



# ***The Enlisted Perspective***

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17 February 2009

## **Service before Self**

What does “Service before Self” really mean? As Airmen, we raise our right hand and swear to defend our country, but how far does this commitment carry into our every action... our every endeavor?

When we look for guidance on serving, we need to look no further than the “Little Blue Book,” the United States Air Force Core Values booklet. The booklet says, “Service before self tells us that professional duties take precedence over personal desires.” The booklet goes on to say we must place the needs of others above our own personal comfort, that we must exhibit discipline and self-control in our daily affairs, and that we must have faith in the system—our Air Force. Faith in the system is also having faith in our leaders. We have to understand they have the facts and make decisions based upon the needs of the Air Force and all Airmen.

The booklet also states this core value is about following the rules. “To serve is to do one’s duty, and our duties are most commonly expressed through rules. While it may be the case that professionals are expected to exercise judgment in the performance of their duties, good professionals understand that rules have reasons for being, and the default position must be to follow those rules unless there is a clear, operational reason for refusing to do so,” according to the booklet.

We place service ahead of our own self interests in many ways. When we deploy; when we take a new assignment, even though it isn’t the location or the timeframe we may have wanted; when we must retrain out of our career field, even though we are very happy in our present duty – these are all examples of service before self.

Service before self does not mean you stop taking care of your families. Our families are a critical element of the Air Force family. Our service should enhance their health, morale and welfare – not take away from it. While Air Force duties take up a large chunk of our time, we must take every opportunity to spend time with our families and involve ourselves in their lives too.

This principle of service before self also does not mean Airmen should not pursue higher education, participate in off-duty activities or pursue personal and professional development. The Air Force desires well-rounded Airmen who are physically, mentally and spiritually grounded. It is beneficial when these extra-curricular pursuits align with service and mission requirements.

I know Airmen are proud to serve. Every where I travel I encounter Airmen who serve our great nation with diligence, commitment and unwavering devotion. Many of our severely wounded warriors are overcoming huge physical barriers to continue serving in the Air Force. While every Airman does not have to deal with this level of extreme personal sacrifice, we all have the same calling to place service before self in everything we do.



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