news does not get better with age.**
 - When you communicate a problem, have a plan to solve it.
- **The Air Force is NOT a one-mistake Air Force; unless it's the wrong mistake.**
 - If you're giving 110% and attempting to do your job in an honest and straight forward way, then you're covered in my book.
 - Acceptance of responsibility is a mark of real leadership and officership.
 - BUT if you do something unethical or reasonably perceived to be, it could be a "one-mistake AF."
 - Remember: you are always on parade; accept that JAGs and paralegals live under a microscope.
 - Know the difference between the extremely hard to do and the truly undoable; when the former doesn't seem cost-effective, talk to your boss; always let the boss know about the latter. Have an appropriate sense of urgency.
 - The 80% solution that's on time always beats the 100% solution that's late to need.
- **I especially value service-before-self; and I greatly admire work ethic, initiative, and a positive attitude.**
- **I think highly of those who give credit to others, and who ensure others are recognized/rewarded.**
 - You can't do it all yourself, and you can never be too gracious when you succeed.
 - Never let your ego get in the way of a better idea.
- **In my view, a successful JAG office must have a robust, fair, and efficient military justice program—this is pass/fail!**
 - Commanders are the decision makers; JAGs provide options (all of them) and reasoned advice/recommendations.
- **Seize every opportunity to improve your forensic skills — the ability to communicate and advocate is essential to success in our world.**
- **Spread the concept of the "JAG Family"; look after one another, and be especially attentive to the families of TDY and deployed personnel. Be sensitive to the needs and concerns of single people too!**
- **Never forget that paralegals are the real "power of attorney(s)!"**
 - Experienced paralegals can help you learn about the JAG Corps and the Air Force — if you let them.
- **Have a vision and specific goals. Encourage others to have them too. Tell the JAG story every chance you get.**
- **Be yourself (I try to be!)...and take care of yourself; be sure to have some fun!**

Go tell the Spartans, thou that passeth by, that here, obedient to their laws, we lie.
~*Epitaph for the Spartan soldiers at Thermopylae, 458 B.C.*

Fortes fortuna adiuuat. ~*Terence, Roman citizen, 171 B.C.*

The world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it. ~*Albert Einstein, 1879-1955*

Courage is contagious: when brave men take a stand, the spines of others are stiffened. ~*Billy Graham, 1964*

For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. ~*Luke 12:48*

Discipline is the soul of the army. It makes small numbers formidable; procures success in the weak, and esteem to all.
~*George Washington, 1759*

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing. ~*Edmund Burke, 1770*

Live as brave men; and if fortune is adverse, front its blows with a brave heart. ~*Cicero, 106-43 B.C.*

War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things. The decayed and degrade state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is worth war is much worse. The person who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing which is more important than his own personal safety, is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself. ~*John Stuart Mill, 1862*

I desire to so conduct the affairs of this administration that if at the end, when I come to lay down the reins of power, I have lost every friend on earth, I shall at least have one friend left, and that friend shall be down inside me. ~*Abraham Lincoln, 1863*

Not failure, but low aim, is a crime. ~*James Russell Lowell, 1890*

Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear — not absence of fear. ~*Mark Twain, 1894*

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. ~*George Santayana, 1906*

There are a lot of guys who say they want to work harder and be the best, but they never pay the price. I love paying the price.
~*Quarterback Tom Brady, 2007*

This is the first and true function of a leader: never to think the battle or cause is lost. The ancient Romans put up a statue to the general who saved them in one of Rome's darkest hours, with this inscription: "Because he did not despair of the Republic"
~*Field Marshal Lord Wavell, 1939*

Duty, honor, country: Those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be. They are your rallying point to build courage when courage seems to fail, to regain faith when there seems to be little cause for faith, to create hope when hope becomes forlorn. ~*General Douglas MacArthur, 1964*

A man caught on rebound from failure can be a wonderful investment...[a]n opportunity to re-establish himself in his own esteem, when he has forfeited it, is something for which a man will give you a great deal in return. ~*Sir John Hackett, 1982*

If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one. ~*Mother Teresa, (1910-1997)*

Success is the result of preparation, hard work, learning from failure, loyalty to those for whom you work, and persistence.
~*Colin Powell, 1997*

Where there is no vision, the people perish. ~*Proverbs 29:18*

You can't change the rules if you're not in the room. ~*Susan Estrich, 2001*

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that this place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat. ~*Theodore Roosevelt, 1910*

Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light. ~*Dylan Thomas, 1952*

The woods are lovely, dark and deep, but I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep. ~*Robert Frost, 1923*

The second point is that it will orient you towards looking at primary sources. Today's world is filled with secondary sources that will explain and summarize the original. The problem? They are sometimes wrong — even catastrophically so, or they omit something of particular relevance to your issue. Reading the primary sources can give a sense of the atmospherics about a matter, and can often allow you to discover an insight no squib will ever suggest. Do not undervalue serendipity in legal research!

MENTORS

I also might add: Find a mentor or, ideally, *mentors*. A mentor is not the same thing as a cheerleader (though good mentors cheerlead from time to time). You really want someone who will tell you what you *need* to hear versus what you *want* to hear. Believe it.

BAD DAYS...EVERYONE HAS THEM

One more: Know that you will have your bad days. By this I mean there will be days in everyone's JAG Corps career when you think you

assembled over the years. But looking at it now, I realize there are a couple of themes present. These themes relate to overcoming adversity and, perhaps even more importantly, understanding that in real life, failure actually is an option and vindication is not a given. One might say that a lot of life is holding onto your values and persevering in the face of stormy uncertainty or even principled "defeat." As Teddy Roosevelt might put it, there is really no true defeat if you fail "while daring greatly." Winners always dare greatly.



FINAL THOUGHT

A final qualification, please appreciate that your current leaders may have a different perspective on some or all of the matters, so please consider my talker as simply a supplement to — *not* a replacement for — their wisdom and guidance. Now, start writing *your own talker!* **R**



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Students attending the Paralegal Craftsman Course (PCC) at the Judge Advocate General's School, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. (U.S. Air Force photo/ Ms. Thomasa Paul)

LIFE-LONG LEARNING

Would I add anything? Maybe. What comes to mind is this somewhat opaque notion: *Always work to know what you don't know*. I've seen way more people find themselves in a fix because they thought they knew more than they did. Here's a truth: the more you learn, the more you realize what you don't know, so accept that learning is a life-long project, and apply yourself to it. Really, you won't be sorry.

are in over your head, that you are not suited for the military, etc., etc. Recognize that *everyone* feels this way once in a while (especially while deployed) and work through it in a professional way. All things really do pass, and it will get better!

FAVORITE QUOTES

On the reverse of the talker there is a listing of favorite quotes. At the time I put it together, I thought it was just a random collection