

# A PROFESSION OF ARMS: OUR CORE VALUES



**U.S. AIR FORCE**

**MAY 2022**

## CSAF PERSPECTIVE

Wingmen, Leaders, Warriors,

We are members of a unique society. No other profession holds its members to the standards that we hold ourselves and each other to. Our Nation holds Airmen to this high standard because it is our job to defend the homeland, project airpower globally, and operate as a joint, allied, and partnered force...and they count on us to fly, fight, and win.

As Airmen, we are all on a journey as members of the *Profession of Arms*. As with all journeys, we need a compass, a north star...a way to navigate the path as we go. These Core Values are our north star, they provide us the basic understanding of what is expected and required of Airmen—all Airmen—every day. These Core Values serve as a reminder that we all start our journey with an oath to something bigger than ourselves. We owe it to ourselves and to each other to uphold these values without wavering.

These are not new values; they have been woven into our fabric by generations of Airmen. We must all internalize these Core Values and model the behaviors that demonstrate them. We must inspire others, set an example through personal conduct, and promote leadership and accountability across the force.

I am proud to be an Airman, and I know that you are as well. Together we will continue to support and defend the Constitution of the United States and defend it against all enemies, united in *The Profession of Arms*.



**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.**  
**General, USAF**  
**Chief of Staff**

## PURPOSE

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The first thing you must understand is that our chosen profession is that of a higher calling, in which we hold ourselves to higher standards. To serve proudly and capably, our commitment to our cause must be unbreakable; it must be bonded in our mutual respect for each other. Throughout our service, we are guided and reminded of this remarkable responsibility to our Nation. The oaths we take remind us that we serve freely in support and defense of the Constitution of the United States.

Whoever you are and wherever you fit on the Air Force team, this is your basic guide to our Air Force Core Values. The Core Values exist for all members of the Air Force family - officer, enlisted, and civilian; active, guard, reserve, and retired.

The Core Values are much more than minimum standards. They remind us what it takes to get the mission accomplished. They inspire us to do our very best at all times. They are the common bond among all comrades in arms, and they are the glue that unifies the force and ties us to the great warriors and public servants of the past and guide us into the future.

***Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence In All We Do.*** These are the Air Force Core Values. Study them...understand them...follow them...encompass them...and encourage others to do the same.

We abide by a Code of Conduct that captures our resolve, while our Airman's Creed highlights the strength of our diverse Airmen who fly, fight, and win as one Air Force. Wherever you are in your Air Force career, it is a reminder to the meaning of service in our profession - *The Profession of Arms*.

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# A PROFESSION OF ARMS: OUR CORE VALUES

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## Chapter 1- INTRODUCTION

### A PROFESSION OF ARMS

No profession asks more of its members than the *Profession of Arms*. As we state in our Airman's Creed, we have answered our Nation's call. It is a higher calling, and it comes with a higher standard.

General Ronald Fogleman, our 15th Chief of Staff once said, "We are not engaged in just another job; we are practitioners of the *Profession of Arms*. We are trusted with the security of our Nation, the protection of our citizens and the preservation of its way of life. In this capacity, we serve as guardians of America's future. By its very nature, this responsibility requires us to place the needs of our service and our country before personal concerns."

That responsibility was given to each and every one of us when we raised our right hand and swore to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. When we joined our Air Force with a sacred oath, we accepted a sacred trust from the American people, one that goes beyond anything else in society. As members of a joint team, our profession is distinguished from others because of our expertise in the justified application of lethal military force and the willingness of those who serve to pay the ultimate sacrifice for our Nation. No other profession expects its members to lay down their lives for their friends, families or freedoms...but it is what our profession readily expects.

We are professionals. As volunteers, our sworn obligation is to the Constitution. Fighting America's wars is an ugly business; there is nothing pretty or glorious about warfighting, but it must be done. Our status as the world's greatest Air Force was earned by those who have served before us and is carried on by every Airman who wears the uniform today and by the civil servants who bring continuity to the mission of the Air Force at home and abroad. Every Airman is a leader of character. This identity calls on us to live honorably, lift others to their best possible selves, and elevate the performance of the team. We do this by owning the pursuit of our identity, engaging in purposeful experiences, and practicing habits of thought and action consistent with our Core Values.

"Every member of our team – whether enlisted, officer or civil servant – is responsible for embodying and upholding the high standards that come with serving the United States in the Profession of Arms. Our commitment to those standards, and to our shared core values, shapes us as a professional military force and guides how we execute our mission to protect the Constitution and the Nation. One Team, One Fight."

**Honorable Frank Kendall**  
**26th Secretary of the Air Force**



## *A Profession of Arms: Our Core Values*

All Airmen belong to the *Profession of Arms*...every officer, enlisted, and civil servant are members of this selfless profession. We are all accountable for meeting ethical and performance standards in our actions and similarly accountable for our failure to take action when appropriate. The distinction between pay grades lies solely in our level of responsibility and the degree of accountability, not in our level of commitment to the *Profession of Arms*. We share the common attributes of character, courage, and competence. We qualify as professionals through intensive training, education, and practical experience.

As professionals, we are defined by our strength of character, respect for others, and a lifelong commitment to Core Values. We all have a responsibility not to engage in—nor tolerate—behaviors that harm members of our formation. Actions like harassment, sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, bullying, extremism, and discrimination erode our foundation and weaken us from within. These actions violate our Core Values. We must guard against those at all times. We must be dedicated to maintaining our professional abilities through continuous individual and institutional improvements.

We must remember, above all else, we are patriots first. As the Total Force, we more than anyone else, understand the price of freedom. We understand the sacrifices that come from willingly serving our country. We understand what it means to serve in the *Profession of Arms*.



## Chapter 2 - OUR OATHS

Every Airman began their service in our Air Force by reciting the Oath of Enlistment or the Oath of Office for officers and civil servants. The oath is a humbling reminder of the seriousness of the *Profession of Arms*. Throughout our careers, we must continually reflect on the meaning of the words and the gravity of our commitment.

### ★ OATH OF ENLISTMENT

“I, \_\_\_\_\_, do solemnly swear (*or affirm*) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God (*optional*).”

### ★ OATH OF OFFICE, OFFICER

“I, \_\_\_\_\_, having been appointed a (rank) in the United States Air Force, do solemnly swear (*or affirm*) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God (*optional*).”

### ★ OATH OF OFFICE, CIVIL SERVANT

“I, \_\_\_\_\_, do solemnly swear (*or affirm*) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God (*optional*).”

“Before you can lead others, you have to lead yourself. We must develop leaders of character that are ready to create and foster environments of respect, inclusivity, and trust. When Airmen know they are valued, have high quality of service and quality of life, and are empowered to reach their full potential—there are no limits to what we can accomplish.”

**General Charles Q. Brown, Jr.**  
**22nd Chief of Staff of the Air Force**



## Chapter 3 - AIR FORCE CORE VALUES

Values represent enduring, guiding principles for which we as individuals or organizations stand. “Core” values are so fundamental that they define our identity. The United States Air Force has clearly defined its identity by these three simple values: *Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence In All We Do.*

For those of us who join this proud community of Airmen, whether officer, enlisted, civilian, active, guard, or reserve, being a part of the Air Force family requires that we commit to living these values, on- and off-duty. This is the expectation of our profession and is the standard against which our fellow service members and the American public hold us. This commitment to our values demonstrates respect for the Air Force, for others, and for the mission at hand. The Air Force professional is a trusted servant of our Nation who adheres to the highest standards of character, courage, and competence. How we act represents to countless others the collective identity of the United States Air Force.

### LIVING THE CORE VALUES

Understanding the Core Values is relatively easy. The true challenge is to live them. It is a commitment that never ends and one that always matters.

We all have the ability to display integrity, both professionally and personally. We have all placed ourselves in a position to serve a greater purpose and we all have the innate desire to achieve excellence. Yet there will be moments where living and acting by the Core Values will be challenging.

These moments are also opportunities to prove, through our actions, that we genuinely embody these Core Values. In doing so, we honor the heritage and continue the legacy of those who served before us and sacrificed so much. It is through this alignment of our actions with these values that we, as an Air Force, earn the public’s trust, strengthen our service, and accomplish our mission.

Each of these Core Values is further defined by virtues (desired behaviors and characteristics) we must practice and demonstrate in our daily lives, showing we truly do value *Integrity, Service, and Excellence*. Consistently practicing these virtues results in habits of honorable thought and action, producing an Air Force professional. Air Force professionalism is a shared belief in and a commitment to honorable service based on our Air Force Core Values.



## INTEGRITY FIRST

Integrity is doing the right thing, all the time, whether everyone is watching or no one is watching. It is the compass that keeps us on the right path when we are confronted with ethical challenges and personal temptations, and it is the foundation upon which trust and respect are built. An individual realizes integrity when thoughts and actions align with what he or she knows to be right. The virtues that demonstrate one truly values *Integrity* include:

### ★ HONESTY:

Honesty is the hallmark of integrity. As public servants, we are trusted agents. Honesty requires us to evaluate our performance against standards, and to conscientiously and accurately report findings. It drives us to advance our skills and credentials through our own effort. Our word must be unquestionable. This is the only way to preserve the trust and respect that we hold so dear for one another and the population we serve.

### ★ COURAGE:

Courage is not the absence of fear but doing the right thing despite fear. Courage empowers us to take necessary personal or professional risks, make decisions that may be unpopular, and admit our mistakes; having the courage to take these actions is crucial for the mission, the Air Force, and the Nation. A person of integrity does what is right even if the personal cost is high.

### ★ ACCOUNTABILITY:

Accountability is the responsibility to an audience. That audience maybe the American people, our units, our supervisors, our fellow Airmen, our families, our loved ones, and even ourselves. Accountable individuals maintain transparency, seek honest and constructive feedback, lead and live with respect for themselves and others, and take ownership of the outcomes of their actions and decisions. They are responsible to themselves and others and refrain from actions which discredit themselves or our service.

### ★ HUMILITY:

A person of integrity grasps and is sobered by the extraordinary task of defending the Constitution of the United States. We practice humility by putting others before ourselves. We seek to add value through community and humanitarian support. We serve with gratitude and without arrogance.

## SERVICE BEFORE SELF

The choice to serve is a decision to hold ourselves to a higher standard; it is a calling, a daily commitment that takes energy, dedication, and sacrifice. Selfless service places demands upon us which are not levied upon the American public or those who choose other professions. Selfless service begins when our Airmen take the Oath of Office or Enlistment, but it does not mean we let go of all that we hold dear - our family, loved ones, and sincerely held beliefs. We embrace a disciplined approach to rule-following, self-control, respect for authority, and respect for the beliefs and worth of others. **NOTE:** *Airmen must practice self-care first to be able to serve others.* The virtues that demonstrate *Service Before Self* include:

### ★ DUTY:

Duty is the obligation to perform what is required for the mission. While our responsibilities are determined by the law, the Department of Defense, and Air Force instructions, directives, and guidance, our sense of duty is a personal one and bound by the oath of service we take as individuals. Duty sometimes calls for sacrifice in ways no other profession has or will have. Airmen who truly embody *service before self* consistently choose to make necessary sacrifices to accomplish the mission, and in doing so, we honor those who made such sacrifices before us.

### ★ LOYALTY:

Loyalty is an internal commitment to the success and preservation of something bigger than ourselves. Our loyalty is to the Nation first, the values and commitments of our Air Force second, and finally, to those with whom we serve. Loyalty to our leaders requires us to trust, follow, and execute their decisions, even when we disagree. We offer alternative solutions and innovative ideas most effectively through the chain of command. Leaders demonstrate loyalty by respecting those who serve and treating them with dignity, compassion, and true concern for their wellbeing. Ultimately, loyalty is demonstrated by helping each other act with respect and honor.

### ★ RESPECT:

Respect encompasses self-respect, mutual respect, and organizational respect. This three-dimensional view requires us to embrace the unique value of all individuals and treat everyone with dignity. We must always act in the certain knowledge that all Airmen must be treated with respect and boldly speak up, even when it is uncomfortable, to assert this truth. Further, respecting others requires a commitment to recognize and root out prejudices, biases, and stereotypes. We must engage genuinely, honestly, and with an empathetic and open mind. We must honor the Air Force and others by following our words with actions.

***Respect must be embraced mutually by military and civilian personnel in all grades or positions and demonstrated in the everyday actions of all Airmen.*** Without it, we simply cannot stand strong in the defense of our Nation. Mutual respect strengthens teamwork, supports increased communication, reduces stress, and diminishes conflict. Put simply; it means treating others the way you would want to be treated and creating an environment, through your words and actions, where every Airman can serve to their full potential.

## EXCELLENCE IN ALL WE DO

*Excellence In All We Do* does not mean that we demand perfection in everything from everyone. Instead, this value directs us to continuously advance our craft and increase our knowledge as Airmen. We must have a passion for continuous improvement and innovation that propels America's Air Force in quantum leaps toward accomplishment and performance. The virtues that demonstrate *Excellence In All We Do* include:

### ★ MISSION:

Mission encompasses operations and excellence in stewardship. The complex undertaking of the Air Force mission requires us to harness the ingenuity, expertise, and elbow grease of all Airmen. We approach it with the mindset of respect, pride, innovation, and a continued commitment to anticipate and embrace change. Our work areas, our processes, and our interpersonal interactions must be undeniably professional and positive. Our people are the platform for delivering innovative ideas, strategies, and technologies to the fight.

### ★ DISCIPLINE:

Discipline is an individual commitment to upholding the highest of personal and professional standards. Airmen commit to a life of discipline and self-control. We demonstrate it in attitude, work ethic, and effort directed at continuous improvement, whether pursuing professional military education or developing ourselves physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. Each Airman represents the entire Air Force. Our appearance, actions, and professional and respectful presence shape the culture of the Air Force and the reputation of the entire military profession.

### ★ TEAMWORK:

Teamwork is essential to triumph at every level. Airmen recognize the interdependency of every member's contributions toward the mission and strive for organizational excellence. We not only give our personal best but also challenge and motivate each other to perform their best. We gain respect through our actions and strong work ethic to build team trust, and we give respect to others for their contributions. We carry our own weight and, whenever necessary, help our Wingmen carry theirs. We serve in the greatest Air Force in the world, and we embrace the idea that our part of the Air Force meets the world-class standard.



## CORE VALUES – THE WHY

The first reason is that *the Core Values tell us the price of admission to the Air Force itself*. All of us must accept accountability and practice justice, which means that all Airmen must possess *Integrity First*. Our selfless commitment to duty, our loyalty to our mission, and our respect for other drives *Service Before Self*. In addition, it is imperative that we all seek *Excellence In All We Do* - whether it be product or service excellence, resources excellence, community excellence, personal excellence or operations excellence.

The second reason for recognizing the Core Values is that *they point to what is universal and unchanging in the Profession of Arms*. The values are navigation points inviting us to consider key features of the requirements of professional service, but they cannot hope to point to or pick out everything. By examining *Integrity, Service, and Excellence*, we also eventually discover the importance of duty, honor, country, dedication, fidelity, competence, and a host of other professional requirements and attributes. The important thing is not the three values our leaders demand. The important thing is that our leaders selected these values, and it is our obligation to understand and be advocates of the ethical demands these values require.

The third reason for recognizing the Core Values is that *they help us get a fix on the ethical climate of an organization*. How successful are we in trying to live by the Core Values? Our answer to this question may not be the one we would like to give. When fellow Airman in our formation believe our operating procedures or the requirements levied upon us from above are absurd or enforced, we face the tendency to “make our own rules” or be “selective about the rules we are going to follow.” As time goes by, these actions become habitual. Eventually, you can no longer distinguish between the “important” tasks/rules and the “stupid” ones you chose not to follow. To combat this activity, every Airman must take ownership in the culture in the places they serve.

The fourth reason for recognizing the Core Values is that in addition to helping us to evaluate the climate of our organization, *they also serve as beacons vectoring us back to the path of professional conduct*; the Core Values allow us to transform a climate of corrosion into a climate of ethical commitment.

“The foundation of our Profession of Arms is, and has always been, respect. That is a non-negotiable principle that supports the Integrity, Service and Excellence of our great Air Force. It is the cornerstone of the culture we need in our Air Force.”

**JoAnne S. Bass**  
**19th Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force**



## Chapter 4 – THE CODE OF CONDUCT

The Code of Conduct outlines the basic responsibilities and obligations of members of the U.S. Armed Forces. All members are expected to measure up to the standards described in the Code of Conduct. Although developed for Prisoners of War (POW), the spirit and intent are applicable to service members subject to other hostile detention. Such service members should consistently conduct themselves in a manner that brings credit to themselves and their country. The six articles of the Code of Conduct address situations and decision areas that any member could encounter to some degree. The Code of Conduct includes basic information useful to POWs to help them survive honorably while resisting captors' efforts to exploit them. Such survival and resistance requires knowledge, understanding, and a commitment to the articles.



### ARTICLE 1

"I am an American, fighting in the forces, which guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense."

### ARTICLE 2

"I will never surrender of my own free will. If in command, I will never surrender the members of my command while they still have the means to resist."

### ARTICLE 3

"If I am captured, I will continue to resist by all means available. I will make every effort to escape and to aid others to escape. I will accept neither parole nor special favors from the enemy."

### ARTICLE 4

"If I become a prisoner of war, I will keep faith with my fellow prisoners. I will give no information or take part in any action, which might be harmful to my comrades. If I am senior, I will take command. If not, I will obey the lawful orders of those appointed over me and will back them up in every way."

### ARTICLE 5

"When questioned, should I become a prisoner of war, I am required to give name, rank, service number, and date of birth. I will evade answering further questions to the utmost of my ability. I will make no oral or written statements disloyal to my country and its allies or harmful to their cause."

### ARTICLE 6

"I will never forget that I am an American, fighting for freedom, responsible for my actions, and dedicated to the principles which made my country free. I will trust in my God and in the United States of America."

## THE AIRMAN'S CREED

The Airman's Creed is intended to remind all Airmen that we are not just a conglomeration of diverse specialties, skill sets, or jobs, but we are brothers and sisters in the *Profession of Arms*. It allows Airmen to think and act with one mind and with a commitment to fundamental warfighting beliefs. Airmen are warriors and are dedicated to flying, fighting, and winning.

*I AM AN AMERICAN AIRMAN.  
I AM A WARRIOR.  
I HAVE ANSWERED MY NATION'S CALL.*

*I AM AN AMERICAN AIRMAN.  
MY MISSION IS TO FLY, FIGHT, AND WIN.  
I AM FAITHFUL TO A PROUD HERITAGE,  
A TRADITION OF HONOR,  
AND A LEGACY OF VALOR.*

*I AM AN AMERICAN AIRMAN.  
GUARDIAN OF FREEDOM AND JUSTICE,  
MY NATION'S SWORD AND SHIELD,  
ITS SENTRY AND AVENGER.  
I DEFEND MY COUNTRY WITH MY LIFE.*

*I AM AN AMERICAN AIRMAN.  
WINGMAN, LEADER, WARRIOR.  
I WILL NEVER LEAVE AN AIRMAN BEHIND,  
I WILL NEVER FALTER,  
AND I WILL NOT FAIL.*

"They knew not the day or hour nor the manner of their passing when far from home they were called to join that great band of heroic Airmen that went before."

**Inscription of the Air Force Memorial  
in Washington DC**



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**OUR MISSION:  
FLY, FIGHT, & WIN...  
AIRPOWER ANYTIME, ANYWHERE**

