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# AFJAGS Podcast: Episode 1

## Leadership with Retired Brigadier General Patrick Mordente

**HOST:** MAJOR RICK HANRAHAN, USAF

**GUEST:** PATRICK MORDENTE, BRIGADIER GENERAL (RET), USAF

Leadership is not a duty title, it's a descriptor. Leadership is a disciplined, selfless service that leads to unit and individual excellence.

**Major Rick Hanrahan:**

Welcome to the first podcast episode from the Air Force Judge Advocate General's School. I'm your host, Major Rick Hanrahan. In today's topic. We discuss leadership with retired **Brigadier General Patrick Mordente**, a 29 year veteran of the U.S. Air Force and command pilot with over 2,700 hours of flying time. Here are just a few highlights from today's interview.

**Patrick Mordente:**

Leadership is not a duty title, it's a descriptor. Leadership is a disciplined, selfless service that leads to unit and individual excellence.

**Announcer:**

Welcome to the Air Force Judge Advocate General's Reporter Podcast where we interview leaders, innovators, and influencers on the law, leadership and best practices of the day. And now to your host from the Air Force Judge Advocate General's School.

**Major Rick Hanrahan:**

Welcome again to the first podcast episode from the Judge Advocate General's School, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. I'm your host, Major Rick Hanrahan. We're excited to have in studio today retired Brigadier General Patrick Mordente to speak on today's topic about leadership. Remember, if you like the show, please subscribe to the show on **iTunes** and leave a review. This helps us to grow an outreach to the JAG Corps and beyond.

Brigadier General Mordente is a 29 year veteran of the U.S. Air Force and a combat pilot with over 2,700 hours of flying time in the T-37, T-38, and C-130 aircraft. He graduated from the Air Force Academy in 1987 and attended undergraduate pilot training at Columbus Air Force Base, Mississippi. He has served on multiple high level staffs within department defense, including the joint staff at the Pentagon and he's a combat veteran who served in Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

He retired as vice commander at 18th Air Force, Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, in October of 2016. Brigadier General Mordente also holds master of science degrees from the National Defense University in national resource strategy from the Air Force Institute of Technology in air mobility as well as a master of arts degree from Weber University in business and an undergraduate degree in engineering mechanics from the Air Force Academy. He is currently the director of the [George W. Bush Presidential Library Museum](#) located in Dallas, Texas.

Well, sir, it's a pleasure to have you in studio today. Wow, that's quite a background there. Maybe you could speak to our listeners a little bit about what you currently do in your position.

**Patrick Mordente:**

Well, I'm the director of the George W. Bush Presidential Library Museum, and my duties require that I protect the artifacts and the archives of the administration, the George W. Bush administration. So the eight years that he was in office, all communications, all documentations are actually reside right there at the presidential library along with all the artifacts, and the artifacts consist of Gifts of State, gifts to the president that were given during the administration, which actually become gifts of the American people.

So, in part we're a research center, because as we go through those documentation or all those documents, we open those up to the public for researchers to come in and be able to learn about the government. That's one of the main missions of the national archives is transpar-

ency in government. So folks can come in and they can look at the eight years of the Bush administration and begin to do research.

**Major Rick Hanrahan:**

Fascinating stuff, sir. Today's topic, sir, is on leadership. It's a very broad topic and we know that you speak about this extensively. Maybe from a very broad perspective, you can just speak in terms of what is leadership?

**Patrick Mordente:**

That's a great question because I think you have to first define leadership and the way I define leadership is I have three quotes that I use. One comes from my days at the Air Force Academy as a young cadet. It's Penn's quote and it's, "No man can command another that cannot command himself." And now, let me update that in today's genre. No one can command another. They cannot command themselves. And that speaks to discipline. Second, [General Lorenz](#) used to be the AETC commander. He's a retired four-star. I was very impressed because when he would get in front of Airmen, he would remind us that all the Air Force owes you is an opportunity to serve. I mean, think about that. All the Air Force owes you is an opportunity to serve. I loved my 29 years in the Air Force and I always looked at my service in the Air Force as a privilege to serve.

And then the last quote that I look at is one that Colin Powell speaks to, and I'm sorry I don't have my notes with me so I'll have to paraphrase, but what he speaks to is he says, basically, "Excellence is not something that just happens. Excellence has to be in the small things as well as the big things." And what he's driving at is if you want to be excellent at what you do, if you want to be a professional, you don't just suddenly wake up one day and say, "You know what? This issue matters and I'm going to be excellent here. But on these day to day things, well, I can let things slide." Now, if you take these three areas and you put them together, the way I define leadership is it is leadership is a disciplined, self-less service that leads to unit and individual excellence. That's how I define leadership.

Now notice, the other thing I say about leadership is leadership is not a duty title. I would challenge you to look at duty FSCs within the Air Force and see if leadership is one of them. You might see commander, but you're not going to see leadership. And so what I emphasize there is, leadership is not a duty title, it's a descriptor. And when you think of it in terms of a descriptor, what I mean by that is anyone can be a leader. You can be a leader as a junior airman because leaders, it's—we talked about this before the mic came on, but that 360 degree aspect of leadership. Okay, when you're a leader, you're not only in command of yourself, that's the discipline. Helping others, that's your peers. You're also focused on what your leadership wants and demands of you. And if you happen to be senior enough and have those who are below you that you are in charge of, that the Air Force has given you to take care of, you have to meld leadership's desires with the care of your Airmen and the cooperation of your peers. That's a leader. When you can get those three things straight and do it well, you'll be a great leader in our Air Force.

**Major Rick Hanrahan:**

So, sir, speaking of the 360 leadership, I think it's something that we even teach here at the school that you mentioned, and I know you've spoken about this a lot. We often hear—many times, you hear about the strategic leadership, right? From the top down leadership. That's what a lot of people, I think, the default is when they think of leadership, but the 360 leadership, correct me if I'm wrong, means leadership happens also from the bottom up, and laterally, and every way in between. Can you speak a little bit more about that and maybe even give an example of what would be an example of lateral leadership?

**Patrick Mordente:**

Okay. Yeah, actually, great question, and I'll rely on my years as an aviator. So when I was a squadron commander at Dyess Air Force Base, I commanded the 39th Airlift Squadron. It was an operational flying squadron. I was in charge of making sure that my squadron was prepared to deploy for combat. And at the time, this is

2003 to 2005 we were deploying all the time, so I had to keep my unit up, ready, current, ready to fly. Okay? Guess what. I can't do that unless maintenance, my peer, is on board and that is probably one of the best examples of, in my career, where I really had to learn and was successful at learning it. How do I interact with my peer, my maintenance squadron commander, because there are going to be times in flying where the aircraft just are broke. They can't generate them. And learning how to, okay, right now it's important for my maintenance team partner to win. It's time for them to take the priority and me to throttle back.

When you learn how to do that relationship with your peers where, okay, I understand you need this and I'm willing to support and then a week later, hey, you need to support me now. And you build that kind of relationship because ultimately the goal is, in my case as a squadron commander, that my group commander was successful, and 18th Air Force above him was successful. So you kind of have to have that perspective of it's not about you, it's about the mission and if we're going to get the mission done, then it takes a lot of players, a lot of people in getting that mission done. And that's when you have to reach out horizontally and gain the support and the confidence because it's a two way street back and forth to make the mission successful.

**Major Rick Hanrahan:**

Some naysayers may say that leadership can't be taught. Perhaps that there's such thing as born leaders. What would your response be to that?

**Patrick Mordente:**

It's interesting because we had talked earlier, I've given some talks on leadership at SMU and one of the questions I'll ask is, is a leader born, or are they made? And, of course, in a typical audience, some people are going to raise their hand, "No, they're born," some people are going to say, "No, they're made." And my answer is you're both right. And what I mean by that is, part of being a good leader is a good introspective look. And this gets to mentorship, and we can talk about that a little bit

too, about finding a good mentor. We are all born with strengths and with weaknesses. My weakness is I'm an introvert, okay? Now can you imagine being an introvert and commanding a wing at Ramstein of 9,000 people?

Okay? So I successfully learned how to overcome that, okay, and get on a stage. I mean, I'd have wing commander calls, that were 3000 people. Okay?

**Major Rick Hanrahan:**

Sir, if I could interject for a second, can I just ask the question? How did you do that? How did you approach that? Because I think a lot of people in the military are introverts and in this environment, in the military, sometimes it's very challenging for introverts to "get out of their shell". What did you do, maybe from a personal development standpoint, or are there other mechanisms that you took to help you grow into that leader?

**Patrick Mordente:**

Well, I think first of all, it goes back to the introspective look. Okay, evaluate me. What are my strengths and what are my weaknesses? Then acknowledging what, okay, here is a weakness. Here's something that I need to overcome. In my case, the reason I overcame it, is I very much wanted to command. Not for the reason of command, but I love Airmen. I love the mission that the Air Force does. And a commander's mission is twofold. It's taking care of Airmen, and it's taking care of the mission and doing both successfully. That aspect of command is what I loved about a command. Well, you can't be a commander and be an introvert. You've got to be able to figure out how do I overcome that. Now, funny enough, you can ask my wife, at the end of the day I might be exhausted, okay? Because where do I get my energy is alone time. That's where I gain my energy. And so I would have to understand my limitations and how to overcome being an introvert, and I was successful at doing it, and I would get out on the stage and I would talk and interact with Airmen because I love Airmen. They're fantastic people. I want to be a part of that group.

But then there would come a time where I would have to go back and recharge my batteries and I would make sure that I'd recharge that battery, and I would build that balance. And quite honestly I was successful at building that balance. But let me talk about mentors. The best thing you can do is find a good mentor. Someone who knows you, is close to you. My mentors from the past, I had connections with—they were my boss. I was an aid to a vice admiral. He was a fantastic mentor. A wing commander at one of my bases, a squadron commander, and one of his great mentors. Your best mentor is someone who will look you in the eye and tell you your weakness. If you have a mentor that sits down with you and says, "You know what? You're fantastic. You're the best JAG I've ever seen. Hey, let's go get a cup of coffee." They're not a good mentor.

A good mentor will sit down and say, "Okay, let me tell you what you're doing right. You're doing these things right. Here, let me show you what you can improve and here's how you can improve them." If you ever get feedback on an OPR, a fitness report or whatever, and it's not true feedback because—don't believe your own press. You read an OPR, it's everybody walks on water for the most part, okay? Mentors are someone who can look you in the eye, know you well enough that they can show you what your weaknesses are.

**Major Rick Hanrahan:**

Sir, could I ask, and I think mentorship is a very important piece, how do you go out and seek a mentor? I mean, it's not like you're just going to go walk up to one a person one day that you like and say, "Will you be my mentor?" I mean, maybe you do that, but it also seems that there has to be a connection there. Maybe personalities that mesh pretty well. I mean, could you maybe give an example or two about a particular person that you developed a mentorship with? Did they seek you out? Did you seek them out? How did those initial steps kind of play out?

**Patrick Mordente:**

In my case, and I don't know, maybe I'm different than some, because I do know of people who have gone to someone and said, "Could you mentor me?" And that's a very appropriate way. There's nothing wrong with doing that. In my case, as a young captain, and this is going to sound so corny, but someone once told me, "Bloom where you're planted." And I mean, that's one of those, you hear that and your eyes almost roll, like a real—bloom where I'm planted. Okay? When I really took that to heart and I said, you know what, I'm going to bloom where I'm planted and I'll tell you the scenario. So it's 1995, 96 timeframe. Air Force is going through a riff. We're downsizing. Okay? I'm watching peers of mine, a year or two ahead of me that are pilots, they've been in Desert Storm, they're at the formal training unit.

As a young captain, they filled all the squares and the Air Force is downsizing, and they're being passed over and they're having to leave the Air Force. And I can remember going home to my wife one night and saying, "I don't know if I'm going to make major, but what I am going to do is I'm going to do the best job I can right here." And I said, "And if it happens, then it happens. But it's because of what is going on within the Air Force as a whole, not because of me. I'm going to do what I can." And so I really took to heart that bloom where you're planted and I began to focus on being the best that I could be at what I was doing.

And what I found happened is mentors took interest in me. My squadron commander took an interest in me. My group commander took an interest in me, and my wing commander took an interest in me. Don't misunderstand what I'm saying. It wasn't a competitive, I'm going to be better than you because I want you riffed, not me." That's not where I was coming from. It was, "I'm going to do the best job I can." This was about me and me being happy with whatever happened in the future and I knew that I had to give 100% at what I was doing to be the best I could be. It ended up paying dividends that you wouldn't believe and suddenly I had people more senior

that were like, "You know what? I like what I see and I, the mentor, am going to invest time in this individual."

Anybody who makes it, and I will tell you right now, lieutenant colonel at 20 years is a highly successful career. Anything after that, including squadron command is icing on the cake. My wife and I have been very blessed by the United States Air Force. To have been able to obtain the rank of a general officer is beyond what I ever thought that I would—I never thought I would become a general officer, okay? Anyone who's ever attained that type of rank, or squadron command, or group commander, colonel, or general officer, did not do it alone. And anyone who will tell you, "I'm there because of me," they're wrong. It's the mentorship. It's the investment that the Air Force put into me. It's the time that mentors put me. One of the best mentors I had was my group commander and I'll go back to that example I talked about earlier with a maintenance squadron.

When I first think about this, your movement to the rank of lieutenant colonel in the United States Air Force is based on you as an individual being the best at what you do. What separates the lieutenant colonels, those who move forward and those who don't, are the ones who suddenly understand it's not about being competitive, it's about the team. It's about how well do we make the mission happen, take care of our Airmen, make the mission happen, make the Air Force and our Airmen successful. The squadron commanders who understand that are the ones who are successful, go on to be group commanders.

When I first took over squadron commander, I had a group commander, wonderful mentor, pulls me to the side, looks me in the eye and says, "Pat, you don't play well with others."

Like, "Boss, what are you talking about?"

He said, "Every time maintenance makes a comment about their plane's broken, I can look at your face and you're ticked off. You don't play well with others."

Now see, this is a great mentor because he pulls me to the side, he tells me what my weakness is, and then he gives me an opportunity to correct. Now, you as the individual taking the feedback, it's your duty to listen with an open mind. It ain't personal. Take the feedback. And I looked and I said, "You know what? He's absolutely right." And I began to develop a collegial—I began to understand that shift of focus, that it's not about me, me being successful, me being the best, it's about this team winning. This team called the 317th Airlift Group at Dyess Air Force Base, the Airmen winning. And it was like a light switch at that point. That was a significant point in my career and a great mentor and I believe his input on that day served me so well as I went up through the ranks.

**Major Rick Hanrahan:**

So clearly mentors are extremely important and for all listeners out there, I think the takeaway, one of the takeaways here is to seek out mentors and do your best to try to find good mentors to help you get better and improve. And like you said, sir, good mentors should be able to point out weaknesses, right?

Sir, I'd like to segue into another question. It'll be a little more geared towards the JAG community. So you've worked with a lot of JAGs, you've worked with the legal community through your career and I'm assuming the further you move up in your career, the more you're probably working with the JAG. From your perspective, sir, could you give any pointers or tips on what makes an effective leader as a JAG for their commander?

**Patrick Mordente:**

Okay. I'm going to give a shout out here to Colonel Mike Vocera who's in the D.C. area right now because he was my JAG in Germany and just a phenomenal JAG, I have the utmost respect for. I will tell as a commander, the JAG was, in my case with Mike, my right hand man. My JAG security forces in OSI, I had a very close relationship with. You cannot be a commander without a great relationship with your JAG, okay? Sadly, well, good thing, 99% of our Airmen are phenomenal Airmen. They're fantastic.

They're the best America has in our Airmen. It's that 1% as a commander that's going to take up 80% of your time and that 80% of your time is going to be with your JAG, and you've got to have the right relationship. You've got to have the right balance with your JAG.

Mike and I would sit down. Mike would come to my office in Germany at least once a week. It's a huge wing and I was the installation commander. So you're talking a population, counting everyone, I think it was 12,000 on the base. So at least an hour a week that Mike would come in and we would go over cases. As a commander, I have to have that trust in my JAG and Mike was extremely thorough. So when I would ask questions, Mike would have the answer for me, which built confidence in me, my confidence in him. Because what I'm dealing with as a commander is not easy stuff. I mean, you deal with it in court on a continuing basis. As a commander, especially with the trust that's been given to us through the UCMJ, you're dealing with people's lives here and their futures and you have to get it right every time. Okay? And having a JAG that you've got a great relationship with, that you have confidence in, and I did in Mike, a hundred percent confidence in Mike, that is an indispensable—you have to have that relationship as a commander. You will not be successful if you don't have that relationship. I joke that I have gray hair. Why? Because of the legal stuff that I had to go through as a commander and the things you deal with.

**Major Rick Hanrahan:**

Thank you, sir. So I'm sure you've faced issues where maybe legal's coming in and maybe they either need or probably should be telling you something that maybe you don't want to hear. It can be challenging. What kind of advice could you give for the newer, the JAGs out there, in how to approach those kinds of issues? Whether they're not dealing with installation commanders, but maybe they're dealing with squadron commanders or first shirts or what have you. How do they approach that, sir?

**Patrick Mordente:**

I think it's so important for the commander to set the tone from the start. And I would get as a wing commander to get my group commanders and my squadron commanders, and I would tell them this, "I will never ask you to do anything illegal, immoral or unethical. If at any time you believe that I'm breaking that promise, you have every right to say something and I will stop what I'm doing and I will listen to you." Okay? Because I don't sleep well at night if I think I've done something wrong, okay? And it's so important that the commander comes out and he sets that tone right from the start because now the JAG knows how to react. Okay?

One of the best compliments I got as a commander I got from a JAG and I was a wing commander in the desert, okay? And here I am in a combat zone and anybody who will tell you, "Well, we're in a combat zone, there's gray area." No there's not. There's regulations, there's policies and there are laws and we are going to abide by every single one. Okay? That's what keeps us safe. That's what keeps people from getting killed. That's what we're going to do. Well, the squadron commanders, as you can well imagine, especially brand new squadron commanders, are hesitant to approach the wing commander. It just is. I mean, it's just one of those things. Okay? So one day I had a squadron commander who approached my JAG and it was a question on policy. The squadron commander wanted to know how I would react to something. And so she was asking, simply asking the JAG, "What do you think Colonel..." At that time I was a colonel in the desert. "What do you think Colonel Mordente is going to say to..." whatever this issue was. And the JAG's response to the squadron commander was, "What is Air Force policy? Because the one thing I can tell you is Colonel Mordente will abide by Air Force policy."

That was a huge compliment for me. It's the tone that the commander has to set from the start and now the legal team knows exactly how that commander is. Now, law is law. We will never break the law. Regulations and policy, those are internal to the Air Force. If you can give

me, if you can identify, hey, I need to do X, but the thing that's holding me back is this, and you can give me a justification as to why we need to amend that policy, I have no problem going with whoever the authority is, wherever the authority rest, may rest with the wing commander, and it may rest with MAJCOM. It may rest with Headquarters Air Force. I don't know. You need to tell me what the policy is. But if you can give me a justification, I have no problem going up and asking for a waiver if I'm trying to get the mission done. But laws are laws and we don't break laws and we're never going to change Congress' mind. So, that's the hard and fast. Regulations and policies we always abide by, unless you can give me justification and if you can give me justification, then we're going to go to the waiver authority because we're going to make sure the waiver's in place first. Then we'll do what we need to do.

**Major Rick Hanrahan:**

Copy that, sir. So I'd like to lead into our last, final few questions here and kind of tie back into maybe where we started. Sir, are there any things that you do, maybe even in your daily routine as you were working through your career, even today, that you continue to do, to grow in your personal development, maybe habits or anything else that helps you grow as a leader from a personal standpoint?

**Patrick Mordente:**

Well, I think several things and I call it being balanced. Okay? Are you physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually balanced in your life? Because if ever that gets out of balance, then something's wrong. When I was a young captain, again, I've said it many times, I love Airmen, I love the Air Force mission. I was a workaholic. My squadron commander came to me one day and said, "Pat, go home."

I'm like, "Boss, I got this one more thing I've got to do."

He's like, "No, go home."

Now, that squadron commander went on to be a three-star when he retired, and he looked at me and he said, "You know, Pat," he said, "Appreciate your efforts here. I appreciate what you're doing, but a day will come and you will no longer wear the uniform." And he said, "Like the rest of us, you will stand in the line at the BX just like everybody else. And God willing, your wife and kids will be standing next to you. Go home." And I took that to heart and I said he's right and I need balance.

So make sure you have that job, family balance, right. Whatever your—I know I'm probably talking to some JAGs now who are single, and there's family there. You have family. Make sure that family and your job, that you have the right balance. Make sure you're physically ready, mentally ready, spiritually ready. Education's important. Always educate yourself. When I left for the Air Force Academy, my dad was military. He's retired military and he looked at me and he said, "Pat, anytime the Air Force offers you education, take it." Take a look at my resume. I got three grad degrees and I don't mean—I don't say that to brag. I mean, that's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is I constantly took opportunity to educate, to make myself better, to better understand.

If you look at my career, obviously I'm a pilot and I'm an air lifter. That's my primary duty. But if you look at my staff and things I did, I was a logistician. I was a logistics guy. I understood logistics. I was a TRANSCOM. I couldn't spell logistics when I entered the Air Force. Still can't spell it today. I have to spell check it in Word. Okay? But the Air Force kept sending me for that education and I became a logistician. Somebody who understood the transportation system. It benefited me. It benefited the United States Air Force. Never stop learning. Never stop educating yourself. When you stop educating yourself, you've peaked that. That's a sign that you're probably done moving on. So education's important.

**Major Rick Hanrahan:**

So with that in mind, sir, could you offer perhaps any resources that you use, whether it's good books on

leadership, whether it's, I don't know, documentaries, podcasts, video, anything out there for our listeners?

**Patrick Mordente:**

I've been retired now a couple of years, but I assume that the Chief of Staff, still has the [Chief of Staff reading list](#). That'd probably be your first start, right there. I mean, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force didn't become the Chief of Staff by luck. There's a reason [General Goldfein's](#) the Chief of Staff of the Air Force. I've met him. He's an outstanding individual. He's an outstanding chief. When he tells you to read something, I'd probably pick that book up and read it.

**Major Rick Hanrahan:**

And with that, sir, I have one more question and then I'll leave the final question to you. Last question I have is, is there one behavior, or trait perhaps, that you've seen that derails leadership?

**Patrick Mordente:**

Absolutely. It all boils down to self-entitlement. The second you forget that it took a team to get you where you're at—remember I talked about that earlier. My mentors, there were a lot of people in my life, in my career, including my wife, that got me to where I ended up being as a one star. The second you forget that, the second you think you're entitled, I'm a general because I deserve to be a general, you're in trouble. You are in trouble. And I think probably you all being JAGs and lawyers have a better perspective on this. You've seen it where suddenly you have senior leaders who are doing things and you're just kind of shaking your head why? Why did you take that extravagant trip? Why were you using your staff car doing whatever with your staff car? It boils down—I think the root cause is self-entitlement.

You suddenly go from this sense of service because that's what leadership is. Leadership is a—it's servant leadership, is what it is. If you're becoming a leader because I want to wear something on my shoulder, I want to wear a star on my shoulder, that's what my objective is, then you've got the wrong perspective. You're going down



the wrong path and you don't need to lead in this Air Force because you'll be a dangerous leader. But if you're going to lead because you care about people, you care about the mission, and you're doing that 360 leadership, it's up, it's down, it's lateral.

Digress here for a second. The army has a great saying, two up and two down. I need to understand the objective two positions above me. What is that? So if I'm a squadron commander, what is my wing commander's vision, and I need to be able to project that two levels down. If I was a wing commander, my squadron commanders need to understand what my objective is. Two up, two down. If you're going into the Air Force and you want to be in that leadership role and you have all the right reasons, you're okay, you'll be fine. It's when leaders suddenly this—it's like a switch turns and they think they're entitled to the position they're in. They'll derail themselves. And I've seen it.

**Major Rick Hanrahan:**

So it sounds like a key takeaway is you got to be cognizant of this. You need to be—actually to have a self-awareness of when you might be doing things that would project a self-entitlement.

**Patrick Mordente:**

Oh, yeah. I mean, I'm actually—my mother always said I was over scrupulous, but I'll give you an example. I'm retiring and I'm clearing out my office and the execs come up and go, "Hey sir, let me help you with your boxes."

"No. No. Your job is not to carry my boxes. I've got it. I'll pack my stuff. I'll put in a box and I'll take it down to my car." I don't know, you might think that's going too far. I didn't. Leadership is about serving others, not about being served.

I was fortunate to be a general officer. That doesn't mean that I'm suddenly given the keys to the executive locker room and I've got a company car and all these benefits. No. It's actually, in some ways, harder to be a general

officer if you have the right mindset because you have to lead by example. You don't get special favors, you don't get special things. Now, does the wing commander of the general get a flag? Of course. Does he get a special song played for him? Of course. Why? Because we are the military. There are certain traditions of the military and there's a certain reason why we have a rank structure and it has to do with combat and the traditions of the military and the war ethos. Those are not special privileges. That's not what I'm talking about. But the thought that, "Oh yeah, my exec can come over and take care of my boxes or do whatever." No, you can't do those kinds of things.

**Major Rick Hanrahan:**

Sir, any final words of wisdom on the topic of leadership?

**Patrick Mordente:**

I'll go back to something I said earlier. Leadership is not a duty title. It's a descriptor. And what I mean by that, everyone can be a leader and leaders know how to follow well. And what I mean by that is name me someone in the United States Air Force that does not have a commander over him. The Chief of Staff of the Air Force reports to the Secretary of the Air Force, President of the United States and the chairman. Okay? We all have bosses. So, a leader can be at any level of the rung of rank and what it is, is it goes back to that self-discipline, doing your job well, working laterally, working up, working down, and focusing on the mission of the unit that you belong in.

And I tell you, if you do that—I know there's people out there that are going, "Yeah, well it worked for you because you became a general. It's easy for you to say." I know it's easy for me to say, but it's true. It's true. You bloom where you're planted, you take care of people and you take care of the mission. And you know what, when you do that, the Air Force will take care of you.

**Major Rick Hanrahan:**

Well sir, it was an honor and privilege to have you in studio today. We really appreciate you coming in to

Speak to us about leadership and that'll be it for today's episode. So thank you, sir. Much, much appreciated.

## TAKEAWAYS

### Major Rick Hanrahan:

Wow. We covered a lot of ground there. While there were likely a dozen or more takeaways from today's discussion, my five key takeaways include, **one, the definition of leadership** by Brigadier General Mordente. Leadership is a disciplined, selfless service, that leads to unit and individual excellence. Leadership is not a duty title. Rather, it is a descriptor. You can be a leader as a junior airman. In other words, anyone can and should strive for leadership.

**Number two, know thyself.** This is an ancient concept dating at least as far back as the Greeks. Brigadier General Mordente mentions that leaders must take an introspective look at their strengths and weaknesses. That requires openness to one's own limitations. Through this introspection Brigadier General Mordente realized he is an introvert by nature. However, in order to lead as a commander, he had to develop his extrovert abilities because that is what the mission required of him. In due time, he developed those abilities and it all started with his introspective reflection.

**Number three, the power of mentorship.** Brigadier General Mordente mentions that no one does it alone. Mentors are critical to your development. The best mentors are people that know you and are close to you. They are also the people who aren't afraid to tell you your weaknesses, but then they allow you the room to develop. Additionally, consider being a bit more proactive in seeking out your mentors. Never forget that mentorship is a relationship. While the mentor can add a great deal of value to your life, you should also look to add value to theirs.

**Number four, a sense of entitlement is the biggest hindrance to leadership.** In short, I would call this pride. When you reach a certain level of success, pride often finds a way to rear its ugly head into the picture.

When you start thinking I and me, much more than you think we and team, you may need to pause and see if a sense of entitlement is brewing in you. A sense of entitlement is one of the main culprits that leads to ethics and other violations, both within, and outside of the military.

**And number five, never stop learning.** As Brigadier General Mordente states, "When you've stopped educating yourself, you've peaked." It's likely a sign you're headed in the wrong direction. He said he took every opportunity to learn and grow including earning three graduate degrees. If we think of this as a formula, learning equals growth. The very fact that you're listening to this podcast shows a willingness to continue on that learning and growth trajectory. With that, thank you for listening to the first podcast episode from the Air Force Judge Advocate General's School. If you liked this episode, please consider subscribing on iTunes and leaving a review. This helps us to grow in outreach for the betterment of the Air Force and JAG Corps. Until next time.

### Announcer:

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