

Ready, Set, Airlift! Ep. 9

Understanding Resiliency

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Julian Hernandez (Host): Greetings, everyone. Welcome to the latest episode of Ready, Set, Airlift. I'm your host, Julian Hernandez. In recognition of Mental Health Awareness Month, we're going to discuss resiliency today. The term has become increasingly common in and out of the military, but it isn't always clear exactly what it means.

In this episode, I sit down with an Alamo Wing subject matter expert to break down what resiliency entails and some easily available resources to help you become more resilient. As usual, stay with us after the interview for some relevant information ahead of the May UTA.

First Sergeant Delbert Templeton joining us here on Ready, Set, Airlift. He is the first sergeant for MSG and wing staff, but in addition, he is the wing resiliency integrator, first sergeant, first sergeant Templeton. Thank you for joining me this morning.

MSgt Delbert Templeton: Good to be here. ISKRA

Julian Hernandez (Host): So I want to start off with kind of a quick, easy, basic explanation of, first sergeant responsibilities.

And then on top of that, tell us what it means to be a resiliency integrator, first sergeant.

MSgt Delbert Templeton: Okay. So first sergeant responsibilities at its basic level is to advise the commander on the health, morale, and welfare of the airmen within their squadron or group or wing. And so what the first sergeant would do is give their advice on those things and how to improve or what's going well.

Julian Hernandez (Host): In addition to those responsibilities, just like any other first sergeant, you're a resiliency integrator first sergeant. So what does that mean exactly?

MSgt Delbert Templeton: Correct. Yeah. So I'm full time first sergeant for the wing. So, and that's kind of the resiliency piece. And it's expected that I do most of the first sergeant stuff for wing staff and group staff during the UTAs.

So what the resiliency piece is that is working with the host base. They do what's called a community action team. We do the same thing on the reserve side, except. We try to be different. So we call it the Community Action Network. And so what that is, it's all the helping agencies for the base.

They get together and they discuss the trends. So mental health will discuss what their top three trends are, the top three things that airmen are going through. ADAPT will do the same thing, military and family readiness, you know, all of the helping agencies on base. We get together and kind of discuss the do's and the don'ts of what's going well and what's not.

And then we get after what we can do to improve the lives of the airmen and their families. We do that throughout the year and then we have what's called a Community Action Board. And that is where we put all of these ideas, and we make a plan for the next year or two years, and we present that to the wing commander active duty, they're doing it to the base commander and then once we have something that's a plan approved for the continuing, for this future year the commander approves it, and then we go out as helping agencies, as a, as a community action network, And we implement the improvements that we're trying to make.

AFRC, they also do one of these CANs, and so , I attend those CANs as well. And the reason that I'm attending those CANs is so that I can bring the issues that we're having issues improving here at the local level. Up to the AFRC level so that they can collect all of the data from all of the wings and get after it from a, from a higher level.

One of the examples that is really big right now is childcare and that's, you know, felt across active duty and reserve. And so they've got several initiatives that they're pushing out to try to get after that.

Julian Hernandez (Host): So I want to zoom out for a second because I feel like resiliency is a word that's sort of quietly crept its way into the military lexicon and I think there's several explanations floating around us to exactly

what resiliency means, , for example, when I was an active duty with the army, it was explained to us that resiliency, you wanted to be in times of crisis or difficult moments in your life, you want it to be like the tennis ball, not like an egg, right?

Meaning if, if you run into an obstacle, right? If you get thrown against a wall, you want to bounce back like a tennis ball, not crack like an egg.

MSgt Delbert Templeton: Yeah, so that's one that I haven't heard before now. I typically use a spring as an analogy. You know, in a normal life, we're, we're set at that spring tension and that's the way we go about business.

But sometimes we get stretched. Sometimes these hard times in life are harder than normal times. They happen, right? And so we get stretched. The idea of resiliency is that when you are stretched, You have the tools and things to deal with those extra stresses. So that when that's, when you get past that difficult, whatever that is, you bounce back to your normal tension of, of the spring, your normal coil size, right?

But if you get stretched too far and you don't have the necessary tools to process that, get you through whatever that is then that spring can be stretched so much that it doesn't necessarily bounce back all the way, the way it's supposed to.

Julian Hernandez (Host): So at the risk of asking a potentially painfully obvious question, why does resiliency matter at the end of the day in military communities?

MSgt Delbert Templeton: For military, the bottom line is readiness, right? When we're, we're not at our a hundred percent that affects. That affects our readiness as a war fighting force. It also affects our families, which then you know, it's continuum that has the potential to snowball and get worse.

So when things get worse on the family side, things get worse on the military side, and then you could see where that's going. So having the tools and the things implemented in your life to be able to deal with those and put yourself in a position to be proactive on those Will, alleviate a lot of those stresses.

Julian Hernandez (Host): And so I alluded to it earlier. I think resiliency is kind of something that's slowly made its way into the military lexicon. Like I would say 10, 15 years ago, it possibly wasn't as openly discussed as it is today. Have you noticed that in your time in service and where do you kind of think that transition is coming from?

MSgt Delbert Templeton: I do. It's definitely a buzzword now. And it's got such a wide array of definitions that it's really hard to pin down what resiliency thing, what resiliency is when I first got this position, I thought about resiliency as, as something that you go and you get. Right. And so what is this resiliency thing?

I have. Since learned that it's something that you build into your life and and it's a never obtaining thing. It's not something that you can reach. It's something that you build. These are skills based. Things that you can put in your life and it increases your resiliency and your mindset of what that resiliency is I did write some definitions down if you want to hear like some of the different definitions So the capacity to withstand or to recover quickly from difficulties.

That's one definition Another one I found was the ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape. That's the spring analogy I was speaking of, and then according to the psychological association, resilience is the process of the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external internal demands on the air force has their own definition.

And so, like, you could see how wide, how broad of a spectrum. The resiliency portion is I think that it's become a buzzword because it's just something that's so important and we've kind of ignored it in the far past it's something that we're learning more and more about on the mental health side, especially of how important that is.

So, when I first came in in 98, the mental health was taboo it was felt that if you, and it was pretty accurate, you know, if you went and sought help, chances are you're probably, you know, looking for a discharge of some sort if it was something major and wasn't quickly fixed. Right. And so I've got some examples of, of my past where, you know, that, that was true and over the last 20 years, we've definitely come a long way.

Almost to the opposite side, right? Where everything we got to seek help for instead of we can use some of these resiliency tools to get after a lot of the stuff that we don't necessarily need professional help on. But we just don't have the tools. So that's kind of where we want to go to first, if that makes sense.

Julian Hernandez (Host): It does, and to your point of the changes over the past 20 years, you know, a lot of the senior members that I served with they've, they've talked about that a lot where early in their careers, the treatment of

people who came up on the net with mental health issues was what we would consider today, hazing, ostracizing, marginalizing, right?

And as an effect was making a problem worse rather than trying to deal with it. I remember. My first sergeant, when I was in the army, he told this story about when he was a young private, someone in his unit sought mental help assistance. And what ended up happening to that person was they were essentially thrown on suicide watch, made to wear like a safety vest and like put in a corner where, you know, like if they were some sort of problem child.

And he was bringing up this story to talk about that. That's the past, you know, that that Cannot be the way we treat any sort of resiliency, mental health issue going forward. So I think your point stands really true to the military as a whole has certainly come a long way. And so kind of using that as a springboard forward, let's talk about some resources for people who aren't maybe newer to the concept of resiliency, starting to grapple with that idea of how they can build up that Skill that you were talking about, building up that resiliency.

If a young airman came to you saying, Hey shirt, you know, I'm trying to be more resilient, where would you point them?

MSgt Delbert Templeton: So that's, that's a broad question too. But I would point them towards the air forces model of CAF with comprehensive airman fitness.

There's, so there's four main domains of that. Okay. And that's mental, physical, social, and spiritual. And so I would just challenge them, like kind of explain what those are, what that entails and figure out which one is the weakest and maybe kind of go after that. Some of the, some of the big things that you know, we see airmen have difficulties with are marriage.

So a lot of communication skills financial skills and just Kind of basic life stuff that we all struggle with at one point or another. So I would get after those, those major easy ones, if you will you know, learning how to better communicate and, and understand other people's perspectives, learning how to manage your money.

Cause that's one of the leading stressors here in America. But also, you know, as warriors, as fighters, we're here we need to be physically fit. Because that also affects your mental health and all of these pillars, they're They're all required to have a stable building or a stable foundation because they all overlap, you know, your, your spiritual beliefs and whatever that looks like for you it

overlaps with your social and those social should overlap with, you know, your mental health and your physical.

Julian Hernandez (Host): So a good broad response to where to point them. But is there a specific place? Maybe it's like on the Air Force portal or their specific Air Force websites. That offered those introductory resources for those newer airmen who maybe want to put a specific name or terminology to things that they're kind of grappling with in abstract.

MSgt Delbert Templeton: Yeah, so I've sent out a resource guide a couple of times in the past, so that's always out there and available. There's electronic copies. If I, if you have one of my emails, there's a QR code on my signature block that'll take you to, to that document. There's the air force resiliency website that's available.

And so that's got a lot of cool tools and different links to other websites. You have your triad, so your commander, your, your senior enlisted leader, or specifically your first Sergeant. Should have a lot of these resources, tools you know, and within the wing, we have our director of psychological health, which right now the nine 60th Francis Martinez is helping out with because we're currently in the process of hiring one.

You have your chaplain's office or your religious affairs office. Military and family readiness, and we have our own financial counselor, Nakia Evans that'll be able to sit down and, and help you with your finances.

Julian Hernandez (Host): And I think that gets us started with a good basis. But what about some of our members who, you know, they've been in for a while, they've gone through the training, they know the terminology, they understand the structure as the Air Force lays it out of, of what these foundations of resiliency are.

And now they're maybe trying to take their resiliency to the next level or add aspects to their resiliency game, if you will, that they hadn't already considered. What are some, we'll call them advanced resources or concepts that you might put forward for those members?

MSgt Delbert Templeton: The Air Force is supporting a training and there's two phases of the training.

Resiliency trainer assistant, you've probably heard of them as RTAs if you've heard of them before. And then you have a master resiliency trainer. And both

of these courses are five day courses. You learn about the four pillars of resiliency. And they teach you how to teach these subjects.

And they're usually broken up in about an hour topics. And as an RTA, you have to have an MRT with you to, to instruct, but these are ways that you can. Learn at a deeper level and also help others build their resiliency toolkit.

Julian Hernandez (Host): And so with that in mind, you know, understanding the fundamentals and then perhaps pushing yourself to the point where you can teach resiliency skills to others, bring up the resiliency levels of others.

You know, one of the reasons I wanted to discuss this topic with you this month is we're kind of at the height of the deployment cycle. We have deployers returning, we have deployers going out the door, and from both of our experiences, you know, we've discussed outside of this conversation that deployment, whether it's preparing for one, being on one or coming back from one, is a time we're having.

Sharp resiliency skills is important. So what do you think are some critical things? Are deployers, regardless of what part of the cycle they're in, should be thinking about resiliency wise?

MSgt Delbert Templeton: Absolutely. So some of the stuff resiliency is a lot of proactivity. And so what I'm talking about there is just being as prepared as possible when, before you're ready to depart.

Right. So what does that mean? That looks different for every person, but typically some of the things that we all have to leave behind are finances. How are your bills going to get paid? Do you have that automatically set up? Just think through that process, you know, if you're gone for an X amount of time.

And something that we've been used to over the last 10 to 15 years is having that constant communication and internet access. Right, so we take a lot of this for, for advantage but what happens if something happens and, and you're out of communication for, let's say, a month? two months, three months. Are your, are the things that you put in place, are they going to be able to take care of themselves for that amount of time?

And that's, that's the kind of stuff that we need to start prepping for and thinking about when, before we depart. You know, childcare, if you have children if you're married, does your spouse or if you're cohabitating even, do they, does your partner have access to find, to the finances that they're going to need?

Do you need to do a will, power of attorney you know, all of the basic life things that just we take advantage of because we're here in life and dealing with them. But when we deploy those things change. So how can you prepare in the beginning for that? Also, there's just certain stressors that we kind of know of before and after and during your deployment.

And I just challenge people to reach out and to their helping resources and figure out what those are. I think military and family readiness, they have a deployment pre deployment and post deployment checklist. You know, your first sergeant, people that have deployed in the past, they have the yellow ribbon program, which, you know, takes you to a pretty cool location.

You can. Learn a lot of these skills at the yellow ribbon event pre and post. And so those are great opportunities to get out see some different things, get other perspectives. And just be prepared for when those moments come and take it one day at a time.

Julian Hernandez (Host): And on that note, with a lot of our deployers coming back, I think if there was like an honest catchphrase about deployment is that experiences may vary.

But pretty much universal truth is that reintegration is a difficult process. that difficulty looks different ways for different people, but. It's a big change in anyone's life. And so as someone who's deployed many times in your career and also now having this position of being a resiliency integrator, just what kind of one on one advice would you offer for deployers coming back?

MSgt Delbert Templeton: So we had a conversation of this. A few days ago, right? Last week we were kind of talking offline about it and something that I've experienced. I know a lot of people have experiences that reintegration piece. For me personally, I was married. So, you know, my, my wife has been holding down the home front, doing everything independently of me, not relying on me whatsoever.

And I've been doing the same thing, but on the other end of the spectrum. And so, When, when we both get together, you know, when I come back home all of a sudden I, I want things and expect things to be back to where they were when I left. And I, I, we just have to have the understanding that they're not the same.

And it's going to take some time for us to kind of rebalance those roles. Especially if you are cohabitating with, your partner. It's just going to take adjustment. Right. She's used to dealing with all the kids and all of their issues.

And I come in with my way, which is different. And normally is a good thing because we balance each other, but that's a big contention point.

So I think just being aware that that exists and that it's normal to get home and be, you know, frustrated because things aren't, they just didn't bounce back. , Just being patient with that process and understanding it, but will help tremendously.

Julian Hernandez (Host): And it's interesting because when I came back from my deployment, I was single.

And so you could say the complete opposite it should feel like the complete opposite of what you described, but in a lot of ways, I had the same issue. You know, I came back. People at my unit had moved on to do other things. My friends were in a different place than where I had left them months before.

But I did have that same expectation like you were talking about that I was just going to show back up from my deployed location. And it's like that, that whole side of my life had been on pause when in fact, It was moving on at its own pace and, and I was the one who was kind of playing catch up on the back end.

So I guess maybe that's a, what you could call a universal truth of coming back from deployment,

MSgt Delbert Templeton: Yeah, that's a good perspective. Absolutely.

Julian Hernandez (Host): Beyond that. In the world of resiliency, whether it's for deployers or those who are just carrying on their normal activities as reservists here with the unit, any other points of resiliency that you feel are maybe under discussed or that people just aren't giving it the thought they should be?

MSgt Delbert Templeton: If you want my personal opinion on resiliency, I think a huge portion of resiliency is a mentality, right? And how can you help adjust your mentality? Life comes with a lot of challenges for every single person. And I, think it's just important to know that life is challenging. Life is tough. It gets tougher.

Sometimes it gets easier. But. Your perspective on how you were going to get through that and process that it, it makes a difference as, you know, we, we say we're talking about the tools and all of the stuff to put in there and a lot of that is to help our perspective, right? When we're financially ready, then our

perspective is, you know, things are going to be good, even if something bad happens.

I'm financially stable enough to get through that. I got a savings or whatever analogy that you want to use there. So I think just having a perspective of like, yeah, life's tough. You know, it hurts now. I'm going to get through it though. You know, and that, that hope can get you through a lot of things, but then also knowing that, you know, you have a family here in the military that is here to take care of you.

You have leadership that's here to take care of you. And, and there's a lot of tools and resources for you to utilize.

Julian Hernandez (Host): Yeah, I think that's a good note. You know, as we're wrapping up here with our just our personal thoughts on the subject. I think for me, in my experience, the key to it all is, is that initial decision kind of you mentioned earlier.

It's all about that proactivity, right? There could be. Infinite resources, but if the individual never takes that decision to take advantage of them, then the resources are kind of a moot point. You know, in the army, we used to talk about a lot. Just you got to come up on the net. We're here for you. That will get you the resources.

But the process has to start with that. Piece of information that you need the resource or you need the assistance or you're just seeking to improve, right? I think a lot of times it gets talked about in this in a sense that you got to wait for there to be a problem You don't you but When you're ready to take that decision to improve your resiliency, to better yourself to take your game to the next level, move from someone who's proficient to someone who's a teacher, you have to say something.

You have to come up and let people know. The system, if you will know that, that you're ready to take that. And then that's when all those great resources, all those great people start to play their part.

MSgt Delbert Templeton: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, we talked about it earlier, right? It's a continuum. You're never done learning.

And so it's something that if you want to improve, there are a plethora of resources out there. There's it's overwhelming how many resources are out there, both on and off base. So I, I would challenge people that if you're

interested in, in learning any of these tools and resources to, you know, reach out to one of the resources that we spoke about earlier reach out to your first sergeant and anybody in the wing or their families as well can reach out to me.

That's why, you know, one of the reasons I'm here is to, I'm not the expert on resiliency. I'm the expert on resiliency resources. And so I'm here to, to get people where they need to be and it doesn't matter what stage they are on that, on that continuum.

Julian Hernandez (Host): So with that being said, I don't want to put you on the spot too much, but Let's, you know, challenge our airmen, our listeners, anybody who's trying to be more resilient. One resource you would challenge them to be proactive, go out there and check out.

MSgt Delbert Templeton: I would say the easiest one to get you started would be the Air Force Resiliency webpage. You can get to that through the portal and just either use resiliency and it should come up.

In the quick tabs,

Julian Hernandez (Host): can they just Google it or do they have to go through a nipper computer?

MSgt Delbert Templeton: No, they can Google it as well.

Julian Hernandez (Host): Excellent. Well, shirt. We could be here for hours, you know, going back and forth on the subject, but I think that's a good starting point unless you have something you want to add.

MSgt Delbert Templeton: No, I think that if people have questions, feel free to give me a call or if you want some clarification on something, I'm always here.

Julian Hernandez (Host): All right. So, on that note, First Sergeant Delbert Resiliency Integrator First Sergeant for the 433rd Airlift Wing, thank you for your time. Hopefully this conversation helps some of our airmen who are out there trying to better themselves, trying to tackle the day to day grind of, of being an airman and, and being a reserve citizen airman, right?

Having civilian life and being in the military. \

MSgt Delbert Templeton: absolutely. It's been a pleasure here talking with everybody and I hope to see or talk to you soon.

Julian Hernandez (Host): If you are more interested in learning about resiliency, our sister unit, the 960th Cyberspace Wing is hosting a Mental Health and Resiliency Fair on Saturday, May 6th. It's happening from noon until 1530 at the Bob Hope Theater here on JBSA Lackland. Also a quick note for anyone having government travel or military pay issues, the CSP Portal is back up and running for all travel and mill pay transactions.

You can find the link to it on this month's edition of the Alamo Flyer, which is emailed out to all wing members and also available on the Air Force Connect app and on the Wing Microsoft Teams channel.

Mark your calendars. The Wing's Family Day is happening during the September UTA, which is September 14 and 15.

More info to come on the exact time and location.

On that note, we are going to wrap up this episode of Ready, Set, Airlift. Make sure to like or follow the podcast on whichever platform you use to listen to us. Also, make sure to check the 433rd Airlift Wing Facebook or Instagram pages, or our website for the latest Alamo wing news anytime.

Just type 433rd Airlift Wing into your search engine of choice. I've been your host, Julian Hernandez from the Wing Public Affairs team. Thanks for listening.