

**United States Air Force Academy**

*Officer Development System*



*Building Leaders of Character*

**February 2004**



*Integrity*

*Service*

*Excellence*



***B***efore long, you will be asked to raise your right hand and take the Oath of Office as an officer in the United States Air Force. Between now and then, your task is to prepare yourself to meet the challenges of this high calling.

*A military leader must inspire others to accomplish the mission despite inconvenience, self-sacrifice and, often, life-threatening danger. Character inspires. Officers without character cannot be truly effective leaders. Thus, the mission of our Academy: To graduate lieutenants of character to lead the world's greatest air and space force.*

*It is a distinct privilege to serve our nation as an officer in the United States Air Force ... a privilege, founded on integrity, that brings with it great responsibility. The Officer Development System (ODS) will help prepare you as a leader—and as a character-based officer in service to your Nation—a noble calling.*

*I wish you success in your future service to our Nation's Air Force.*

**JOHN W. ROSA**  
Lieutenant General, USAF  
Superintendent



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## ***Foundational Doctrine Statements***

- ***Leadership*** is the art and science of influencing and directing people to accomplish the mission.
- ***Officers of character*** develop best through a deliberate process, one that aims to produce exactly the right capabilities to meet the Air Force's operational needs and to become leaders of character for our nation.
- ***Force Development*** is a series of experiences and challenges, combined with education and training opportunities that are directed at producing officers who possess the requisite skills, knowledge, experience, motivation, and essential elements of character to lead and execute the full spectrum of Air Force missions.



# *Officer Development System*

**Why was the Officer Development System (ODS) created?** The United States Air Force Academy's (USAFA's) ODS is founded on the idea that professional commitments can be fostered through deliberate connections to the principles of professional military service. ODS provides a holistic framework designed to coordinate and integrate cadet developmental activities across their entire four-year experience with emphasis on cadet ownership. Above all else, it focuses on character-based officership and prepares cadets for a career of continual professional development in service to the Air Force and the nation.

**The threefold purpose of ODS is to:**

1. Develop each cadet's appreciation that being an officer is a noble way of life
2. Foster a commitment to character-based officership
3. Develop competencies essential to this identity as a character-based officer-leader.

Members of a noble profession must understand the obligations of their commitment. For the commitment to last, it must be able to withstand critical examination and still be appreciated as genuinely worthwhile. For the commitment to endure over a career, it must be **worth your life**. Only then will the commitment survive as an integral aspect of an individual's identity. The ODS will guide cadets through this critical examination to ensure they gain an understanding of the challenges and rewards of character-based officership.

USAFA graduates must be committed to the identity of an officer of character. This commitment provides the focus and motivation for the training, education, and experiences that comprise the developmental process. Developing commitment means creating conditions so that cadets will appreciate the value of their profession's service. This is an especially challenging task today, for society's needs may seem distant and vague when compared to a glittering technology or occupational specialty. The ODS is meant to help USAFA meet this challenge by strengthening a developing officer's commitment to character-based officership relative to any competing loyalties to a technology or specialty.

Finally, the ODS is also designed to develop the competencies and values that support officers in their service careers and beyond.



The ODS is the first step for cadets in the Air Force's overarching Force Development (FD) Program. ODS emphasizes the tactical objectives of the broader Air Force program while laying the foundation for attaining FD's operational and strategic outcomes. By systematically pursuing these outcomes in a deliberate, integrated process as described by the ODS, the Academy will graduate deeply motivated, highly competent, *character-based officers* oriented toward the Air Force's requirements and toward developing qualities of leadership and strategic thinking.

## ***Character-Based Officership***

***What is character-based officership?*** Officers are leaders of character who are not only shaped by what they know and do, but also by a deeply held understanding and acceptance of what it means to be a commissioned officer. To prepare for the innumerable challenges of military service as an officer, cadets must reflect upon and develop a personal understanding of the unique characteristics and obligations of their chosen profession.

The essence of character-based officership is captured in the Oath of Office and Air Force core values.

\* The **Air Force Officer's Oath of Office** outlines the concept of officership, illuminating the depth of both the physical and spiritual commitments:

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

**Note:** the only difference between the *Cadet* Oath of Office and the *Officer's* Oath of Office is the rank stated in line one.

\* The **Air Force Core Values** provide the moral code that guides airmen fulfilling these commitments:

***Integrity First ... Service Before Self ...  
Excellence in All We Do***



**Integrity** is the willingness to do what is right even when no one is looking. It provides our "moral compass" - the inner voice of self-control; the basis for trust at the Air Force Academy and in the Air Force. **Integrity** is the single most important part of your character and forms the very foundation of the military profession. Elements of this first core value are:

**Courage.** A person of integrity possesses moral courage and does what is right regardless of personal cost.

**Honesty.** In the service, one's word is binding. Honesty is the foundation of trust and the hallmark of the profession of arms.

**Responsibility.** Airmen acknowledge their duties and take responsibility for their own successes or failures.

**Accountability.** No person of integrity tries to shift the blame to others or take credit for another's work.

**Justice.** A person of integrity treats all people fairly and with respect, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or religion. Rewards and punishments must fit the behavior.

**Openness.** Airmen encourage a free flow of information within an organization and seek feedback from subordinates, peers and superiors. They value candor as a mark of loyalty, even when offering dissenting opinions or bearing bad news.

**Self-Respect.** Airmen respect themselves as professionals and as human beings. Airmen with integrity and self-respect behave in a manner that brings credit upon themselves, their organization, and the profession of arms.

**Humility.** Airmen comprehend the awesome task of defending the Constitution of the United States of America and realize they cannot do it alone. While airmen should be proud, they should be neither arrogant nor boastful.

**Honor.** A person of integrity upholds the traditions of sacrifice, courage, and success that mark Air Force heritage. Airmen strive to adhere to what is right, noble, and fair.

Without **integrity**, it is impossible to be an effective member of the profession of arms.

**Service Before Self** captures the selfless dedication to duty inherent in military life. It incorporates our responsibility to accomplish the mission defined by our superiors and to serve the nation despite risk, danger, or personal inconvenience.



*Service Before Self* is the one value that is most difficult for some members to internalize and generates numerous questions: "Does this mean the Air Force should come before my health? My family? My religion?" No, the Air Force should not supplant any of these treasures, but each Air Force officer must understand the imperative of military service: to obey lawful orders and to accomplish the mission successfully despite personal sacrifice. *Service Before Self* means your Air Force career must be managed with an eye toward what is best for the nation, not necessarily what is in your best interest nor personal desire. This Service core value includes:

***Duty.*** To serve is to do your duty. Airmen have a duty to fulfill the unit's mission. Service before self incorporates performing all assigned tasks and responsibilities to the best of one's ability. Professionals exercise judgment and understand rules exist for good reason. They follow rules unless there is a clear operational, legal, or moral reason to refuse or deviate.

***Respect for Others.*** Airmen always act with the knowledge that all persons possess a fundamental worth as human beings. Good leaders place their peers and subordinates ahead of personal needs or comfort.

***Self-Discipline.*** Air Force leaders must act with confidence and cannot indulge themselves in self-pity, discouragement, anger, frustration, or defeatism. They must exercise self-discipline to make decisions and to ensure their loyalties to relationships or personal gain does not supercede loyalty to the Constitution, the Air Force, or the mission.

***Self-Control.*** Airmen must refrain from exhibiting behavior and/or expressing attitudes that would bring discredit upon themselves, the Air Force, or the United States. This especially includes exercising control over anger, sexual conduct, use of alcohol, and other discrediting or criminal behavior.

***Tolerance.*** Military professionals must remember that religion and other personal choices are a matter of individual conscience. Professionals must not use their position of power and influence to change the personal views of others, unless those views are in conflict with official guidance and laws.

***Loyalty.*** Airmen should be loyal to their leaders, fellow airmen, the Air Force, and their country. American military professionals must demonstrate allegiance to the Constitution and loyalty to the chain of command, especially to the President and the Secretary of Defense, regardless of political affiliation.



**Excellence in All We Do** challenges you to do your best at all times with all tasks. Excellence demands innovation and dedication to improvement in all areas. This core value requires peak development in personal, organizational, and operational terms. It also calls for effective and efficient management of resources. *Excellence in All We Do* is an attitude as well as a performance standard.

Excellence complements the other core values of integrity and service before self by introducing a quantifiable, performance-based element to our values. By elevating excellence to a core value, we, as an institution, are saying that our mission is so vital to our nation's security that achieving excellence is imperative. As warriors, we know this to be true. Excellence is not a luxury, but rather a fundamental element of our daily performance that allows us to accomplish our mission safely and effectively. Without a true commitment to excellence, we put lives in jeopardy.

Regardless of previous background or prior attitudes, Air Force members must understand and adhere to standards of conduct expected by the American people and demanded by the military. Officers and cadets must not abuse alcohol or drugs, engage in improper sexual behavior, or violate established standards of military discipline. They must also take action to correct, stop, and/or report others who violate standards. Confronting or reporting others takes an internal motivation toward excellence.

Even though excellence is most easily measured in performance, the internal motivation that drives one to excellence is what is essential. Individuals can achieve excellent results in specific tasks, but the core value of *Excellence in All We Do* requires a much deeper commitment. Each one of us must fully commit to achieving and maintaining excellence in every aspect of our roles as Air Force officers and develop a mindset in which anything less than excellence is unacceptable. Sustained excellence requires commitment, dedication, perseverance, and focus. If we fall short of excellence, we must learn from our mistakes, make necessary adjustments, pull ourselves up, and try again. The core value of Excellence includes:

***Professional Excellence.*** Airmen must accomplish professional education, stay in physical and mental shape, and continue to refresh general educational backgrounds such as military history and political science.

***Community Excellence.*** Everyone must work together to successfully reach a common goal in an atmosphere free of fear. There must be mutual respect that involves viewing another person as an individual of fundamental worth.



**Operations Excellence.** Airmen must understand the importance of their role to the broader Air Force mission and maintain a total commitment to maximizing the effectiveness of their unit and the Air Force team.

The core values guide the way Air Force members live and perform and provide standards with which to evaluate the ethical climate of all Air Force organizations. We recognize these core values as universal and unchanging in the profession of arms.

***Why are the Oath and Core Values so important to Air Force Officers?*** Because the Oath and Core Values uniquely define the officer's obligation to society.

We can elaborate on the commitment that officers need to make by examining the **four overlapping attributes of character-based officership.**

## ***Warrior Spirit ... Professional ... Leader of Character ... Servant of the Nation***

**Warrior Spirit.** Regardless of duty location or occupational specialty, all officers must embody the warrior spirit; tough-mindedness, tireless motivation, an unceasing vigilance, and a willingness to sacrifice their own lives for the country if necessary. While always preferring peace to war, officers hone their skills to ensure the Air Force is ever ready to "fly, fight, and win." Air Force officers are committed to being the world's premier air and space force. This is the warrior spirit.

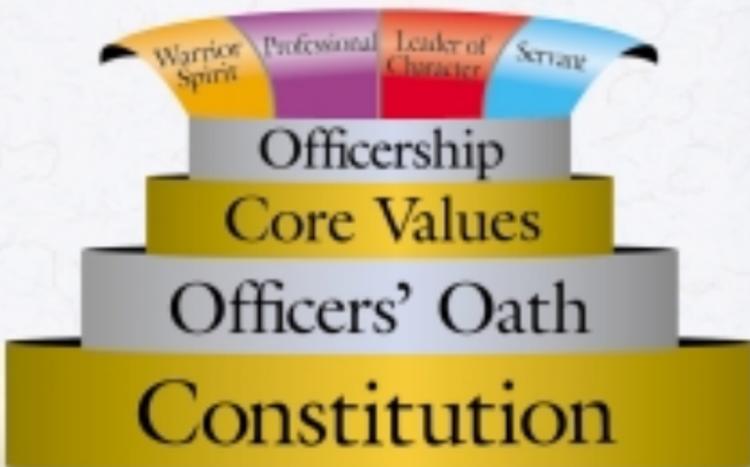
**Professional.** Members of a profession hold a special place in American society. A professional officer embodies a unique competence and experience, authority delegated by the nation, and a distinct culture with a recognized code of ethics. Officers must never forget that they are public figures accountable to the highest standards of personal and professional conduct.



**Leader of Character.** Leaders of character demonstrate moral excellence reflected in their values and behavior. They set a personal example for all, whether in their units, organizations or society. Leaders of character seek to discover the truth, decide what is right, and then demonstrate the courage to act accordingly—always!

**Servant of the Nation.** Officers serve the Nation for one and only one purpose: to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. Our nation places a special trust in the officer to provide security and to protect our democratic way of life and its values. This unique relationship requires a moral obligation, sense of duty, and total commitment to sacrifice one's life if necessary. This attribute of officership reflects the relationship between the military profession and the nation, embraces the principle of military subordination to civilian control, and establishes each officer as a servant of the nation. It creates the moral foundation for an officer's duty. Being a servant of the nation focuses activities on furthering the interests of the nation, not the individual.

If cadets are to embrace the identity of character-based officership, they must understand the significance of this commitment and appreciate its value to the society they serve. The primary focus of the initial phase of ODS is to help cadets explore and understand the multiple dimensions of character-based officership in order to develop this commitment.



## *Cadet Development Process*

The mission of the Air Force Academy is to inspire and develop outstanding young men and women to become Air Force officers with knowledge, character, and discipline, motivated to lead the world's greatest air and space force in service to the nation.

***How are cadets developed into officers?*** Officers of character develop through a deliberate process that focuses on a well-defined set of outcomes. To be successful, the process must rely on a series of experiences and challenges, combined with education and training opportunities that are consistent with Force Development used throughout the Air Force. It must be tailored to the competencies of cadets at each stage of development. The individual experiences must be delivered in a way that integrates activities across all mission elements and affects all dimensions of personal development. Finally, the developmental process must be executed within the framework of a practical developmental leadership model.

The architects of the ODS recognized that the Academy serves as the initial phase of a decades-long process to develop many of the senior leaders of the Air Force. Thus, it is extremely important that cadets graduate with a solid foundation in the tactical elements of Force Development—a commitment to the core values; strong personal, interpersonal, and team leadership abilities; and a foundation of knowledge and experiences that support further development at the operational and strategic leadership levels.

Cadets will best develop these competencies when the expected outcomes of the process are clearly defined. Toward that end, the ODS at the Air Force Academy is designed to focus on **ten specific outcomes**.

### ***United States Air Force Academy Outcomes***

#### ***Produce officers of character ...***

1. ... with integrity who are selflessly committed to service to their country through personal and professional excellence.
2. ... who possess a breadth of integrated knowledge across the academic disciplines and the military profession that support the Air Force mission.



3. ... who are decisive leaders with the stamina, courage, and discipline to build and inspire high-performing teams in demanding, dynamic environments.
4. ... who appreciate the significance of their own spiritual development, accept the beliefs of others, and foster mutual respect and dignity among all individuals.
5. ... who make sound decisions grounded in the fundamentals of air and space power in a joint environment.
6. ... who promote the dynamic relationship between leaders and followers through effective communication.
7. ... who can use their understanding of global relationships, cultures, and languages to effectively employ air and space power.
8. ... who will apply their knowledge and skills to meet the present and future challenges of the military profession.
9. ... who demonstrate an unquenchable desire for personal and professional development.
10. ... who are motivated toward a lifetime of national service.

This developmental program involves all the mission elements at the Academy and encompasses every dimension of a cadet's life—**intellectual, professional, physical, ethical, spiritual, and social**—while remaining focused on character development.

The emphasis of ODS will vary in each year of the cadets' experience, focusing first on the development of personal leadership competencies before migrating toward an increased emphasis on interpersonal and team leadership skills. In support of this developmental growth plan, the competencies from the appropriate level of leadership (Personal, Interpersonal, Team, and Organizational) are defined for each year of the cadet development process and are supported by every aspect of the cadet experience.

The objectives within each level of leadership reflect the maturity and experiences of the cadets as they progress through the ODS. They emphasize primary skills at each level of cadet leadership, but they also emphasize the continual need to practice and broaden those skills learned

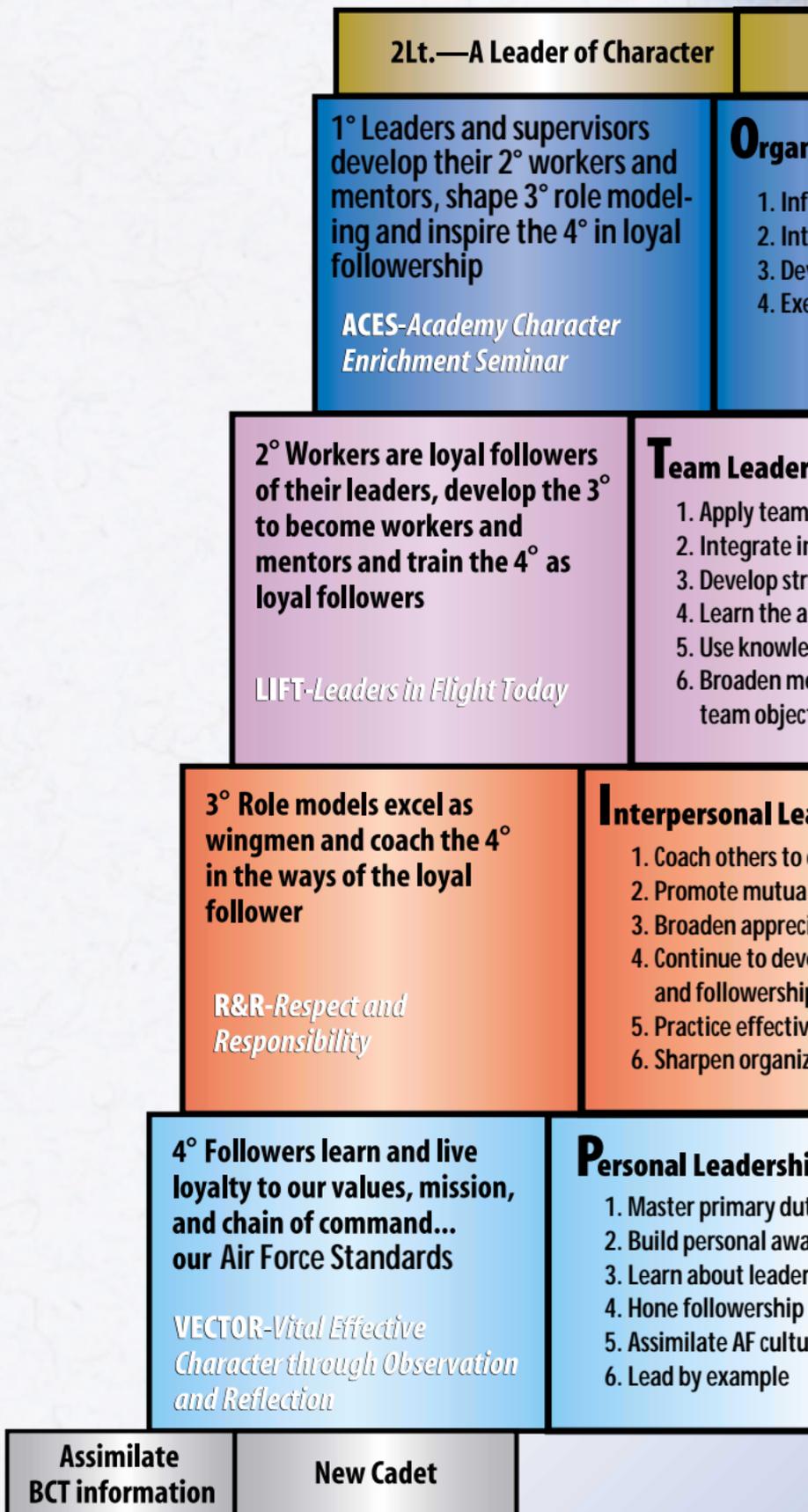


at earlier stages in the ODS. In addition, for growth to occur, each cadet must take the time and effort during each stage of development, to give and receive feedback and reflect on that feedback.

By mapping competencies to cadet classes, levels of leadership and desired outcomes in this way, any interaction between cadets can be designed to enhance the development experience for all participants. For example - a fourth class cadet can focus on developing as a loyal follower - a personal leadership quality; while an upper class cadet is developing as a leader who builds and inspires an effective team - a team leadership quality supporting ODS outcome #3.

By carefully mapping the leadership objectives for each cadet, the ODS provides a progressive, deliberate process that is tailored to meet individual needs. This tailoring enriches the interaction for all cadets, accelerating the developmental process.





**Officer with strong leadership qualities**



**Organizational Leadership**

Influence element, flight, squadron, and wing policy  
Integrate efforts of small units toward broader objectives  
Develop talents of others  
Simplify and enforce high professional and moral standards

**Team Leadership**

Understand team dynamics  
Leverage individual talents in support of task  
Build strong foundation in air and space employment  
Participate in effective decision making  
Apply knowledge and skills to support squadron goals  
Assume mentoring and supervisory role to focus on larger objectives

**Personal Leadership**

Develop and achieve personal objectives  
Demonstrate respect, fairness and dignity in interactions  
Promote the continuation of AF culture and doctrine  
Develop and practice personal leadership skills  
Improve communication skills  
Develop organizational and planning skills

**Self-Leadership**

Develop self-leadership skills  
Increase self-awareness  
Apply self-leadership techniques  
Identify strengths and abilities  
Embrace and adopt core values

**F e e d b a c k + R e f l e c t i o n = G r o w t h**



Putting all this into practice requires a cross-functional strategy that capitalizes on the talents of staff, faculty and cadets. The challenge is to ensure our policies, procedures, standards and expectations reinforce the levels of leadership and the corresponding competencies and values. We can achieve these goals by adhering to the following set of **guiding principles**.

## ***Guiding Principles for Cadet Development***

1. Align all aspects of the USAFA experience with accepted USAF practices.
2. Create depth of expertise sequentially and progressively based on a cadet's developmental level - meet them where they are and move them to where they need to be.
3. Integrate and coordinate all education and training experiences to meet ODS outcomes.
4. Use goal-oriented and standards-based approaches to build skill-set expertise.
5. Strike an appropriate balance between quality and quantity of development experiences.
6. Establish both a common core of experiences and multiple paths to the same outcome.
7. Couple adequate support with every challenge; tailor every challenge to each cadet always understanding cadets are at different places developmentally.
8. Emphasize cadet ownership and accountability for their own development - allow cadets to make significant decisions.
9. Prepare cadets to expect, embrace and handle change and adversity.
10. Involve all cadets, faculty and staff in the implementation and use of the ODS.
11. Assess the effectiveness of training and educational processes.
12. Ensure all leaders and followers gain from every developmental experience to include both successes and failures.

While the outcomes represent the detailed objectives of ODS, **the guiding principles represent the rules of the road**. As such, they define **how we expect to achieve our targeted outcomes**.



## ***Leadership Growth Model***

***What influences a leader's development?*** Development is a uniquely human endeavor that requires an understanding of theory, people, situations and the interactions among all three. In addition, faculty, staff and cadets must recognize the complexity of leadership and remember that the process of leadership and officer development is influenced by the **ongoing interaction of three elements:**

**Leader**  
**Follower**  
**Situation**

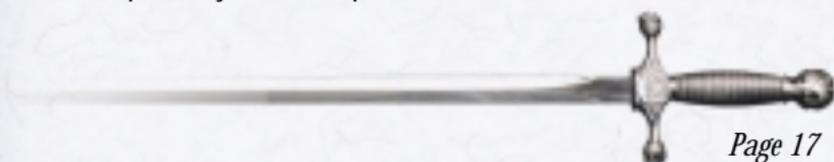
This illustration represents the complex contingencies involved in leadership. Since no single leadership method or style is universally effective, consideration must be given not only to the qualities and characteristics of the leader, but also to the qualities and characteristics of followers and the nature of the situation.



Further, it is critical to recognize the necessary shifting in leader and follower roles. That is, cadets will simultaneously serve as leaders and followers, in the same way leaders serve as both leaders and followers at every level in the Air Force.

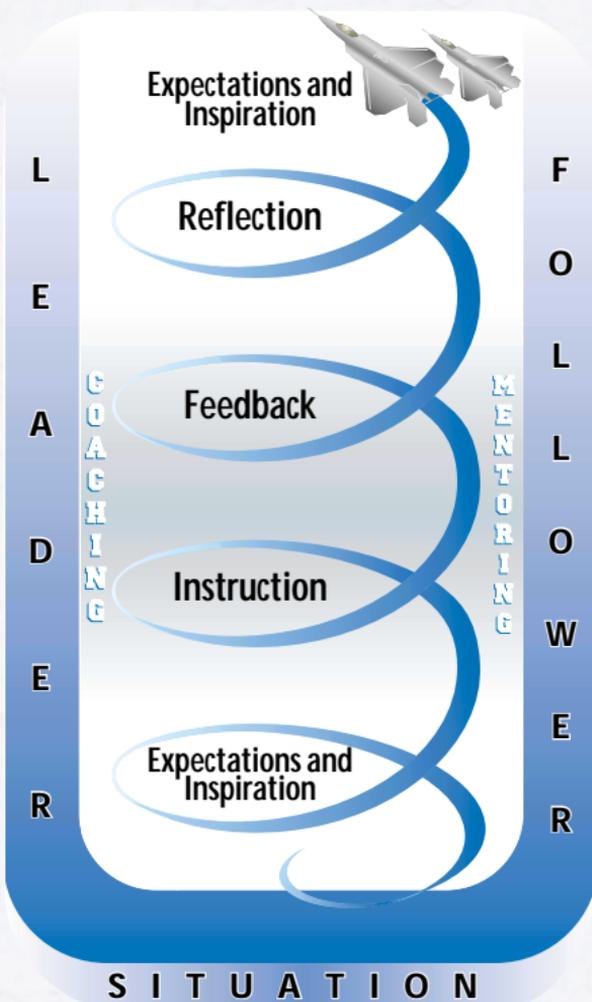
The heart of this interaction and the key to the ODS is the **Leadership Growth Model (LGM)**. LGM is a leadership model that defines the key relationships among leaders, followers, and the situation in terms of a four-stage, continuous process. It is universally applicable throughout all phases of the Academy experience across the entire education and training spectrum - in the classroom, in the squadron, and on the athletic field. It applies equally well to the educator, trainer, coach, element leader and commander.

The **LGM** develops the required set of outcomes discussed earlier, by integrating education, training and experience to provide all cadets with deliberately designed opportunities to develop. Using a hierarchical leadership system, aligned with the Air Force rank structure, each cadet develops through the supervisory relationship. This relationship focuses on personal competencies, including interpersonal skills and proficiency with teams. Tailored to promote development, this multi-stage officer development model outlines the broad expectations and specific requirements within the supervisory relationship.



The **four stages of the LGM**—*expectations and inspiration, instruction, feedback, and reflection*—are shown in the chart below. In the first stage, the leader critically appraises the situation, his/her own skills and those of the follower, and sets developmental **expectations** for the follower. The leader also provides **inspiration** to the follower by developing a shared understanding of purpose. In the next stage, the leader provides the essential **instruction** to help the follower meet the leader's and organization's expectations. As the follower works towards these objectives, the leader assesses the follower's competency level and provides ongoing **feedback**. The key challenge for the leader during the instruction and feedback stages is to integrate coaching and mentoring techniques to help bridge the gap between expectations and results. Finally, the development process is further enhanced in the **reflection** stage in which both the leader and follower review the expectations, instructions and feedback, internalize any lessons learned and prepare to enter the next cycle.

The spiral graphic linking these phases of the model suggests a highly interactive and positive growth process that expands the skill and capability of the leader and follower. The rate at which each participant develops depends on the relative skills of each, the relationship between the two, and the quality of each prior stage.



The perfect scenario would be to progress from the bottom to the top of the spiral and then begin at a higher level of expectations and inspiration. However, the participants in any situation must understand the boundaries between phases may be blurred and that some phases may need to be repeated. For example, the leader may give a set of expectations, inspiration, and instruction, but during the feedback phase the leader may realize the follower did not understand the expectations. The leader should then start over by clarifying the expectations and instructions before guiding the follower up through the spiral again.

## ***“Be, Know, Do” Framework***

Leaders can promote a more rapid development of their follower through the LGM if they apply a proven framework - the **“BE, KNOW, DO”** framework. This framework illustrates that to be a leader, there are certain attributes that characterize a cadet. A cadet must **“BE”** by exhibiting and upholding standards; **“KNOW”** the competencies and principles being developed and how to teach others; and must **“DO”** those tasks required to support the developmental experience.

To understand how to apply this framework, look at the stages of the model and the interaction between the **“BE, KNOW, DO”** framework and the **activities that occur at each stage:**

<i><b>Leader</b></i>		<i><b>Follower</b></i>
<b>BE:</b> Exemplary role model <b>KNOW:</b> Yourself, your job, and what motivates others <b>DO:</b> Communicate expectations, be enthusiastic, explain the “why”	<b>Expectations and Inspiration</b>	<b>BE:</b> Exemplary role model <b>KNOW:</b> Yourself, your job, what motivates you <b>DO:</b> Communicate expectations, ask for help in achieving objectives
<b>BE:</b> The expert, and committed as a trainer, coach, and mentor <b>KNOW:</b> The follower’s capabilities, how and why each task needs to be done, as well as ways to get it done <b>DO:</b> Show, teach, ask questions, encourage, praise	<b>Instruction</b>	<b>BE:</b> Prepared, open, engaged—an active learner <b>KNOW:</b> The ways you best learn the goal and objective, your leader is committed to your development <b>DO:</b> Ask questions, request assistance; gain the knowledge you need
<b>BE:</b> Competent and lead by example, provide support <b>KNOW:</b> How to teach, shape performance, and identify progress <b>DO:</b> Motivate by instilling confidence, offer ideas, question skill/knowledge level	<b>Coaching and Mentoring</b>	<b>BE:</b> Receptive, prepared to change, an engaged partner <b>KNOW:</b> Your successes and challenges, specific objectives and needs <b>DO:</b> Share accomplishments and shortcomings, take on calculated risk, and communicate often



## *Leader*

**BE:** Respectful, honest, sensitive, and courageous  
**KNOW:** Different styles of feedback, strengths, performance gaps, level of motivation and effort  
**DO:** Promote confidence, watch for reaction to feedback, discuss future goals

## *Follower*

**BE:** Courageous in the face of constructive criticism  
**KNOW:** Desired objective, strategies to reach goals, self-assessment  
**DO:** Listen carefully, consider feedback, match feedback to self-assessment, understand gaps, dialogue with leader

### *Feedback*

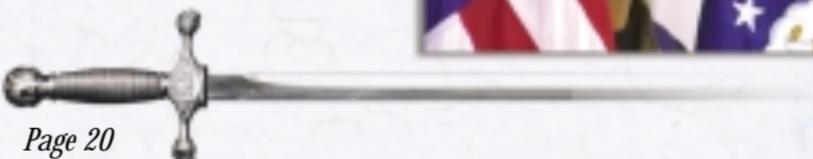
## *Leader and Follower*

### *Reflection*

**BE:** Able to look back and learn from experience ... open, honest  
**KNOW:** Goals, strengths, weaknesses and values  
**DO:** Make time for personal review and ask for feedback; learn from reflection

## *Conclusion*

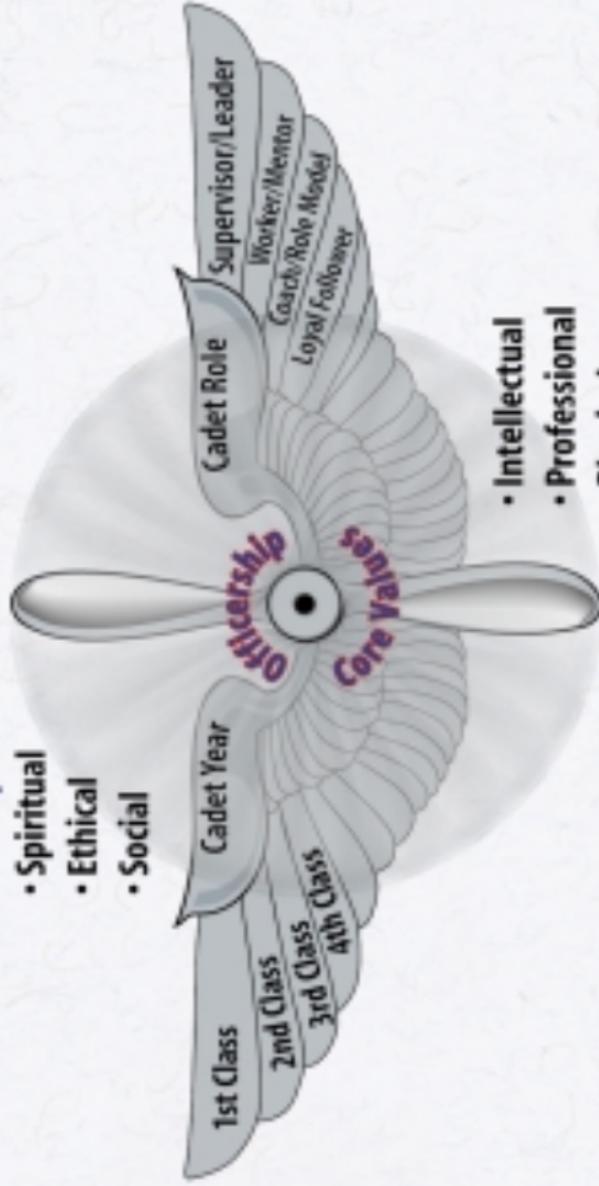
Your experiences under the Air Force Academy's Officer Development System are designed to prepare you to lead airmen as an officer of character. You will be presented with opportunities to develop as a leader and a follower, as a professional and a warrior. It is up to you to make the most of these opportunities and to help others develop in the same way. The best officers are those who are committed to an ideal, accept challenges with optimism, and are dedicated to continued personal and professional growth. We at the Air Force Academy are all committed to helping you develop these qualities as you take your first steps on an exciting journey in service to your nation.



# *Cadet Flight Path to Officership*

## **Developmental Domains**

- **Spiritual**
- **Ethical**
- **Social**



- **Intellectual**
- **Professional**
- **Physical**

## **Developmental Domains**



**U.S. AIR FORCE**

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