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LIFE | LEARNING | LEADERSHIP

# Earning Your Paychecks

***We all have specialties and occupations that we've been assigned, but when we're entrusted with the sacred honor and duty of leadership, we get paid to do a great deal more than just tactics.***

Around about February 2019, Scott Greene reached out to me and asked if I'd like to contribute an article to the Llama Leadership. First thought in my head was he emailed the wrong person, but after confirming he did intend for me to write something, I submitted an article entitled "You Gotta Genuinely Give an \*Expletive\*." That same year, the non-commissioned officer (NCO) private organization here at Travis AFB, the Team Travis 5/6, asked me to be their guest speaker for that year's NCO Induction Ceremony. Once again, **I had to verify they actually meant to ask me for this honor, as it is usually reserved for someone holding the rank of Chief Master Sergeant.**



Once I knew for certain I was the requested speaker, I knew immediately that my first article was going to be my speech...and it reached great many folks. It wasn't just the newly selected promotees that got something from my message, the majority of folks that came back and thanked me for my extremely honest words were my peers in the senior non-commissioned officer tier. **They appreciated the candor and "non-cookie cutter" message I passed along to the inductees and base population.**

Since that day, I've reflected on the words I wrote and spoke. I have had countless conversations with friends, peers, and junior ranking Airmen about leadership and mentoring. One such conversation I had recently was with a junior ranking Airman that recently returned from deployment. **This individual did not have the greatest of experiences during their deployment, and without going into great detail, the things they experienced raised some red flags for me.** The conversation we had was a simple check-in from my side of the talk. I informed them that I had heard through the grapevine about their issues while away and asked how they were doing, who they had spoken to about their issues and if there was anything, I could do from my position to address what had occurred. The Airman assured me that they were okay, had spoken with their Commander about their deployment and would be fine; however, what stood out to me was how they finished the conversation. **They said "Thank you for asking. Besides my Commander, you're the only other person that has asked how my deployment went."**

That statement sort of threw me off at first, but then I realized that it wasn't anything I hadn't heard before. I explained to the member that 1) it's my job to ask and 2) it was a shame only two folks asked about their experience and I apologized. **I also elaborated on what I meant by it being "my job."**

This Airman is nowhere remotely related to my unit, I would never work with them if I were in my primary career field and more than likely would have never met them had I not worked in the same building as one of their family members...but "my job" is to care about Airmen (note the capital "A").

And so, after realizing that I was doing "my job", I got angry, for lack of a better term, that others were not. I asked myself, "How is another member of the same rank as me, getting paid the same amount, and not putting in the work and effort to earn their paycheck?"

That's where the idea for this article came to mind. Teammates, I ask you, how are you Earning Your Paycheck?

**We all have specialties and occupations that we've been assigned, but when we're entrusted with the sacred honor and duty of leadership, we get paid to do a great deal more than just tactics.** No matter what organization we're a part of, military or civilian, when we are placed in position of authority and leadership, we are expected to keep our people's development, health and welfare at the top of the priorities list.

We've already achieved expertise in our respective crafts, so it's a safe assumption we can, and are doing the basics of our work to get paid, but what are you doing to actually earn your pay? **Are you simply punching a timecard, collecting the check, and giving the minimum effort?** Or are you taking the time to get to know your people and those folks outside of your circle, recognizing when they are acting out of character, and having candid conversations about what they may be going through?

How are you holding yourself accountable for the position or rank that you hold? The power of a simple check-in with someone is immense and can open the door to many other opportunities to connect with and grow your folks.

So, as with anything I write in the arena of leadership, I will leave a few questions that I ask myself that ensure I am "doing my job."

- At the end of the day, I try to reflect on what I did that day. Literally ask yourself "What did I accomplish today?" How did you fill 8-12 hours of work? Did you just clock in and clock out or was there more to the day than just jockeying a desk?
- "Who and how did you make an impact on today?" You don't have to perform CPR on someone that's unresponsive to be impactful with your actions, but you've most likely made some kind of impact on someone's life. It doesn't have to be on a large scale.
- "How will I do my job tomorrow?" What will I do the next day to set myself apart from the herd and intentionally impact another's life? This can be simple outreach within your work-center, asking about someone's weekend, and genuinely attending to the conversation, or even making the morning coffee run.

Doing your job in the sense of serving people doesn't necessarily need to be a formal, timed, office visit. **Small actions make big differences.**

So that's about it, team. Go, do your job, do good things, and continue to genuinely earn your paycheck!

## WILL WEISENBURG

Will is an Air Force Senior Leader and currently serves as the Airman & Family Readiness NCO at Travis AFB, California



# The Offensiveness of Being Offended

*We demand that people contour themselves to our emotional needs. Why do we do this?*

**Listen.** I want to be real for a few minutes. Here's the deal: I'm worried that my generation gets offended way too easily and much too frequently (I hope this doesn't offend you).

**I, like many of those in today's leadership context, am a card-carrying member of the infamous millennials.** You know, we're the ones born sometime between the early 1980's and the mid-1990's (depending on the model to which you subscribe) and are way too hard to manage. We're the ones propagating this idea of an "outrage culture." We riot to ban speeches with which we disagree. We demand safe spaces but take to social media to lambast those who dare possess a different opinion than our own. We equate verbiage with





physical violence. We demand that people contour themselves to our emotional needs. **Why do we do this?**

As a quick side note, I'll admit that I've painted a huge number of unique individuals with a very broad and maybe not 100% accurate brush. Worse yet, much of my analysis here is really just based off of experience...we'll call it "bro-science." Despite all that, I still think this situation is valid enough to warrant some consideration.

**So why does my generation, one that possesses so much great potential, think like this?** The answer is simple: It's

those Boomers and Generation X'ers (gasp!). Simon Sinek agrees and argues that millennials are the result of "failed parenting

strategies." Sinek explains that as kids, we were constantly told that we were special (thanks, Mom!). We were given participation trophies for coming in last (guilty). We often times received good grades because our parents complained to the school (not guilty). Sinek then suggests that millennials are now getting out into the real world and quickly learning that we're not special, our moms can't get us promotions, we get nothing for coming in last, and that we can't just have something because we want it.

Though this is another broad characterization, I think Sinek is onto something here. The problem with the parenting strategies he outlined is that they prevent children from learning how to address adversity at an early age. If this has truly been the case, then my generation is entering the workforce without a solid foundation of hard-learned coping mechanisms. In *The Coddling of the American Mind*, Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt insist that these parenting strategies have "prepared the road for the child" instead of "preparing the child for the road." **So, once these children hit the real world, they expect the road to continue being prepared for them.** For example, in a 2017 survey, college students urged that they should not even be exposed to offensive ideas (Naughton, 2017). If this mentality becomes widespread (and I fear it is growing in the next generation), then this is going to propagate an avoidance of reality and a shirking of mental growth!

I would also add that we millennials have lived many of our developmental years in a video game and social media induced culture. Admittedly, I'm not a psychiatrist and I'm certainly no expert in the field of cognitive studies, but experience has convinced me that these electronic influences have hampered our ability to have interpersonal relationships.

So when we combine the failed parenting strategies of the Boomers and Gen-X'ers with an electronically-driven age, I think we risk leaving ourselves an overly sensitive and easily offended culture comprised of members who are ill-equipped to deal with disagreements and interpersonal problems. So, we walk around on eggshells afraid of offending and afraid of being offended. The danger of this, however, is that we lose out on the beautiful benefits of free and open dialogue because we're constantly afraid of hurt feelings.

Personally, I think this culture of offendedness manifests itself in three types of individuals: 1) those who weaponize offense, 2) those who are thin-skinned, 3) and those who have reason to be genuinely offended.

### **Those Who Weaponize Offense:**

Recently, I had a conversation with a young individual who claimed to be offended by some events that had transpired in the individual's work center. During our conversation, the individual was complaining about a comment, made by his supervisor, that the individual had apparently deemed as offensive. Here's the problem: I personally didn't find the comment offensive at all, but I also understand that I'm a hard person to offend. Armed with this introspective posture, I asked some follow-up questions that went something like this:

**Me:** Do you have friends, like old high school buddies, outside of work?

**Individual:** Yes.

**Me:** My friends and I frequently deliver jabs and insults to each other. Do you and your friends do the same?

**Individual:** Of course.

**Me:** If your friends made the exact same comment as your supervisor, would you be offended?

**Individual:** No. I don't think I would.

So what I had here was an individual complaining about a comment that the individual admitted was not offensive! **What in the world would motivate someone to do this?!**

**My opinion is that we, as a culture, have glamorized the emotional state of being offended.** Here's why I believe this: When someone claims to be offended, two things happen. The first is that they are the recipient of attention, and people who have been raised in a society fueled by social media, reality television, and political outrage love themselves some attention! The second thing that happens when someone claims to be offended is that the individual is placed into a position where the offending party owes them recompense in some form or fashion.

I'm not alone in this opinion. Mark Manson in his New York Times #1 Bestselling book writes that our society has tended to award large amounts of attention and sympathy to people who are able to perpetually feel victimized. This, as Manson notes, causes people to ride the "highs of moral indignation." In my opinion, this has driven some people to weaponize offense. **What this means is that if I can find or invent ways to be offended, then I exercise a certain amount of control over people.** From the example above, what better person could I wish to have control over than my very own supervisor (particularly if they're holding me accountable)? This is obviously a toxic personality trait that needs to be exposed and stopped dead in its tracks within today's leadership context.

### **Thin-skinned people:**

In 2015, The New York Times highlighted an issue at Brown University where "safe spaces" had been installed in response to a guest speaker who was expected to spark controversy. Lukianoff and Haidt recount the words of a student who sought out a safe space, "I was feeling bombarded by a lot of viewpoints that really go against my dearly and closely held beliefs." Lukianoff and Haidt recounted that the spaces had "cookies, coloring books, bubbles, Play-Doh, calming music, pillows, blankets, and a video of frolicking puppies, as well as students and staff members purportedly trained to deal with trauma."

**The problem with this is that our formative years and education processes should be a time when we entertain all kinds of ideas.** These should be ideas that align with our worldviews and ones that shake them to their core. Instead, we have promoted a safe-space culture where young people not only need to be shielded from disagreement, but one where we must avoid "micro aggressions" at all costs, lest we risk inciting an outrage response. This has caused, as Shadi Hamid writes, the bar for offense to be lowered considerably.

**The problem with thin-skinned people, however, is that the real world is a cruel place.** The business world is often a dog-eat-dog environment. For those within the military (my own context), we cannot afford to have thin skin. **There are people on this earth who want us dead simply for wearing an American flag on our shoulder.** Moreover, in the heat of battle, we must be emotionally equipped to receive bluntly delivered and concise communication without hurt feelings or indignation. Finally, we have to brace ourselves for devastating loss. We must posture ourselves so that we can charge through tragic circumstances with warrior ethos and hardness of spirit. Those who find themselves in need of a safe space to avoid dissenting opinions and challenging worldviews are prepared neither for the battlefield nor for the real world. These thin-skinned people are hiding their heads in the sand and missing out on the beautiful refinement that happens through hardship. Challenges grow and mature people. **If you avoid challenges, you inevitably avoid maturation and growth.**

### **Those Who Are Actually Offended:**

Lastly, there are people who fall victim to heinous acts from their fellow human beings. These acts range from rape, to sexual assault, to physical violence, to hurtful words. These situations are truly devastating, they cause great pain, and they leave lasting marks that endure a lifetime. Please understand, the words that follow are not meant to cheapen or belittle anyone's experience.

Here's the bottom line: We have to get over it. I've been hurt before. I've been lied to by people who held my trust. I've been cheated. I've been punched. I've been insulted. I've been hazed. Why? Simple. Because there are jerks in the world. There always have been, and there always will be. From the time Adam and Eve ate that stupid fruit, we have been destined to have interactions with people who deserve nothing more than a solid punch straight to the throat.

**I've found that I cannot control what other people do to me.** I've also found that I can nearly always control my response. If we find a way to be a team player, thicken our skin, and move ourselves mentally to a place where jerks can't hurt us, then we take away all of their power. Being able to look at someone who is trying to hurt you and say to yourself, "Hah, what a dummy" and then move on is true liberation!

How does one do this? Know your worth! As a created human being, you have value that is measured far beyond the confines of this world. Your value as a human being is grounded in far more than someone's snide remark. Those who hurt you don't get to decide what label you wear. **Your God-given value as a human being decided that far before you were born.** You are more than victimhood. You are more than other people's opinion of you. You are you! When you own this truth, you'll find it increasingly difficult to be offended. You might even move yourself to a place where you can help those who try to offend you.

## M. COLE PASLEY

M. Cole Pasley is a native of Georgia and entered the Air Force in 2005. He is an Air Force Senior Master Sergeant and is currently stationed at Spangdahlem Air Base in Germany as the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Flight's Superintendent.



# The Llama Lounge

A Dialogue on all things Life, Learning, and Leadership!



## [Listen to the Episode Here](#)

In this episode Scott catches up with an old friend, Ed Francis. Ed is an Air Force Veteran, a lifelong musician, owner and master drum coach at Round Rock Drums and the Founder/Artistic Director at Rhythm Workshops, a 501-C3 non-profit organization dedicated to empowering at-risk kids using the magic of music. Scott and Ed discuss the value of relationship building, maintaining personal discipline, the importance of being true to yourself, and the influence Boba Fett has had on his life.

### Ed's Book Recommendations:

Anthem - Ayn Rand: <https://amzn.to/3cifB9j>

The Hero with a Thousand Faces - Joseph Campbell: <https://amzn.to/2OlC2XR>

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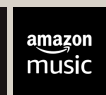
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A Dialogue on all things Life, Learning, and Leadership!



## [Listen to the Episode Here](#)

In this episode, Joe had the honor and privilege of chatting with Dr. Jannell MacAulay. Dr. MacAulay is an Air Force Combat Veteran, human performance specialist and an executive leadership consultant. During their discussion, they explored mindfulness, risk taking, and Dr. MacAulay provided some tips on how to command your mindset.

Dr. MacAulay's Book Recommendations:

Think Like da Vinci – Peter Hollins: <https://amzn.to/368aEi5>

A Man's Search for Meaning– Viktor Frankl: <https://amzn.to/36107VN>

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