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Brigadier General
James Demarest

AFJAGS Podcast: Episode 24

Joint Force Leadership with Brigadier General James Demarest – Part 1

HOST: MAJOR RICK HANRAHAN, USAF

GUEST: BRIGADIER GENERAL JAMES DEMAREST, USAF

In this episode, we discuss Brigadier General Demarest's background, development of his leadership philosophy over multiple career paths, and 2 of the 3 pillars of the Joint Force Leadership triad including communication and focus.

MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:

This episode is the first part of a two-part interview with [Brigadier General James Demarest](#), the Chief of Staff of the Florida Air National Guard, co-founder of the consulting firm, [Joint Force Leadership](#), and former active duty F-15 pilot, who later became a JAG.

Over this two-part interview, we discuss the Joint Force Leadership triad that was created through the combined experiences of Brigadier General Demarest, as a fighter pilot, along with his co-founder, a former Navy SEAL. In this first part, we discuss Brigadier General Demarest's background, development of his leadership philosophy over multiple career paths, and two of the three pillars of the Joint Force Leadership triad, including communication and focus. Here are a few clips from part one of today's show. [upbeat intro music]

SHOW EXCERPTS, BRIG GEN JAMES DEMAREST:

Focus, trust and communication were the three common tools to highly effective teams.

Across the board without exception, the highest performing teams are the ones that are able to communicate effectively.

It's important for us as leaders to use the tool that works best for the audience, not necessarily for ourselves.

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.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Welcome to another episode from [The Air Force Judge Advocate General's School](#) at Maxwell Air Force Base. I'm your host, Major Rick Hanrahan. Remember, if you like the show, please consider subscribing on Apple podcasts and leaving a review. This helps us to grow in outreach to the JAG Corps and beyond.

Well, I am humbled and very excited for our show today with an amazing guest that we have. We have the unique privilege to interview Brigadier General James "Boots" Demarest, the Chief of Staff of the Florida Air National Guard, co-founder and partner of the consulting firm, Joint Force Leadership, and former active duty F-15 pilot that then became a Judge Advocate General. He's here today to talk about the Joint Force Leadership triad, and we'll allow him to explain what this is, its importance and how you can implement it into your leadership development for your team and yourself. Sir, thank you for taking some time from more or less leaving the Florida National Guard to speak with us today.

BRIG GEN DEMAREST:

Well, thank you very much for having me. I look forward to getting some time to talk to the JAG Corps and beyond about the experiences I've had in the military and civilian world that I think translate nicely to the role that we have as judge advocates, and to have really general leadership principles beyond that.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

And sir, before I dive kind of into your bio here, and then we enter into our substantive discussion, just kind of curious, I mean, this is probably on everybody's mind, we have COVID-19 that's going on in Florida right now, having some of the highest caseloads on record. How is that impacting the Florida National Guard and what are your folks doing about it?

BRIG GEN DEMAREST:

Well, currently we have over 1500 members of the Florida Air National Guard involved in a variety of different roles

in response to COVID. We are manning a number of the community-based testing sites. We are working with food distribution and a number of other missions that have been tasked through the TAG to support the citizens here in Florida. As military members, we are used to dealing in less than perfect environments, and that's why the National Guard, generally, and the Air National Guard, specifically, gets called when things out of the ordinary happen.

Like everybody else, our members have been affected, our families, their business. But what really hasn't changed is the fact that we have a mission to do, and our citizens need our help. And whether it's with a testing or making sure that they're fed, or providing security for key areas. We've been operating in the COVID environment since it first kicked off, and we continue to operate there. And it really means evaluating each particular environment determining what level of personal protection equipment is necessary, what can we do, And really it's a daily balance between our people and our mission, because if everybody comes down with COVID, then we're unable to execute the mission. If we all stay at home, then the mission doesn't get done. And so, I think the challenge for us like everybody is to balance our mission and people.

And so far, although Florida has had an uptick in COVID cases and we've had a slight increase in positive COVID results for our military members, we've done a really good job protecting our people from COVID while maintaining the mission assurance in those areas where we have a can't-fail mission, including for example, the homeland defense mission that we execute 24/7, 365 up at Tyndall.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Well, thank you for that, sir. And that's great to hear what steps are being done in Florida and what our military members are doing, which is always an incredible.

GUEST INTRODUCTION

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Brigadier General Demarest graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Political Science from the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1982 and commissioned as a second lieutenant pilot. He completed pilot training and was a distinguished graduate of the Air Force Fighter Weapons, Top Gun program. He was first assigned to fly F-15s at Bitburg Air Base, Germany, and he's held other assignments to include serving in DESERT STORM as an F-15 pilot and chief of the combat mission planning cell in Saudi Arabia. He served on active duty as an F-15 pilot for 10 years before separating in 1991.

Following his active duty service, he graduated from Cornell Law School where he served as Managing Editor of the "Cornell Law Review" while specializing in advocacy and international law. He then spent nine years as a commercial litigation attorney and partner in a national law firm in Naples, Florida. He then rejoined the military through the Florida Air National Guard in 2009 as a staff judge advocate, and he has served as a JAG in both the state and national levels.

Currently, Brigadier General Demarest serves as the Chief of Staff for the Florida Air National Guard and the Deputy Commanding General for Joint Force Headquarters in St. Augustine, Florida. In his civilian capacity, he is also the co-founder and partner of a consulting firm, Joint Force Leadership. He is a sought after speaker on topics including leadership, strategic and tactical planning, and execution improvement. He has been a professional speaker since 2002, and has worked with NFL teams, Fortune 500 and global 2000 organizations, and established companies and teams in the finance, healthcare, pharmaceutical, sales, legal, consumer products, banking, medical devices and technology industries.

PODCAST INTERVIEW

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Well, sir, what an incredible background. Could you please offer a little more background on your current

position as Chief of Staff of the Florida National Guard and the now Deputy Commanding General, in addition to your role for your Joint Force Leadership consulting company.

BRIG GEN DEMAREST::

So to back up just a bit, I spent 10 years in the JAG Corps doing the things that JAGS at the unit, wing and NAF, and MAJCOM level do. And then, was offered the opportunity to move, and with TJAG's concurrence, I've been moved from the JAG Corps now and assigned at Joint Force Headquarters. In the state of Florida, we have about 2000 members of the Air National Guard, and there are two general officers. One, [Brigadier General Michael Valle](#) is the Assistant Adjutant General for Air and the Commander of the Florida Air National Guard. He's a full time Guardsman.

The second position, that I occupy, is for a Drill Status Guardsman. So, my job as the Chief of Staff and as a Deputy Commanding General, is to essentially assist the commander in the running of the full and part time staff. But in Florida, we've decided to bifurcate some of our efforts. And so, a lot of work that I'm gonna do is to move Florida's strategic initiatives forward.

So for example, we're trying to recapitalize our F-15 unit at Jacksonville with a newer airframe, either F-35 or the F-15EX. We just filed an organizational change request with the National Guard Bureau to bring a second wing to Florida. We have a space equities in Florida that while somewhat in flux, we're continuing to build. We have a cyber capability that we're looking to improve upon. And so, we have a number of strategic initiatives that align with our federal mission, as well as the state missions involving our DSCA operations and support to our citizens across the board. Typically, they're emergencies like hurricanes although more recently, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic has involved quite a few of our members.

And so, my job is to help lead the incredible Airmen that we have in Florida and represent Florida interests

at the national level, both at the National Guard and at the Headquarters Air Force to advance our strategic initiatives.

On the civilian side, Joint Force Leadership is a full services leadership consulting company. And it started because a good friend of mine, [Mark McGinnis](#), a Naval Academy graduate, and 24 year serving U.S. Navy SEAL, had worked together a number of years ago, yet had gone out on our own more recently and we were each doing our own consulting work. And a couple of years ago, Mark and I reconnected and we talked about our consulting businesses, and it turns out that he and I were doing some very similar things. What neither one of us had at that time was a kind of a consistent platform or a book, quite honestly, and in the consulting world, a book is like a business card. And so our need to get something down on paper brought Mark and I together to form Joint Force Leadership.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Thank you, sir, and I definitely want to discuss the book. I know you recently published that book and we're gonna get into that a little bit later, but before we do that, you've had quite an interesting and distinguished career, I think, one could say, a fighter pilot for 10 years, and then you have a break in service for a number of years. Why did you return to the military in the Air Force after all that time?

BRIG GEN DEMAREST:

Yeah, I think that's a great point. I spent 16 and a half years as a civilian and after leaving active duty. And, when I left active duty as an F-15 pilot and charted my course ahead, I never really considered the Reserves or the Air National Guard for anything other than a flying position. And since that's really all I had known on active duty as the years went by and my life situation really didn't lend itself to flying in the Guard, I really kind of figured that my military career was over. And when I got out of the F-15, my final flight in May of 1992, I looked back and said, you know what? If I never fly a high performance

jet again, that's okay because I did it for 10 years and I left because I wanted to go do something else.

And so, what happened is that over the years as friends of mine who remained in the Air Force began ascending to leadership positions, whether active duty or in the Guard, I would reach out and always offer encouragement and congratulations.

It was one of these, I'd been out for about 15 and a half years when a friend of mine at the time, Colonel Bob Branyon, had been selected as the Wing Commander in Jacksonville. And I called him up and I said, "Squirt, I've got two things for you." I said, "number one, congratulations." I said, "number two, I'm not looking for a job." [Major Hanrahan laughs].

Because we joked, when you ascend to a leadership position particularly in the Guard perhaps, you start to get phone calls from all your long lost friends. And, I wanted him to be sure that that was not the purpose of my calling, and after we talked for a few minutes on the phone he said, "How would you like to come and be a JAG?" He said, "we have a really hard time recruiting and retaining JAGs", at the time. He said "Your F-15 and fighter background "aligns with Florida." I flew the same airplane that we still do here in Florida. He knew about my legal experience and said, "What do you think?"

And so, the short answer to the question is why did I come back? The answer is because somebody asked. And that's a message that I have carried forth since then, is that, if we're not out there asking talented people to come join our team then we shouldn't be surprised if we're undermanned. And so, after he asked, it was a fairly straightforward process. I marched right back home and asked my commander in chief, my wife, what she thought. And, after a pretty short conversation, it became evident that this was gonna happen. And she said, "Well, what do you have to do?"

And I said, "Well, I'd have to go to JAG school for nine weeks in Montgomery, Alabama."

And she said, "Well, I hope you enjoy that 'cause we're staying here in Florida."

And 10 months later, I was sworn into the Florida Air National Guard, went to JAG Corps at the ripe young age of 49 [both laughing]. And I spent the last 10 years as a JAG, as I mentioned earlier.

TRANSITION TO A LEGAL CAREER

MAJ HANRAHAN:

You know, reviewing your record, it's incredible. I mean, you are a distinguished graduate in basically every single training school that you went through, including an Academic ACE. And fighter pilot for 10 years. Then you transitioned out of active duty and you move into a legal career. It's quite an abrupt change. How did that come to pass?

BRIG GEN DEMAREST:

Yeah, that's a great point. And a lot of my fellow pilots asked me that very question. And I joke with them that I must have been hit on the head or something. But quite honestly, as I was getting ... as I completed my active duty service commitment and was considering what to do, and as I approach the 10 year point of military service, I really had a decision to make. And that was, do I stay in and continue to serve in the Air Force and fly and do 20 years and get out, or this was really an opportunity for me to get out and get more education.

As you mentioned in my bio, I have a degree in political science. And so, coming out of college that qualified me for the most part to fly airplanes and not much more. So, I knew that I needed more education, and I was interested in the law early on, quite honestly as a springboard to a potential political career. So, my intention was to separate from active duty, go to law school and begin a life in elective politics. And as I got to law school, I began to investigate elective politics and got involved. And, I think the more I saw behind the scenes what happens in our elective politics world, the less interesting that option became to me.

And, since I was married and had young kids, I could not be unemployed. So I decided to take a different path and pursue an opportunity to be a commercial litigation attorney. And my wife is from Florida. And so, when we got engaged in law school, I was down on one knee and said, "Would you marry me?"

And she said, "Yes, but..." [both laughing] and she said, "Yes, but you will return me to my native state of Florida?"

And since that was not a difficult task, I then, set out to get myself a job in Florida. Landed up in Naples. And that's where we've lived ever since. I moved here in 1995 and continue to live here to this day.

LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHY

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Well, fascinating story, sir. So our podcast, as you know, sir, is one where we discuss leadership and that's what today's topic is on. How has your leadership philosophy grown and matured over your career?

BRIG GEN DEMAREST:

When you're commissioned and you enter the Air Force as a pilot, you spend several years in training going from one training environment to another. And although you get exposed to a number of different officers, you're really in the training pipeline and they're really ... there isn't a heavy emphasis in leadership. I think in the pilot pipeline, at least there was not in the early 1980s. The emphasis was rightly focused on developing your skills and abilities to be an effective aviator.

And so, you don't really even get really a leadership flavor until you get out on active duty. As a lieutenant flying fighters over in Europe, again, my focus was on being the best fighter pilot that I could be, and there really weren't very many leadership opportunities early on in my career. After I went to Fighter Weapons School and came back, I was now in charge of a weapon shop. I had a chance to work with like-minded pilots. And, I think my leadership philosophy was fairly focused

because as an F-15 pilot on active duty, you're on the tip of the spear and your job is to make sure that you and others around you are for whatever operation you're tasked to do on very short notice.

I've found that the leadership component was fairly easy. You had like-minded people, all doing a difficult job, all united behind the same course, there wasn't really enough time for personal issues or problems to crop up, if they did, we would address them right away.

And so, while it was a very dynamic environment in which to be an officer, in which to employ, I felt like I had limited leadership opportunities. And so, I didn't give it that much thought. I'd never written an OPR. I'd never supervised an enlisted member in my 10 years of active duty in the Air Force. And that's not good or bad, it's just a fact. And so, I would say my leadership was much more tactically focused on the other pilots around me. And as you well know, the Air Force has a lot more than pilots, and it's a lot more than the officer corps. And so I would say that I had a limited, a very intense but a limited exposure to leadership early on.

Upon returning to the military, I think that that was completely different. I came back to the Florida Air National Guard as a deputy SJA and then an SJA in a legal office, and I was immediately immersed in the wing staff and dealing with all the issues that you do in a legal office. The interesting thing about being a JAG in the Guard is that you're an officer too. And it's an SJA, it's a deputy SJA and if you're lucky you have two paralegals. In my case, we only had one throughout my career and sometimes none.

So you end up doing all the different jobs that you find in any legal office. We were doing justice, which is different at the Guard, but we still have Article 15s. And so, you're doing claims and wills and all these other things. So, from a leadership perspective, coming back to the Guard was really a great opportunity to work with a small team at the wing. And so my philosophy has

grown, from single focused or focused on small group to certainly the evolution toward a more large group leadership role, including now as one of the general officer leaders of our 2000 members here in Florida. So there's definitely been an evolution in my leadership experience and philosophy.

JOINT FORCE LEADERSHIP

MAJ HANRAHAN:

So at this point, sir, I'd like to kind of dive into today's substantive topic, which is Joint Force Leadership or the Joint Force Leadership triad. Obviously it's the name of your consulting firm, you wrote a book on this. Can you explain for our listeners in a nutshell, what is Joint Force Leadership?

BRIG GEN DEMAREST:

Sure, so as I mentioned earlier, that Joint Force Leadership is the product of combining the leadership experience of a U.S. Navy SEAL and an Air Force Fighter pilot. And as Mark McGinnis and I sat down and talked about this, what we realized was that, we came from very different backgrounds and experiences, right? The Navy has their own culture The Air Force has their own culture. Fighter pilots have their own culture, certainly Navy SEALs have their own culture. And these organizations and cultures are very different. They have different focuses, they have different methods of employment. Yet, what is universally true is that our two groups, fighter pilots and SEALs, are routinely brought together to execute cannot-fail missions.

In a lot of cases, we never meet the person that we're working with. It's all done through communication, email, message traffic, relying on your experience. And so, what we said was these same qualities that we see in the military, we find all the time in civilian businesses. So if you go into any company or any team, you're gonna find that the HR folks have their own culture, the finance, the sales team, they all have different cultures. They all use different languages. They all have different acronyms, yet they are required to come together and

execute. And if they do that right, they can perform at a high level. And if they don't do that right, their team and the organization as a whole will struggle.

And so our goal was to take our military experience as a joint force. The combination of two or more different teams united behind a common purpose and translate that into a business experience so that whether you're a military reader or a civilian reader, you can understand that it's about bringing different groups together to execute and perform, at a high level. And that's really where Joint Force Leadership came from.

TRIAD: FOCUS, TRUST AND COMMUNICATION

MAJ HANRAHAN:

And sir, within this Joint Force Leadership, there's what I would call three pillars or this triad. Can you explain what this triad is and how you define them and how they came to be?

BRIG GEN DEMAREST:

Sure, so as we explored Joint Force Leadership, we took the time to look at the military and the civilian teams that we had worked with. And, Mark McGinnis and I have been working in the civilian world for, at this point up to 15 years. So, I have almost as much civilian experience as I do of military experience in this area.

And we sat back and we tried to say, Okay, for the teams that have performed exceptionally well, what are the common core characteristics? Whether it's SEALs, fighter pilots, businesses, professional sport teams, what are the things that you could go back and say, these are the three things that are most important to success. Or conversely, when we've worked with organizations not reaching their full potential, what were the three major areas that we could identify where there was a weakness in one or more.

And, so we came down and decided that focus, trust and communication were the three common tools to highly effective teams. And so that's what we decided at the

intersection of focus, trust and communication, were results, and affected leadership. And that's what began to form the triad that we call focus, trust and leadership under our Joint Force Leadership model.

TRIAD: COMMUNICATION

MAJ HANRAHAN:

And sir, if it's okay with you, I'd like to kind of take each one of these in turn. So the first one, communication, to me seems like it might be naturally the first one to discuss. You even mentioned here that communication is the linchpin of leadership. And I would kind of look at it as, without communication, it's hard to build trust or probably have focus. So, can you talk a little bit more about the importance of communication?

BRIG GEN DEMAREST:

Yeah, and I think the easiest way to explain it is to ask your listeners to ask themselves a question. When you've been on a high performance team, how would you define the communication on that team? Or conversely, if you've been on a team that has not performed so well, how would you characterize their communication?

And, across the board without exception, the highest performing teams are the ones that are able to communicate effectively. And effectively doesn't mean that we're getting bombarded with information. It is absolutely a balance. It's getting the right information to the right audience at the right time.

And so, it's constantly a quality that leaders have to evaluate and they have to really be concerned about or thinking about the audience that they are addressing. Because how you communicate with your key staff or your C-suite in the business world is a lot different than how you communicate with the troops in the field or your individual contributors. And so, it is absolutely key. It drives most everything else.

So let me give you an example that we call commander's intent. It's a very powerful communication tool. It has military roots, but widespread civilian application, if it's

done right. And commander's intent is basically when you as a leader are able to articulate what outcome you are looking for. And it's not just, go out there and win one for the Gipper. It has to be more specific than that, but it really has to describe the end state that you want and has to avoid at all costs telling your team how you want them to get there. It is not easy to come up with, though. A lot of people think I could do that in a minute. Well, if you can, congratulations, you're one of the top 2%. Because it requires you as a leader to sit down and think, what is it that is really important and what does success for my team or organization really look like? And we talk at great length about that as a communication tool because if you can clearly articulate your commander's intent, then people have something against which they can action.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

And sir, if I could interject for a second, just to make sure I'm clearly understanding this. Commander's intent is that you want to project the end state to the team of what you're looking for, the ultimate objective, but not necessarily how to get there. Just what you're trying, where you're trying to get?

BRIG GEN DEMAREST:

That's exactly right. In some cases you can allow the how to sneak in there if you're pointing out a key resource that absolutely has to be leveraged, but that's a rarity. It is really about identifying clearly for your team, what you want the end state to be. So, the commander's intent for military justice, might read that we want timely justice executed in accordance with their regulations, providing the appropriate due process at the speed of relevancy, which I know borrows somewhat from TJAG's approach with this. Maybe it could be a little bit more specific. You could put timeframes in there, perhaps, because things like as soon as possible mean different things to different people. But the idea here is that we need to give people enough direction so that everybody on the team can say, okay, I understand where we're going while giving them the freedom to figure out how they're gonna get there.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

And sir, if I could ask probably a very basic question, why is this the approach?

BRIG GEN DEMAREST:

Yeah, I think because as leaders, we have to be able to influence where our people are going. They look to us for that direction. We owe it to them. And the most valuable resource that our people have is their time. And what we wanna do is make sure that they are spending their time in the highest and best use, making sure they're not running down different rabbit trails or running down different issues that while may be important to them or someone in the short term, do not drive our organizations strategically in the direction we wanna go. And that's really, as a commander, how you keep your hand on the rudder to steer the ship in the direction that you want it to go. And if you're not doing that, well intentioned people will try and steer the ship in the direction they think you want it to go.

And here's the analogy that I use. I'm gonna assume that everybody on your team absolutely wants to do the right thing. But without any guidance, let's assume for a minute that we tie a string to each one of those members and they're able to pull on the string. Well, everybody is pulling on the string in the direction they think our organization should go. Guess what? We don't really go anywhere 'cause people are yanking the organization in different directions. If I can provide a beacon, a high level explanation with some detail about where I want us to go, I'm much more confident that people will pick up the rope and we'll all pull generally in the direction that we've set for ourselves as a team. It's a very powerful visual but it helps, I think, explain why it's important to get that alignment and unity of effort from our team through the use of commander's intent.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

And you talked within communication about having regular calls or meetings with team members. What have you seen to be a good quote and quote "battle rhythm" for meetings?

BRIG GEN DEMAREST:

That's a great question because I've worked with teams and organizations that run the gamut from, we never get together, through we're in meetings from sunup to sundown. And here's the way I answer that. The answer is gonna vary based upon the team. But what I have found effective is that I'm gonna set some guidelines as to what we're gonna do in a meeting. So for example, before I allow anyone to schedule a meeting with me, I have them answer a couple of questions. Number one, what is the purpose of the meeting? Is it to provide information? Is it a decisional briefing? Is it a brainstorming session? And if they can't articulate what the purpose of the meeting is, then they're not ready to meet.

The second thing I want to know is, what's the deliverable? What are we gonna walk out of the meeting having done? Is it we've made a decision? Is it we've increased our awareness? Is it we've educated people? We've level set our expectations? What is the deliverable?

And then what I do is I say, "Okay, how much time are we able to allocate to this effort?" And I try and make people ... I don't let them put a four-hour meeting on there unless I'm convinced that it's worth four hours of everybody's time. 'Cause the next thing I'm gonna ask them is who else is gonna be in the meeting and why? Ask yourself this question, how many times have you been sitting in the back of a room in a meeting, wondering to yourself, why on earth am I sitting in this meeting? And I'm sure I'm not the only one who's had that happen, right?

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Yes, sir.

BRIG GEN DEMAREST:

And so, the goal is to answer that question before we get into the meeting. And I think that there's gotta be enough regularity to make sure that we continue to steer the ship in the right direction. But we have to give people enough time to get out of the meeting and go back and get the work done.

So at the Florida Air National Guard, we have a drill every month. We're in there eight hours on Saturday, eight hours on Sunday. That's 16 hours that we have. And we're very mindful about how we use people's time. And so, we make a conscious decision before we show up. What kind of meetings are we gonna have? Who's gonna be in them? And anytime we have a meeting involving the entire team, we scrub that list to make sure that every bit of information is something that we need to communicate to the team face-to-face. If we can send it another way, better. But, and I think, if you can focus your meeting efforts on that, you'll streamline a time that you're together or be more productive when you're in the meeting.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

So do you think it'd be safe to say that meetings therefore should be solution focused as opposed to like dissemination of information sessions?

BRIG GEN DEMAREST:

I think generally speaking, yes, but there's some information that you need to hear from the boss. So, we just talked about commander's intent and while I think it's great to write up commander's intent and prominently post it and send it out in an email, the troops need to hear from the boss the commander's intent.

And so, I do think there some information that needs to be delivered face-to-face. And I do think there are also other purposes. You can do a meeting to brainstorm. You can do a meeting to brief the boss on three different courses of action and get some guidance in that. So, I don't necessarily think they just have to be limited to that, but you gotta be able to answer the question, why are we all getting together? And like you mentioned, if it's just to pass out information, is there a faster and better way?

So, one of the tools that we use in the Guard is that we send out a newsletter before drill and we put all that collateral information in it. And then it's up to the

member to go there and look at it before they get to drill. It's I think another communication tool that's important and it's a follow on to kind of your question here, is what is the right communication tool to use? And meetings is one of them, but obviously we have a lot of other tools at our disposal.

Here's my thought. It's important for us as leaders to use the tool that works best for the audience, not necessarily for ourselves. And let me say that again, you have to use the best tool for the recipient of the information, not the one that you're necessarily most comfortable with. If your default is to send a two-page email, I have news for you. Very few people are reading your two-page email, right?

I just got done working with an organization, a civilian business. And the CEO was so proud of himself 'cause he was sending out monthly 10-page email updates to the entire field and he thought, okay, my job as a communicator is done here. And I laughed out loud and said, "I bet you, only half the people on the C-suite "read this whole thing" [both laughing]. "I can guarantee you the troops in the field are not reading a 10-page email."

And I think that's true with us in the military. We get comfortable with certain tools because they work for us. And I think we need to turn that construct on its head a little bit. And I come across this a lot because as you can tell from my bio, I've been around a while, yet a lot of our Airmen are 18, 19, 20, 21, 22. My kids are 19 and 22. They're in the perfect sweet spot to tell me what works and what doesn't. They think that Facebook is for dinosaurs. And we think that Facebook is a phenomenal communication tool, and don't get me wrong, it has its place but if you wanna reach your Airmen who are in their twenties, sending them a long email is not the way to do it.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Yes, so, what are your thoughts on social media?

BRIG GEN DEMAREST:

Yeah, my thoughts are, it is part of our life. And I share the same concerns as a lot of people with OPSEC and stuff like that. But if you think that well, I'm just not gonna be on Facebook and I'm not gonna use these tools. You've talked yourself out of an opportunity to connect with the troops. I think you have to be very mindful of your messaging. So I think, less is better. And, there are platforms that leverage that less is better.

Our Adjutant General, who is same age as I am, we're academy classmates, has kids about the same age and we've talked about this, that we have to get out of our comfort zone to engage our Airmen with the tools that they use—mindful of the OPSEC and COMSEC considerations associated with all these tools. So, it's here to stay. And if we wanna connect with our Airmen in ways that matter to them, you got to embrace it.

TRIAD: FOCUS

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Yes, sir, and I think we could talk on this topic on communication for hours, if not days, but I'd like to move on to our second point in the triad here, which is focus. And you mentioned on your website and some of your materials that leadership starts with being the quote "master of the right now." Can you elaborate on that?

BRIG GEN DEMAREST:

Sure, based upon our, the conversation we just had on social media, it's very easy to say that we are bombarded with information from all different channels: media, the phones we carry, the laptops we are looking at, you name it. There's a lot of things out there competing for our attention.

The teams and the individuals who have been able to execute at the highest levels are the ones that are focused on the task in front of them and don't allow themselves to be distracted by these other tools. Doesn't mean that they shut them off, it just means that they are mindful about the fact that if I'm gonna spend time on

social media, I'm gonna limit myself to 30 minutes. I'm gonna use it for this purpose. And then I'm gonna get back to the task at hand.

And they have some type of system. It could be a Google Keep, it could be a Post-it Note. It could be a list they keep on their phone. They have a way of making sure that they keep their number one priority at the top of their list. Meaning that they allocate time to do it. Some people go so far as to go into their calendar and block off two hours of time to say I'm working on this, to be the master of right now. This is the most important thing that I need to get done. And I'm not gonna let the distractions of the day interfere with that. And look, I get it. We all have bosses, we all get called into emergencies. That's aspirational. But I think the opposite of that is that if we let the swirl and all the activity and information drive our behavior, we never get anything done in a meaningful way.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

And sir, I think this is probably something we all struggle with and maybe it's hard to ever get this maybe quote unquote "perfect". And, but something that's, I think, could be very challenging especially in our high ops tempo world that we live in with all the different forms of communication that we're getting. I mean, frankly, we're getting bombarded with communication and to find that focus that you talk about seems to almost be an anomaly sometimes in our current technologically connected world.

So, kind of with all that in mind, I mean, are there any things that you would recommend to our listeners on how they can work to get better on focus? And you mentioned here about time blocking, and I've read that in other books. There's a book called "The ONE Thing" by Gary Keller. And he's very big on certain things about focus, really. That's really what the whole book's about. But are there any best practices that you've seen through your years of experience, both in the military and in the civilian world that people could utilize to become better at focus?

BRIG GEN DEMAREST:

Yeah, I have seen that and that is that, again, kind of going back to the commander's intent discussion. You don't have to tell people exactly how you want them to do stuff. But I think creating expectations on specific deliverables and specific times and dates helps out with that. If I tell someone that I want them to do this project, and I tell them I want it as soon as possible, that is open to debate and discussion, because what I think is as soon as possible may not be what you think is as soon as possible. So, in terms of establishing priorities, again, I don't wanna tell someone how to do their job. I wanna tell them that "By this Friday, I need from you two courses of action that address this particular issue. Today's Monday, we can check in on Wednesday or Thursday if you need that."

So, I think in terms of setting objectives or goal setting that involves specific measurables. All of us have heard of SMART goals, and that time bound component helps focus people on what you've decided is the most important thing. And I've told people that that translates to their personal life as well.

If you're a Post-it Note person, or you use your phone to make a list, put them in order of priority. So, for example, I'm a fan of Google Keep because I use different devices and I have a Google Keep document for work. I have a Google Keep document for my family. I have a Google Keep document for Joint Force Leadership. And I put in there the task and I give them a priority one, two or three. And it takes a little bit of time, but it is worth it because as people get busy, what we often do is we default to doing those things that we'd like to do, or those things that are easy. And neither one of those things will perhaps drive us to focus on what's most important.

And so, I review that list and say, okay, what's number one? And I have to be able to articulate a clear reason why I'm doing a number two or number three, if the number one is sitting out there. And it takes a little discipline, but because it leverages technology that

technique also works with some of our younger Airmen. They love to use electronic tools and so, I have found that that simple application will help them prioritize as they go through there.

And then, back to the communication piece. Letting your supervisors know when something comes up that derails you. Because in the example I just gave, I don't wanna hear Friday at noon, that you haven't been able to get to my courses of action because the rest of your week got hijacked by A, B and C. I need to know that earlier in the week so that either I can A, help you get unhijacked from that other work or B, manage my expectations that, okay, this was a higher priority. It came from higher headquarters, it came from my boss. I'm gonna manage my expectations and push that back to next Wednesday.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

And I presume that would be something that you would have in your communication plan from the onset, if you're the leader with your team members on how they would communicate to you, if, for example, they weren't able to hit a particular deadline.

BRIG GEN DEMAREST:

Yeah, and that's exactly right. So, you had asked earlier about a communication rhythm. I think is as you go up in the organization, and when I say up, I mean, size of group, not in rank. So the bigger the group, the less frequent you're gonna meet.

My direct reports, I have a weekly check in with my direct reports and it's, and when I say a stand-up I mean, we don't get to sit in the chairs cause it goes so quickly and we use it just to check in so that we, they can tell us what they're working on. We can re-vector them if necessary, but it's a quick communication tool. It's not a four-hour meeting, here's what I'm gonna do this week. It's, hey, what are the top three things that you're working on? And I think, regular calls and check-ins, help manage expectations and help people more effectively communicate where they're spending their time.

SETTING GOALS

MAJ HANRAHAN:

And sir, we touched upon goals a little bit. I'd like to explore that just a little bit. Do you have any best practices for setting goals with teams, and also individually?

BRIG GEN DEMAREST:

Sure, let me start at the individual level 'cause the tools that apply at the individual level get leveraged with a team. So almost everybody has heard about SMART goals, right? Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound. And each of those qualities of a goal are important. So specific means you use language that the reader understands and not laden with acronyms that nobody knows. Time-bound is a date on your calendar, not as soon as possible. Measurable is some type of objective measure, not some type of subjective. I feel like it's done or I feel like I have accomplishment. Achievable means believable, that when I say in front of the team, they don't laugh out loud in my face. I take that just one step further.

And I say a SMART goal, and I use the acronym SMARTS and the last S is strategic. And what I mean by that is it's not that everything we do is at the strategic level. But what I mean by that is that every single goal that we set has to be aligned with the commander's intent or the strategic vision of our leadership. So if I can't point to one of TJAG's key strategic initiatives when I'm setting a goal, then I have to ask myself, why am I doing this?

And oftentimes the answer is I shouldn't be and I'm gonna realign or rethink that goal so that it does drive a strategic outcome. That piece, I think a lot of people miss and we spend a lot of time working with organizations, not only teaching them the SMART goal but okay, how do we measure that against a strategic outcome? If you've clearly expressed your commander's intent, you can point right to that. Oftentimes what we find is that commander's intent either doesn't exist or it's too vague to point you to say, well, I think it aligns with your vision. And whenever I hear that, tells me there's more work to be done on the strategic vision piece.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

That concludes part one of the interview with Brigadier General Demarest. In part two, we continue the discussion on the pillars of his Joint Force Leadership triad including focus and trust. If you liked this episode, please consider subscribing on Apple podcast and leaving a review. This helps us to grow on outreach for the betterment of the Air Force and JAG Corps. See you on the next episode. [upbeat music]

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GLOSSARY

- **CEO:** chief executive officer
- **COMSEC:** Communications Security
- **DSCA:** Defense Support to Civil Authorities
- **HR:** human resources
- **JAG:** judge advocate general
- **MAJCOM:** major command
- **NAF:** Numbered Air Force
- **Navy SEAL:** SEAL in full Sea, Air, and Land
- **OPR:** officer performance report
- **OPSEC:** Operational security
- **SJA:** staff judge advocate
- **SMART:** specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-sensitive
- **SMARTS:** specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-sensitive, strategic
- **TAG:** The Adjutant General
- **TJAG:** The Judge Advocate General