**Congrats! You’ve Been Selected for Command…Now What?**

The squadron command selection list should be out now. If you have been selected for command, congratulations. I’m sure you and your family are going through a couple of stages. The first centers on location. You are having thoughts like “Wow! I got my first choice (said no one ever),” or “that wasn’t even on my dream sheet (folks have said this…me -- 3X).” Second stage is trying to figure out the mission, size and leadership at wing X. After completing your recon, you might start to think “can I do this—command a squadron?” I can’t answer that question for you; but I can help you start thinking about taking command.

You should first start thinking about what it means to be a squadron commander. Your first duty/responsibility is to be a ***commander***; not a comptroller. Many enter the job thinking mainly about the FM role. That is understandable since our experience has been focused on our FM skills. However, you have flight commanders that are focused on the basics FM operations and should be empowered. But wait you say “I’m the wing commander’s comptroller and CFO!” Yes you are, that is one of your roles and we will touch on that. But leading and commanding are your first priorities. Our career field is not the only one that wears multiple hats. Think about the CE commander; she is the base civil engineer, will have up to 400+ personnel spread across multiple career fields and is on everyone’s speed dial. While she is responsible and accountable for CE operations, she will spend the lion share of her time focused on her people.

What does taking care of people mean? For one, it means growing tomorrow’s leaders. As the commander, you should be mentoring and coaching your officers and senior enlisted/civilians. Providing them opportunities to tackle big projects, brief senior leadership and push them to network across the base. As the commander, you are creating the climate/culture that empowers all Airmen to learn, innovate and truly feel they are instrumental. To achieve that lofty goal, you will also need to maintain discipline and good order in the unit. This duty is why you will wear that special badge – it signifies you have the authority to punish.

While you can seek advice from your JA and fellow commanders, at the end of the day, you are making the decision to demote, fine, assign extra duty or discharge a fellow Airman. You essentially hold another person’s future in your hands. A court martial will impact an individual’s earning power once they are discharged from the service. The flavor of the discharge can impact their VA benefits too. You will have to weigh multiple factors. And while you are punishing the Airman, you all also have to take care of that same Airman. You will find that disciplining an Airman will be your toughest job.

As the unit’s commander, you will be watched. Your actions and behavior will speak louder than your words. Be on time! You need to respect your people’s time. Just because you are the commander doesn’t mean you get a free hall pass. Show up! Attend events like ALS/CCAF graduations even if your squadron doesn’t have folks graduating. You represent the squadron and you need to “show the flag.”

One more thing on being a commander – you need to remember you will also be the WSA ADCON commander. While your comptroller squadron might have less than 15 military members, you will serve as the commander for another 80-200 airmen serving throughout the wing staff agencies. You don’t need to learn their mission sets or functional roles, but you do need to meet and get to know the WSA airmen. The first time they see you shouldn’t be for disciplinary action.

You might be thinking the above is a lot of responsibility. Remember, you are going to receive squadron commander training from your respective MAJCOM. SAF/FME also hosts a course in DC that will help you prepare. You also have a few months before taking command. There are books on leadership (you should already be reading/studying) that can help you reflect on what it means to be a commander. There are plenty of mentors around that can assist you now and when you are in command. Command can be lonely; but it doesn’t need to be.

Regarding your role as the wing’s FM/CFO – you don’t brief the FMB. You don’t brief metrics. You advise, mentor, keep a pulse on the FM operation and serve as liaison between your wing and MAJCOM/IMSC. You work with your fellow squadron commanders ensuring processes are smooth and the teams are working as one. You facilitate. If you are acting as an action officer, processing vouchers or doing basic analysis – you are doing it wrong. It doesn’t mean you don’t have situational awareness of your wing’s challenges. You should keep a list of unfunded requirements, understand main cost drivers and how well your FSO is operating. But, you use your position to short circuit processes to help your team get things done.

As you read this, you can see the majority of the article focuses on your role as a commander and just a few lines on your FM role. That should give you some gauge on where to spend your time. Back to getting ready - I will email you a couple of “checklists” I’ve collected during my career. These checklists provide you some things to think about as you prepare for command. (others who would like a copy, send me a request via email.) You can also get a copy of Gen Goldfein’s book**, Sharing Success--Owning Failure: Preparing to Command in the Twenty-First Century Air Force.** Just google it and you can find the PDF on AU’s website. Lastly, remember to enjoy your time as a squadron commander; it can be one of the best jobs you will ever have. The FM DT believes in your potential to command or you wouldn’t have been selected. It is up to you to meet and exceed our expectations! What are you going to do next?