



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF STAFF
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WASHINGTON DC 20330

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Commanders,

We are now six weeks out from the AFA Convention and our annual global wing commanders conference. It is one of the gatherings I look forward to most as CSAF because of the rich exchange of ideas and the opportunity to talk about important issues. As we prepare to meet, a few thoughts to share.

A year ago I gave each of you an assignment to visit Basic Military Training (BMT) at Lackland to see where we make Airmen. You were given a “test question” to ponder – “*how do so many of our Airmen transition from unlimited hope on that parade ground to hopeless on our watch*”?

When I asked this question, we were on a path to 103 suicides in 2018 having had 50 at that time. I would never have predicted that a year later we would stand today at 78 suicides. If we do nothing, we will end 2019 with upwards of 150+. **Hopeful to hopeless** ... what is going on? It is our job to find out.

Tomorrow opens a 45 day window for you to take a Resilience Tactical Pause to discuss this with the airmen (including civilian) entrusted to your care and every echelon of leadership in your command. Make this day yours and pick the timing in the window that works best for your wing. Include leadership at every level in both planning and execution.

I had a conversation recently with a young person who had just lost a high school friend to suicide. We talked about the reasons behind such a tragic and final act. What she said was enlightening. “*Young people often see themselves as a burden to others. Their family, their friends, their unit, the Air Force ... so killing themselves in their mind is a way to remove themselves as a burden.*”

It got me thinking about how we see our airmen who have been entrusted to our care. Do we see them as a **blessing** ... or as a **burden** ? What about first line supervisors, flight commanders, squadron commanders, superintendents? Perhaps you should talk about this in your discussions. What about you? Start with an honest assessment of how you see your airmen. How do your airmen see themselves?

Suicide is an adversary that is killing more of our airmen than any enemy on the planet. You and I have sworn to “defend against all enemies, foreign and domestic.” Suicide attacks sometimes with and often without warning. Make this tactical pause matter. Make it yours and make it personal.

CMSAF Wright has been talking about resiliency for 3 years, so I asked him to put together a video for your use as you craft a day to talk about what is going on and how we counterattack. Small groups tend to be more effective than large. We must turn this around.

I look forward to discussing this with you at our conference to hear what you have learned. As commanders, taking care of our airmen and their families so they can take care of the mission is our most sacred duty as leaders.

As always, proud to serve with you. Fight’s on!


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