



VOLUME 2 LEADERSHIP

**CHAPTER 2: LEADING AIRMEN**

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*I'm firmly convinced that leaders are not born; they're educated, trained, and made, as in every other profession. To ensure a strong, ready Air Force, we must always remain dedicated to this process.*

—General Curtis E. LeMay, CSAF, 1961-1965

**Leadership is the art and science of motivating, influencing, and directing Airmen to understand and accomplish the Air Force mission in joint warfare.**<sup>1</sup> This highlights two fundamental elements of leadership: (1) the mission, objective, or task to be accomplished, and (2) the Airmen who accomplish it. All facets of Air Force leadership should support these two fundamental elements. Effective leadership transforms human potential into effective performance in the present and prepares capable leaders for the future.

Any [Airman](#) can be a leader and can positively influence those around him or her to accomplish the mission. Leadership does not equal command, but all commanders

<sup>1</sup> AFM 35-15, *Air Force Leadership* (1948): "Leadership is the art of influencing people to progress with cooperation and enthusiasm toward the accomplishment of a mission." AFP 35-49, *Air Force Leadership* (1985): "Leadership is the art of influencing and directing people to accomplish the mission." The definition in the text is a distillation of these earlier efforts to define leadership for the Air Force.

should be leaders.<sup>2</sup> The vast majority of Air Force leaders are not commanders. Individuals who have stepped forward to lead others in accomplishing the mission simultaneously serve as both leaders and followers at every level of the Air Force, from young Airmen working in aircrew flight equipment, to captains at wing staffs, to civilian directors, to generals at the Pentagon. Leaders positively influence their entire organization, without necessarily being the commander.

The Air Force expects its members to develop leadership skills. The nature and extent of that development depends on the member's status: officer, enlisted, or civilian. The Air Force expects an officer to move quickly through the levels of leadership, from tactical expertise into operational competence. Many will move into the level of strategic vision.<sup>3</sup> Air Force enlisted members will operate chiefly at the level of tactical expertise, where their technical skills are combined with their direct influence on subordinate members. DAF civilians can function at all levels of leadership, but, with the exception of the President of the United States and authorities granted to the Secretary of Defense,<sup>4</sup> they can never command. The pinnacle of leadership is to command where the responsibility for making life and death decisions as well as taking organizational responsibility resides. Officers can rise to command Air Force forces or a joint force.

Followers also have a critical role in displaying loyalty, as well as core values needed to accomplish the Air Force mission. A commander should be comfortable leaving his or her unit in the hands of the next in command, without feeling the need to routinely check in to ascertain the status of the unit. If the commander has done his or her job right in developing followers who can step in with competence and confidence, no fear for the health of the unit during absence should exist.

The abilities of a leader can be improved through deliberate use of force development, built from education, training, inclusive collaboration, and experience (see Annex 1-1, [Force Development](#), for a full discussion of force development). All Airmen can achieve excellence by living the Air Force core values, developing institutional competencies, acquiring professional and technical competence, and then acting on such abilities to accomplish the unit's mission, while taking care of the unit's personnel. Core values permeate leadership at all levels, at all times. Leaders at the more junior levels demonstrate personal institutional competencies needed to create a cohesive unit fully supportive of its mission. Mid-level leaders use institutional competencies at the people/team level to advance the organization's responsibilities within the framework of the operational mission. The more senior the leader, the more crucial becomes his or her use of organizational competencies in effecting mission accomplishment. The ability

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<sup>2</sup> This concept dates back to AFM 35-15 (1948): "You can be a commander without being a leader, or you may be a fine leader without a command. But you must be a good leader to be an efficient commander" (AFM 35-15, page 4).

<sup>3</sup> Levels of leadership are defined more thoroughly here: <https://doctrine.af.mil/download.jsp?filename=V2-D10-Levels-Leadership.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> The President's authority is derived from the [United States Constitution, Article II, §2](#). The Secretary of Defense's authority is derived from [10 U.S.C. §113](#) and [50 U.S.C. §401](#).

to influence people, improve performance, and accomplish a mission—leadership actions—are part of all levels of leadership.

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