

The following is from an audio recording and in some cases, it may be incomplete, or inaccurate due to inaudible passages, or other transcription errors. Nothing from this show or any others would be construed as legal advice. Please consult an attorney for any legal issue. Nothing from this show is endorsed by the Federal Government, Air Force, or any of its components. All content and opinions are those of our guests and host. The inclusion of hyperlinks and references does not imply any endorsement by the author(s), by the Federal Government, Air Force, or any of its components. They are meant to provide an additional perspective or as a supplementary resource. The Department of the Air Force or any other department or agency of the United States Government does not exercise any responsibility or oversight of the content at the link destination.



# AFJAGS Podcast: Episode 71

## Be the Leader You Want to See: A Leadership Perspective with CMSgt Tynisa Haskins

**Hosts:** Major Laura Quaco and Major Victoria Smith

**Guest:** Chief Master Sergeant Tynisa Haskins

In this episode, Major Laura Quaco and Major Victoria Smith sit down with Chief Master Sergeant Tynisa "Ty" Haskins, the Senior Enlisted Advisor of the Air Force Judge Advocate General's Corps. CMSgt Haskins provides her views on leadership, fostering connections, vicarious trauma, diversity and inclusion, and related matters.

[Music: Band playing clip of Air Force song]

### New Hosts

#### **Major Laura Quaco:**

Good morning, afternoon and evening, listeners. Welcome back to The Air Force Judge Advocate General's School Podcast. I'm Major Laura Quaco.

#### **Major Victoria Smith:**

And I'm Major Victoria Smith.

#### **Maj Quaco:**

And we are your new hosts for The [AFJAGS](https://www.jagreporter.af.mil/) Podcast. Now, for any of you non-[JAG](https://www.jagreporter.af.mil/) or nonmilitary listeners, you may be wondering why the hosts of this show keep changing periodically. Major Smith, why don't you give them the quick details on that.

#### **Maj Smith:**

Absolutely. So we as JAGs, we tend to rotate assignments every two to three years, give or take. So Major Erin Davis and Major Charlie Hedden moved assignments this past summer. After they moved, Major Quaco and myself, we moved in to the Professional Outreach Division, which led to us becoming the brand new hosts of this podcast.

**Maj Quaco:**

So, now that introductions are out of the way, let's talk about what we're going to talk about, huh?

**Maj Smith:**

Sounds great.

## **Introduction**

---

**Maj Quaco:**

Alright, listeners. So, you're in for a special treat today because we are actually sitting here with Chief Master Sergeant Ty Haskins. She is the Senior Enlisted Advisor to The Air Force Judge Advocate General, General Charles Plummer, and to senior staff on enlisted matters for all paralegals within the Judge Advocate General Corps worldwide. That includes active duty and Air Reserve component paralegals. And so today, she's going to be talking with us about leadership, about fostering relationships, vicarious trauma, diversity and inclusion, and all related matters that are useful not only to those of us who are in the JAG Corps career field, but really they are applicable to any type of career that anyone might be in.

So a little bit about Chief's background. She has served in varying levels of paralegal manager across different types of legal offices, [MAJCOM](#) level, headquarters level. She's been a flight instructor at the Airman Leadership School, which includes other career fields. She's been noncommissioned officer in charge of various sections of the legal office. She's been a defense paralegal, just to name some of her jobs. She's also deployed in support of OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM.

So, with that Major Smith, I'm going to turn it over to you.

**Maj Smith:**

Chief Haskins, thank you so very much for joining us today.

**Chief Master Sergeant Tynisa Haskins:**

Thank you, ma'am, for the invitation.

## **Senior Enlisted Advisor to The Judge Advocate General**

---

**Maj Smith:**

Oh, absolutely. Will you tell the listeners a little bit about your responsibilities as a Senior Enlisted Advisor to The Judge Advocate General.

**CMSgt Haskins:**

Yes, ma'am. I get the privilege of advising The Judge Advocate General and other senior leaders across the JAG Corps and across the Air Force on matters of welfare, readiness, utilization, progression of paralegals. And then I also get the honor of passionately advocating for our paralegals' interests and helping them find a sense of purpose in the performance of their duties.

**Maj Smith:**

So during your career in the military, you've advanced from the ranks of being an airman to being a chief master sergeant. When you started your career as Chief Haskins, did you ever think that you'd be the Senior Enlisted Advisor to The Judge Advocate General?

**CMSgt Haskins:**

It's funny, ma'am, no, I didn't, but the former—or the retired Chief Master Sergeant Larry Tolliver will tell you in a chat that we had when he was my Global Strike MAJCOM functional manager, he asked me a question about what job did I want next, and I responded, tongue in cheek, with "yours." And so and at the time, he had just been promoted to the Senior Paralegal Manager. So I didn't think that I would ever get here. But in jest, I told him I wanted his job, so I guess I got what I asked for.

**Maj Smith:**

And how does it feel to have this job now?

**CMSgt Haskins:**

It's a huge responsibility, but it's also a great reward. It's so rewarding to be able to help the paralegals.

## Leadership and Mentorship

### **Maj Smith:**

Now, Chief, you've been serving in leadership positions throughout the Air Force for about 20 plus years now. How did you learn how to become a leader?

### **CMSgt Haskins:**

Mentorship. I cannot overstate the importance of mentorship in an Airman's career. I'm an avid reader. I absorb a lot of content for leadership books, and I've read many over the years. But not everything is on the pages of a book. And that's why I am a firm believer that mentorship is paramount. I have three mentors that I have met at various stages in my career, and I lean on one more than others. My primary mentor, I've known for 22 years now, and he's invested in me and helped me articulate long term and short-term career goals. Collectively, he's identified—all of them have helped me identify areas of improvement, but they've also held me accountable and molded me into the leader that I am today. So, I cannot overstate the importance of someone taking the time to get to know you, invest in you, and show you how leadership looks at different levels. It is extremely important.

### **Maj Smith:**

At what point in your career did you realize the importance of mentorship.

### **CMSgt Haskins:**

I'd have to say as a staff sergeant, because I watched different leaders across the Air Force and also within our corps, make decisions that I wanted to know the reason why behind it and asking that "why" was how I understood what mentorship was like—they taking the time to explain this is why we do what we do. And one day you'll have the opportunity to perhaps make that decision or weigh in on that. So I believe it was a staff sergeant for sure.

### **Maj Smith:**

Did you have any leadership experience coming into the military?

### **CMSgt Haskins:**

Not really. Well, I take that back. I did. I served in junior [ROTC](#) in high school, and I earned the position of what—Washington, D.C. isn't a state—so I earned the position of what we would call a brigade commander. So I was responsible for all of the [JROTC](#) commanders in the city of Washington, D.C. To me, that seems not like a big deal, but apparently it was. But I learned that I was responsible for other people that I didn't have direct contact with, and I learned the gravity of that. But even now, so it kind of passed my mind thinking, oh, well, you know, that was just a moment in time. But taught me some valuable lessons.

### **Maj Smith:**

Any of those lessons that you learned during your time in JROTC that you transitioned or used in your military time?

### **CMSgt Haskins:**

I definitely will have to say discipline, because, you know, as a high school student, you're not really focused on discipline. You may be focused on when's the next game or what am I going to wear the next day, or, you know, I have to write a paper or I'm preparing for college. But I honestly would say there are JROTC prepares you for the discipline aspect that most people aren't willing to make those sacrifices early at that age. So discipline for sure.

### **Maj Smith:**

Are there any leadership lessons you learned specifically in the military?

### **CMSgt Haskins:**

Yes, ma'am, from my mentor, I know there are several mentors that taught me these different valuable lessons along the way. So I'd say one of the things that stand out the most to me is in the absence of something whatever it is that you're longing to see or that you like to experience, you can fill in the blank. You have the opportunity at every level to model what you want to see, and then be that. Many people get frustrated with people in circumstances along the way throughout their career and assignments, and oftentimes we

can't immediately change the circumstances, and you certainly can't change how people are, but you can change your perspective and approach by modeling what you want to see.

### Being Approachable

And so my perspective and leadership philosophy in terms of those lessons that I've learned have to do with being authentic, being approachable, and being accountable. And those three things have taught me so much throughout my career. The approachable piece, you know, I had a mentor tell me, you know, in a roomful of people, you know, you kind of stand out or stand off you're stand offish, right? You don't engage as much, but one-on-one a great person to talk to, lots of dialogue. But when you're thinking about being a leader, leadership is people. That's what leadership equates to. It's people. If you're a leader, you're in the business of people and you have to be able to connect and you have to be able to communicate.

### Being Authentic

And so that approachability was huge for me. And then the authenticity piece, I mean, I think we all have learned at some point throughout our careers, you're the best version of yourself when you are yourself. I don't know how to be anybody else but me, to include my flaws, but each of those teach me something about how better I can be for the people that I lead, and the people that I serve alongside.

### Being Accountable

And then as far as accountability, I mean, in our career field, we're used to advising commanders on how to hold others accountable. But we, too, need to realize the value in taking that personal accountability for our actions to include those things—those actions that we would like to not make again. You know, the mistakes that we've made are also huge teachers to us. So, yes, approachability, accountability and authenticity have not steered me wrong.

## Maintaining Your Authentic Self

### **Maj Smith:**

No, those are valuable lessons. Chief, I want to talk to you a little bit about authenticity. Do you have any advice about being and maintaining your authentic self while being in the military—an organization that is driven by customs, courtesy, discipline, uniformity?

### **CMSgt Haskins:**

Yes. Ma'am. You know, we all joined the military. And when we do, who you are at your core doesn't have to change. There's some things about your character that could be improved for sure. People say the military makes you a better person, but when you come to the military, there are traits, there are values that you—there are morals—that you bring with you that only add to the betterment of who we are as a force. So I think those things at ground, you don't necessarily have to change. And there may be some valuable things that you can contribute, but that's a part of what attracted us to you, and I think that's the part that people miss. We recruit you to be a member, to be an Airman, we want you to be a part of our team for a reason.

And I think that authentic part of who you are is what we want to see. So you don't have to lose sight of that. Now, there are some things that we're going to help develop in you that will certainly add more value to your contribution as an Airman, but I think that you can't lose sight of who you are at your core because that's ultimately the person that you'll be when you take off the uniform. So wearing, the uniform just adds to who you are. But when you take it off, you have to remember who you are and who you were when you joined.

## Leadership Position

### **Maj Smith:**

Well, very well said, Chief, for many JAGs, many paralegals—myself included—whenever we join the military, we find ourselves supervising for the very first time. Do you have any advice for a JAG or a paralegal who finds themselves in a leadership position for the very first time?

**CM Sgt Haskins:**

Yes, ma'am. The one thing that I'd say first and foremost is that a leadership role doesn't make you a leader. It's not your duty title, it's not your position that's going to make you effective. And I think setting that expectation up front is huge because sometimes people walk into these positions and they assume that the dynamics of just being in the position will change things, but as a leader, as a person, and as a leader, you have the ability to set that temperature, to set those dynamics in your office.

So first and foremost, just realize that it is a privilege to lead and that you have to earn certain things in that position. You have to earn trust. You have to build trust. And so, doing so, you got to lead by example in your attitude. That's what people are going to follow first and foremost, your attitude and your example, the position and the duty title are not going to do it. But once you take that and say "it's a privilege to lead" and "I'm honored to do so", then being responsible for people and programs, it's going to seem overwhelming at first, but don't lose sight of the fact that being the kind of leader that people want to follow is huge. It's huge because that's the example. And then they're going to do it because they want to support you. They want to get behind you. But start with being transparent. Start building trust and promoting teamwork. Critical to every person in a leadership position—earn their trust.

## **Fostering Connections**

**Maj Smith:**

Chief, I want to segue and start talking next about fostering connections. So, with the start of [Airmen's Time](#), the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, have made it really clear that connecting with people, connecting with our Airmen, that's critical to our mission. For the last couple of years, as you likely know, that's not what you've been doing. People have been physically distant. People have been teleworking, socially distancing. Now that we are transitioning into a time where people are going back to the office, we're working with one another again. There are some people

out there who are struggling, struggling to connect with other people, maybe because they're out of practice, maybe because they've kind of gotten used to not being around people. Do you have any advice on establishing, maintaining connections, especially during a time when so very many of us are just out of practice?

**CM Sgt Haskins:**

Yes, ma'am. That's—that's very good—that's a very good question. Connecting with others has been at the top of my priority for many reasons. That's one of the reasons why I started the initiative—the Paralegal Connect initiative. It's because we are disconnected. And COVID, I think, enhanced that in some ways. I have had the opportunity to watch kind of phases of how our Air Force has been connected, as from the enlisted corps perspective, many moons ago, even when I was stationed here at Maxwell, we used to go to the enlisted club for camaraderie. You know, you would talk about, hey, "How's things going with your family? How's things going outside of work?" You got to know people, and that's the first step. If you connect and get to know your people, then when you're checking on them, it doesn't seem surface. It doesn't seem obligatory. And so that's the first critical step is just if you didn't have a connection with people outside of work, it's going to seem very obligatory.

So make the connection. Just take the first step, make the connection, ask them how they're doing outside of work. I'm not asking you what you're doing to contribute to the mission. I just want to know how you are as a person. Because that's going to go a long way. And then when they understand that your intentions are not exclusively based on their performance, but them as a person, then they'll open up a little bit. There may be some vulnerability. That's going to take some time and work, but I would say make the effort because once you get to know your teammates, build those connections, and understand their strengths and experiences, then you can tap into some other things, challenge them in some areas to cause them to want to maybe reconnect

in different ways. But it's going to have to be the building of relationships first.

## **Be or Model What You Want to See**

### **Maj Quaco:**

Chief, if I may chime in here, I've got a question on that. So what can you say for our Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors, or insert your nonmilitary listener if they have a supervisor who does not embrace these characteristics that you're recommending? If there's a supervisor who may be naturally introverted and not have those natural abilities to reach out and foster effective communication?

### **CMSgt Haskins:**

That's a great question, ma'am. And so I would say back to the be or model what you want to see in the absence thereof, whatever it is that you're longing for, then you fill in the blank. I would challenge that Airman, that Guardian, that Soldier, that Sailor—you make, you take the first step, because sometimes you have to demonstrate what it looks like.

For introverts, it's very hard for them to come out of their shell. And so sometimes you have—if you are an extrovert or even if you're a people person or you're better skilled in that area, you're more comfortable, demonstrate it by small things, the little things. You bring donuts to the office if that's what you choose to, or baked goods, you walk around the office and check on people. "How was your day? How was your weekend? What plans do you have?" Or you start the conversation right before the staff meeting. "Hey, guys, this is what I'm working on today and I'm excited about this task because"—so, you may have to start that conversation. You may have to make those small connection points so that you can show your supervisor, this is what I'm longing for.

And once you demonstrate that there is a need and you're trying to meet it, other people will meet you halfway and perhaps maybe your supervisor will then come over to you and say, "Hey, I really like it when you do that. Can you do more of it"—or give you an opportunity

to lead maybe an offsite or an office function that brings people together because that's a strength for you and it may be a weakness for them.

### **Maj Quaco:**

Those are some great ideas. Thank you, Chief.

## **Diversity**

### **Maj Smith:**

Now Chief, two other pretty important areas that the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force have been focusing on are diversity and inclusion. Chief, what does it mean to have a diverse force?

### **CMSgt Haskins:**

Different knowledge, skills, and abilities. I think that's paramount. First, when we attract talent to the Air Force, we're looking at the different skills, the different knowledge, and abilities that you bring to the fight. That's what attracts us, your talent to us. But then there's diversity in thought. You don't get that diversity in thought if you don't get to know the person. So, everybody brings something different to the table.

I think where we can capitalize on diversity is making sure people feel like they can share that. So it's one thing to see the outward difference, right? You're going to see that all day long. You pass by people. We all look different. We're all shaped different. Everybody is a different hue and they have a different personality. That's the outward difference. But the diversity that matters the most, the diversity that's most beneficial to us is when we get to know our teammates and we get to know their differences that they bring to the table, because that's when if you have a strength that is so valued amongst our group and our team and the organization, then we can we can bring that in.

You feel like you're contributing in a meaningful way. We can collaborate, and all as well in that scenario, because every diversity is highlighted—highlighted in a positive way because we want a diversity of thought, diversity of

unique skills and ability. So I think that's what it is more so, it's the inward diversity that we can pull out is one that makes all of us better, not just outward diversity. All of these things contribute to our talent pool, contribute to how we execute our duties, to contribute to how we accomplish a mission for you.

## **Inclusion**

---

### **Maj Smith:**

For you, what does it mean to be inclusive, to have an inclusive team.

### **CMSgt Haskins:**

Inclusion is a feeling. So I know people like to try to pinpoint it and describe—it's important, but it's a feeling. So for instance, when I walk into the JAG school, there's a feeling that I get of inclusivity because I'm a part of a family. I belong to a family. It's familiar, I feel comfortable. And so if I walk into a room full of people and I feel invisible, that's not inclusion. Even if people are talking and they're connecting, but I don't feel seen, if I don't feel heard, that's the feeling of not being included. And so the best way I can explain it is the feeling of belonging, the feeling of being seen and heard. And oftentimes that can't quite be articulated well if you don't know what it feels like. Most people feel like what it feels like to be excluded. And that's easy to describe. But when they say, well, you were in the room with us, we were all together, I—it's the way that Todd Simmons describes it when he goes out to talk about organizational climate, he talks about inclusion.

He said diversity is giving you a seat at the table, but inclusion is allowing you to or giving you that comfort that you can speak and be heard and felt valued. And that's what it is. I might invite you to the room. You might be invited to the meeting, but do you feel comfortable enough to speak up? Do you do you feel comfortable enough to share your ideas, and do you feel like those ideas are being heard? So that's the best way I can describe. It's a feeling.

### **Maj Smith:**

Chief, if there's a listener out there who's maybe responsible for leading a team. Do you have any advice, like how do they foster that feeling of inclusion? How do they create an environment where all the members of their team feel like they can be seen and they can be heard?

### **CMSgt Haskins:**

First, I'd say if you haven't connected with your team yet, to identify what each person's strengths and I don't like saying weaknesses, just areas that they can improve upon, maybe some vulnerability—some areas where they don't feel as confident. That's critical first, because as teammates, we need to know each other. So, first, level set—figure out what everybody's strengths and vulnerabilities are. And once you do that, then you invite them to share their strengths because you got to know what they are. So, invite them to share their strengths with the group whatever that is. It could be something small. We have a project that we're working on in the office, and I think you'd be great to lead that project because you're—you have a strength in that area.

And then when they feel welcome enough to share those strengths, then it's a building block because again, the beauty of making someone feel included is that I elevate you from Airman to advocate. So as a teammate, you may just feel like an Airman, but when you feel included, you're an advocate because you're going to advocate for—your commitment level changes, you're going to advocate for whatever we're focused on whatever we're trying to accomplish. And so the goal is to change that commitment level by inclusion because they really are committed to helping us move forward together. They're committed to collaborating. But that collaboration isn't there if they don't feel committed and connected. And so that's what I'd say. Get connected to your folks first, find out what their strengths are so you can draw those out and they feel like their contribution is so valued by their teammates.

## Vicarious Trauma

### **Maj Smith:**

Thank you, Chief. That was wonderful. Now, Chief, you have served as the noncommissioned officer in charge or NCOIC of military justice, you were a defense paralegal, you've been a law office superintendent, a paralegal manager. While serving in these roles, I'm imagining you probably dealt with and handled some pretty serious heavy type case. Have you experienced vicarious trauma during your career?

### **CMSgt Haskins:**

Yes, ma'am. The funny thing is when you ponder—when I ponder that question, I have to think back. There's like two or three cases that I could pinpoint right now at the top of my head. But at the time I was experiencing it, I didn't identify it by name, if that makes sense. The terminology was not as familiar to me. Now, I could actually go back and say, over the years I've probably experienced vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, and burnout, but I couldn't pinpoint it then. And so I can describe those feelings that I associated with when I was working on those cases for sure. Emotional numbness, exhaustion, you know, feeling I guess maybe overly empathetic with a victim. And so I can describe what those feelings were, but I didn't exactly know what they were at the time. I couldn't identify them by the name.

### **Maj Smith:**

Did you have a name for the feelings, the emotions that you were experiencing at the time?

### **CMSgt Haskins:**

Not really. I mean, at the time when you're working on the cases or you're—depending on how long you serve in that position, you're probably just thinking, man, I'm just doing my best to keep moving. You know, the cases are hard. You know, sometimes you see and hear content or evidence and it's just like, man, this is a tough one. I think that's almost how you describe it—this is a tough one. And then you figure out how to move forward after dealing with that tough one. But you don't necessarily pinpoint it to, oh, this is vicarious trauma and this is how

I would cope. So I think over the years, once you identify and you understand what those terms are, then you're able to say, okay, you know, now that explains why I felt that emotion. And now that I understand what it is, I'm better able to cope with it, or address some of those feelings. Even when I think about the cases. Now I'm able to identify and address those feelings and cope with them.

### **Maj Smith:**

Is there anything that you did to help yourself overcome or deal with those feelings you had?

### **CMSgt Haskins:**

Because it took me so long to identify what they were I'd say at the beginning, no. And that's probably the toughest part. As a legal professional, if you aren't aware that that's what you're experiencing, you're probably not going to be able to address it at the time. So, everybody's coping mechanisms are different, right? So, you might be one of those people where you just keep your head to the ground and you just keep focusing. Some people exercise a lot. Some people just, you know, they have a hobby. I didn't have a hobby. So, you know, it more so will morph into or lead to burnout. I will tell you, I still struggle now with balance because, you know, you're balancing workload, you're balancing family, you're balancing the different hats that you wear. So even now, if I were trying to give my teammate advice about burnout, I would say, you know, my boss, General Plummer, he calls it the harmony, you know, he's—work life harmony. You find harmony when you can. I just say, you know, at specific moments in life, you have to make a decision about what's going to be important at the moment. So, you live each moment and be present in that moment. So, you know, we're planners, we're thinkers, we like to look ten and fifteen steps down the road and our attention shifts to that.

And we try to be so forward thinking that we miss the moment. My best advice would be live in the moment and make those people who are with you in the moment the most important thing. Even if it's your teammates



and you're working on a case, let them feel like they are the most important thing. They're more important than the work, they're more important than what you're viewing at the moment. But the people in your lives need to feel like they're more important than the work. The work is important and it is going to get done but if it's a shared experience, those people should mean more. The people who are helping you in the trenches should mean more. The people who are your clients, who you're taking care of should mean more than just that case. So, make the people feel most important in that moment. That's the best advice with balance.

## Challenging Times

### **Maj Smith:**

Wow. That's amazing, Chief.

Chief Haskins, I know you know this, but there have been headlines out there about promotion rates among the enlisted ranks. We've been dealing with the global pandemic for what seems like forever at this point. People are really, really struggling. Do you have any words of encouragement for military members, family members, anybody out there who's listening, trying to navigate a difficult or maybe even a challenging time?

### **CMSgt Haskins:**

Yes, ma'am. I'd say you know, challenging times don't last always. And, you know, as I listened to General Brown speak last month at [AFA](#), you know, his words were very encouraging because he said, "we've been here before and we'll do it again." Do it again means we'll evolve. We'll transcend. We'll overcome. Right? And so, we've experienced challenges before as an Air Force, and we overcame them.

Our predecessors were trailblazers I mean, they served in austerity with pride. They didn't have as much technology. They didn't have as many resources. They were convicted about the reasons that they were there. They served with distinction and they didn't have, you know, all the things that we have right now. But they still

served with courage, they persevered. I mean, and they showed us what possibility looked like in challenging times. So, if we just take a little bit from their legacy, just a little, that's encouragement enough for me. But I mean, we, too, are experiencing challenging times right now. It just looks a little bit different and we'll get through it together. We've come too far to go backwards. That's the first thing that you got to put on your mind. We can't go backwards. Going backwards is not an option. Right?

And if things are challenging now, you definitely can't stay where you are. So, our only hope and encouragement is to know that we are going to get there. We need to move forward together. And as I contemplate, you know, what my next move is, or what those Airmen are thinking about what their next move should be, you had to really ask yourself, "Why am I here? Why am I here? Why did I choose to serve? Why am I choosing to stay?" Because that's a fundamental question that if you answer, then you'll figure out where do I go next? Slow promotion rates—do I stay in the Air Force to see if I'm going to get promoted within the next couple of cycles, or do I choose to do something different? Do I wait it out? What else will cause me to continue to serve? Because sometimes you got to, you got to look at it and say, "Am I only here for the paycheck?" I mean, we get paid for our purpose of being here, but there has to be another sense of purpose that will drive you. Because when one thing doesn't work, out, what do you turn to? What's the alternative?

And so sometimes the grass looks greener on the other side, but there has to be some sense of purpose that drives you to make the decision to serve. And I'm not saying that people should not seek to promote because, you know, it is validation that you are working very hard and that you want to move up, that—that's great, that's a great pursuit. But if for some reason it doesn't come immediately, is that the only thing that your service is hinging upon? So I would encourage people to ask yourself that question. Why am I here? Why do I continue to stay?

## Sense of Purpose

---

**Maj Smith:**

How did you find your sense of purpose?

**CMSgt Haskins:**

I would say it definitely comes from my faith, my family, and I'm a little bit stubborn [laughter] so if things don't always work out in the in the short term, sometimes you have to stay the course, right? I often tell people that I mentor, try not to make a permanent decision based on temporary feelings because, I mean, life has ebbs and flows. And, I mean, I, really believe that if you make up in your mind that you want something you're going to chase it down. So, for instance, we could use our teammates, the JAGs as an example. You went through a lot to get into law school and that first year is going to test you like none other. And so all the effort that you put to get into law school and you're going through that first year, you're asking yourself that question, "Why am I here? Do I want to stay?" But you've made up in your mind at some point, I'm going to see this through. It's the same. It's I want to be an attorney. It takes work to get there. So instead of focusing on what's right in front of me, I've got to figure out how to press forward. I have to press inward first to tap into what I need, that fortitude, that grit. I've got to press inward first. And then that's going to help me to press forward. And the same thing, find that inner grit—that thing that motivates you to dig deep so that you can you can press forward.

**Maj Smith:**

Thank you for the beautiful reminder about finding your inner strength. And you also give me a couple of flashbacks from my first year at law school.

**CMSgt Haskins:**

[Laughter]

**Maj Smith:**

Chief, I'm not going to lie. Not a great time of my life.

**CMSgt Haskins:**

[Laughter]

## Starting Off Your Military Career

---

**Maj Smith:**

Chief Haskins, what would you say to a brand new paralegal, maybe even a brand new JAG who's just starting off in their military career?

**CMSgt Haskins:**

I have learned a lot of lessons over the span of almost 27 years. So I would say the first thing is there is pride in wearing the badge. There really is. There's pride in what we do. I know there's other career fields in the Air Force that look glamorous, jumping out of planes and, you know, doing a lot of other things that seem like they're operationally worthy of saying that you're an Airmen, but there's so much pride in what we do and our purpose for serving as JAGs and paralegals.

And so, you know, your faux pas and your failures are going to foster growth. If you're proud of what you do, you're going to invest time to grow in your craft, to hone your ability to execute your duties as a paralegal and a JAG. But, but don't pass over that mature—that maturation period, right. Everybody wants to come in and they want to be—the level of expectation is high on both sides, but you're not going to be a picture perfect leader or servant leader at the beginning. There's a maturation process. Don't try to skip through the maturation process because there's so much value added. So when you're brand new, dig in so that you can grow, hone your craft, you're going to evolve eventually. It's not going to be easy, but you're definitely ready for the challenges ahead.

There isn't a task or a function that you can't do unless you're a paralegal, [UPL](#). But one task or function is not more important than the other. You're up for the challenge. We can all do things together. I think the dynamic of the JAG-paralegal partnership is fascinating to me. And I think if we realize that one person brings a certain strength or brings something to the table and the other one is a complement to that, that teamwork is so critical and that's something that I think we could definitely do better on. So as new JAGs, new paralegals,

I think that we should look for those strengths in our teammates, because if it was outside of any other setting, right, you want to be able to lean on your teammate. You're not going to always be at your peak. And so there are times when you're going to need to depend on your teammate.

I love the dynamic of the [ADC](#) and the [SVC](#), because they have teamwork—that team—that teammate partnership of the JAG and paralegal is just phenomenal. And so I would say work on the partnership piece for any new JAG and new paralegal. Take an opportunity to get to know how your skills and abilities can complement each other. But be prepared to grow and evolve together. I think here's the part that we when I say expectations are high on each side as paralegals and enlisted we don't expect the JAGs to be experts or perfect when they arrive, and we don't want them to expect us to be experts or perfect when we arrive. It is the best opportunity to grow together. And when you grow together and you see each other evolve, you're like, now I know they can do this.

Now I know they can do this well. I know that my JAG when they're doing this, they could use a little help over here. So I'm going to—I'm going to anticipate what they need, because we've gotten to grow together. So, that partnership is critical, but expect to evolve together. The best part is growing together. And so that's what I tell any new JAG or paralegal, you know, enjoy the journey of growth, enjoy the journey of partnership. You bring something different to the JAG Corps. That's why we attracted your talent. And whatever that uniqueness is, it's going to be a valued contribution. I would also say be yourself, be yourself. Don't—being a JAG is an awesome opportunity. Being a paralegal is an awesome opportunity, but being Ty for the last 27 years as an airman paralegal, as an NCO paralegal, and as a senior NCO paralegal has probably been the best experience.

So be yourself.

## Resilience

---

### **Maj Smith:**

Chief. Thank you. Thank you for reminding us that perfection is not required. It's not expected. Thank you for the reminder that we are a team. We are working together in partnership, and it truly is about evolving as individuals and as a group.

Let's say you had a time machine. If you could go back in time and talk to Airman Haskins, what would you tell her about the importance of resilience?

### **CM Sgt Haskins:**

Obstacles will come, but you can overcome them. Connection is going to be critical and vulnerability is strength. Most people think that being vulnerable is a weakness, but a part of your resilience is being able to identify when you need a timeout or when you're struggling or when you take—need to take a knee. The critical part about connection is that you create that atmosphere where you can be vulnerable and you can be honest and transparent about, hey, I'm struggling at the moment and not a lot of people want to do that.

You know, we show up and we have a game face. We got to work face, but we don't want to show that the layer behind the mask. And I would I would tell Airman Haskins, don't allow yourself to be so closed off or guarded that you don't connect in a way where you can be transparent and vulnerable when you need—when you need to lean on your teammates. That is so critical. It's going to take time to build trust. I'm not saying that it's something that happens overnight, but you will be pleasantly surprised at the support you'll get from your teammates once you show that vulnerability. And I think also you've got to be patient with yourself because again, we look at what our teammate—we look at the journey of our teammates and we always want to either covet what they have or wish that we were in their shoes, but walking a mile in someone else's shoes is not easy.

And so your journey is going to look a little bit different. Everybody elevates to positions differently. Some people come with more experience in a certain area, so be patient with yourself because maturity takes time. You're going to grow into your—to your position. I'd say use every opportunity as a teaching moment because it is. You're going to have faux pas, you're going to have failures, your failures are going to teach you something and they are value added to your development. So, don't shy away from learning from your failures and from your successes because not everything is going to end up as a success. I would also tell Airman Haskins to take moments throughout your career to redefine what success looks like for you, because success doesn't mean that you always win a case. Success doesn't always mean you get promoted the first time. Success doesn't always mean you get the assignment of your choice. Success has to be defined differently for you than it will be for your teammate. So, redefine success at multiple phases of your career. And then finally, I guess I say don't get wound up about your life's pursuits. I think it's important to slow down and live. Be intentional about taking deep breaths and enjoying every moment. Life is so much more better with balance. It really is.

## **Being A Leader**

---

### **Maj Smith:**

What would you tell Airman Haskins about being a leader?

### **CMSgt Haskins:**

When I think about where I am now versus where I was then, I tell Airman Haskins to stay true to yourself. You're going to be the best leader that you can be if you stay true to yourself. Don't change for consensus, don't change for companionship, don't change for promotion. Don't change your position. Be true to yourself. Be confident with your weirdness. Be secure in your intelligence. And allow your insecurities to help you evolve, and not retreat. There's beauty in your difference and your new uniqueness. And I think a lot of people, when you come to a group where everybody looks the same in uniform and everybody is pursuing almost the

same goal, sometimes you have a tendency to shrink back from the person that you are.

I'd also tell Airman Haskins that as a young leader, you need to learn to let things go. When things don't turn out quite the way we expect or planned, sometimes we can kind of replay it over and over and over again. And if you don't let it go, it shapes you in a not good way. So you got to learn to let things go. You can have a daily dose of drama, but in the big scheme of things need to be able to—it pales in comparison to what the future holds for you. I'd also say don't compare your journey to someone else's because again, it's going to look different. Perfect plans don't exist. I'd say invest in others, build currency in relationships.

It is so—it's invaluable in the relationships that you established. People think back to their college roommates. They think back to people who were in sororities and fraternities with them. Relationships matter. If you invest in the currency in relationships, then you can build trust. You can have positive influence over others. You create community, so if nothing else, build relationships very early in your career as an airman because they will pay huge dividends decades later. And then, passionately pursue your purpose. Passionately pursue your purpose.

## **Wrap Up**

---

### **Maj Smith:**

Chief Haskins, thank you. I know that Major Quaco and I do this podcast for the listeners, but I got personally so much encouragement from your words, so many important lessons that I know I need to incorporate into my life. So, Chief, thank you, thank you, thank you for taking the time to do this. Thank you for being your authentic self.

Thank you for reminding myself, our listeners, everyone out there, that we can absolutely balance finding a purpose, being in the military and showing up as who we are. Thank you.

**Maj Quaco:**

Yes, Chief, I have to add, even though we talked about JAGs and paralegals, I think the words of wisdom you gave on leadership, fostering communication, building those connections, diversity and inclusion, those—that advice spans not only across the JAG Corps, but the Air Force, our sister services and any of our civilian counterparts. I think your advice applies to us all. So thank you very much on behalf of all of our listeners.

**CMSgt Haskins:**

Thank you, ma'ams. Thank you both for allowing me to connect with our JAG Corps family in this way.

**Maj Smith:**

Absolutely, Chief. Thank you so much.

Well listeners, that wraps up our topic for today. But before we get going, Major Quaco, if we have a listener out there who wants to find out more about becoming a JAG, what should they do?

**Maj Quaco:**

Well, we have a very specific recruiting process through the Air Force JAG Corps. You can check out the website at [airforce.com/jag](http://airforce.com/jag). That's J A G. We also have social media through Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. For Instagram, look up Air Force JAG Recruiting. For Facebook, its U.S. Air Force JAG Corps, and for LinkedIn, look at Air Force JAG Corps. If you want to talk to somebody about recruiting, you can call 1-800-JAG-USA that's 1-800-524-8723, or you can e-mail them at [airforcejagrecruiting@gmail.com](mailto:airforcejagrecruiting@gmail.com)

**Maj Smith:**

Listeners, thank you so much for joining us today. Please like, review, subscribe wherever you get your podcast. And if you have specific feedback or suggestions please reach out to us on the website [jagreporter.af.mil](http://jagreporter.af.mil) through the "Contact Us" function.

That's all for today. This podcast is in recess.

**Maj Quaco:**

Until next time.

**Maj Smith:**

Nothing from this show should be construed as legal advice. Please consult an attorney for any legal issues. Nothing in this show is endorsed by the federal government, the Air Force or any of its components. All content and opinions are those of its guest and host.

## Glossary

---

- **AFJAG:** Air Force Judge Advocate General
- **ADC:** Area Defense Counsel
- **AFA:** Air Force Association
- **JAG:** Judge Advocate General
- **JROTC:** Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps
- **MAJCOM:** major command
- **NCO:** noncommissioned officer
- **NCOIC:** noncommissioned officer in charge
- **ROTC:** Reserve Officer Training Corps
- **SVC:** Special Victims' Counsel
- **UPL:** unauthorized practice of law

---

Layout by Thomasa Huffstutler