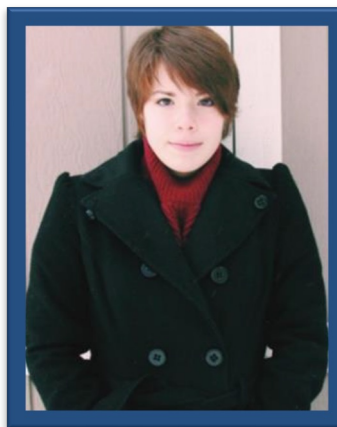


# Mentorship



# Testimonials



# MSgt Tyreika Clark

## AFPC



“My mother calls me Missy, My son calls me Mom, My grandmother called me Daughter, my wife calls me Beautiful, and my Airmen call me Mentor. Life, along with the position I play in the lives of others have come with a lot of titles but the one I want to open up with you about is mentor. According to Webster, mentoring is the art of transmitting knowledge and experience through our interpersonal relationships, and those who come alongside to guide us are mentors. Contrary to the popular belief “leaders are born”, in my personal opinion as a leader, I was made through mentorship. Throughout each chapter of my career, God has seamlessly placed people in my life who aided him in directing my path. My grandmother and other elders in my family lived by the saying, “it takes a village to raise a child”. This phrase is always a reference when I seek out an analogy for mentorship. It truly takes a village to raise an Airman. My recruiter mentored me on the importance of building a network as he introduced me to leaders in his circle. My 1st supervisor mentored me on the importance of dress and appearance as we battled it out for the sharp troop award each month. My mentees mentor me on the importance of dependability as they hold me accountable and continuously trust in me to show up. My son mentors me on the importance of being compassionate as he randomly stops in his tracks and give me forehead kisses. My wife mentors me on the importance of kindness as she demonstrates humanity with everyone she comes in contact with. My peers mentor me on the importance of connection as they rally after any project or crazy idea we place in front of one another. My AETC mentoring council project manager mentors me on the importance of articulating thought and leaving undeniable impressions in any room I enter. The mantra that impacts my approach on mentorship the most states “Deliberate mentorship builds purposeful leadership”. Through deliberate mentorship I will continue to grow in my pursuit for purposeful leadership.”



# Mr. Joseph Nalepka

## 711 HPW



“What do you want to be when you grow up?” This may be the single hardest career question you have to answer during your career. In fact, it is probably easier for you to answer the question, “What do you NOT want to be when you grow up?” Envisioning your career path and what you want to do in that career can be a real struggle. This is where mentoring can be a great asset for helping you achieve your career goals and make the most out of your career.

Mentoring comes in three different forms. The first and most basic form is what I will call Self Mentoring. Before you can begin to think about your career journey, you need to know more about yourself. Self Mentoring is an opportunity for you to think about your strengths, weaknesses, limitations, and aspirations. It’s an opportunity for you to think big about your career goals and your possible career end state. Self Mentoring is not a one-time occurrence. Rather, it should occur throughout your career. The ability to regularly assess yourself and gain self-awareness will not only ensure you are making progress towards your career goals, it will also ensure that you are taking the necessary personal growth steps that are necessary for reaching those goals.

The second form of mentoring is what I will call Informal Mentoring. Once you have achieved a level of self-awareness, it is a good idea for your to seek the advice and opinion of others to not only confirm what you have learned about yourself during Self Mentoring, but to also uncover your “blind spots,” or things that others see in you that you do not see in yourself. For Informal Mentoring to be successful, you must be open-minded to the feedback that is provided to you because the lens through which you view yourself may not be consistent with the lens through which others view you. Informal Mentoring is a good opportunity for you to talk about your career possibilities with people who know you very well and can provide you with honest and candid feedback. Informal Mentoring discussions, in general, do not involve a specific agenda or a specific career advice request. Rather, Informal Mentoring is meant to help you put more clarity and vision to your career journey.

The third and final form of mentoring is what I will call Formal Mentoring. This type of mentoring occurs when you have a clearer vision of your career goals and you now need help and advice to achieve those career goals. For Formal Mentoring to be successful, you should find a mentor who has achieved career goals similar to yours and has career experiences and advice that can be passed along to you. This advice typically includes job opportunities you should seek out, the skills you need to hone in those opportunities, and the training you should accomplish. During Formal Mentoring, you bring forward to the mentor a specific reason for the mentoring session and what you are looking to learn and get from the mentoring session. It is acceptable for you to do career brain storming in a Formal Mentoring session, but only to help zero-in on your career possibilities and not to develop your career path. You should also keep in mind that a formal mentor will help open doors for you (for contacts and opportunities) and provide you with advice and actions that will help you achieve your career goals. It is not the formal mentor’s responsibility to find you a new job. The formal mentor gives you the career goal spark. It is your responsibility to take that spark and turn it into a fire.

As you think about your career goals and aspirations, keep in mind the three different forms of mentoring and use those forms to help you along your journey. We call this journey a “career” for a reason. It takes time and patience to move forward in that journey and achieve your goals and aspirations. In your quest to discover what you want to be when you grow up, have fun, challenge and stretch yourself, embrace the unknown, celebrate your victories, learn from your defeats, and most of all, enjoy the journey!



# Mr. Alphonso Thomas

## SES, AFMC



“Being a mentor continues to be one of the most gratifying aspects of my job as a senior leader. I believe mentoring should be about encouraging, uplifting, inspiring and guiding others to, first, believe in themselves and then work toward achieving their maximum potential. One of my first memories of such inspiration goes back to my childhood and one of my cousins, the neighborhood carpenter, who built our little shack behind a house on a dirt road in Alabama. Even in that environment, I was inspired, not so much by what he said, but by the way he lived his life, the respectful and warm way he treated people and the pride he took in his craft. During that time, I also learned about making people feel appreciated from my grandmother, who gave me the first store-bought birthday gift I ever remember receiving – a brand new white handkerchief. It’s amazing how such a simple act of giving can uplift and encourage a young child to the point that I still get sentimental about it some 58 years later. Another strong mentor was my fifth grade school teacher, Ms. Wells. During that time of Jim Crow laws and segregated schools, it was easy to develop the inferiority complex that I still battle to this day. However, Ms. Wells saw something in me that I didn’t see in myself. Through her encouragement and nurturing of my artistic talents, she bolstered my self-esteem, strengthened my confidence, and instilled in me a determination to succeed at any challenge that came my way.

Years later, after 15 years in the military, I started my civil service career, expecting the same structured career development and advancement opportunities as I had been accustomed to in the military. After almost 8 years of waiting, I finally expressed my disappointment during a Scientist and Engineering all-call at Robins AFB. Out of that came my first mentoring session with a GS-15 Division Chief in the engineering directorate. The feedback was a little uncomfortable, especially when the mentor revealed that he’d been on a recent career development board where other senior leaders discussed my performance record and were less than impressed. Armed with that information, however, I was able to focus on improving my areas of weakness. It’s important to note that this individual was not in my reporting chain. One of my recommendations is that everyone has at least one mentor, if not more, outside of the normal supervisory chain, because they will likely have a different perspective than your superiors, who may be primarily focused on your day-to-day production. The external mentor can focus, instead, on your personal and professional goals as well as introduce you to opportunities outside your current organization. In my case, this mentor eventually became an advocate for me, one of the biggest advantages of having a senior level mentor.

Other advantages of having a mentor include the ability to leverage the mentor’s professional network and meet others who might have similar aspirations or challenges as you. A mentor can also be a spark for you in times when you can’t find the drive to pursue something that seems outside of your reach. Had it not been for a mentor’s strong encouragement, I would not have applied for the job that promoted me to GS-14 and landed me in the midst of several senior leaders who propelled me to my current position. I didn’t think I was qualified, but my mentor convinced me to apply anyway. Sometimes, mentors are just in the right place at the right time. For example, after weeks of submitting an application for my first civil service job and having it repeatedly rejected, I was ready to give up on my dream of moving closer to home and family. My mother, perhaps one of my greatest lifelong mentors, gave me the advice that ultimately set me on my 25-year civil service career. She stated simply, “don’t let them make you give up.” Six months later, I was offered, and accepted, my first civil service job. The right words from the right mentor at the right time can change your life!



# Brianna Russ

## HQ AFMC



“My name is Brianna Russ, and I am a Palace Acquire Intern with AFMC. Throughout my two years as an Air Force civilian, I have had multiple mentors, both formal and informal. I started my career as a Pathways intern while I was still in classes for my undergraduate degree. After graduation, I had to choose whether to stay in the Air Force or transition into an industry career. My supervisor at that time was one of my informal mentors. She was able to explain my career options in the Air Force, and, through her recommendations and sponsorship, I was able to land a PAQ position.

When I transitioned into my current PAQ position, I was lucky enough to be assigned a unit sponsor who has become one of the most influential mentors of my career thus far. As my mentor, she has connected me with POCs that can be instrumental in my future career, promoted my work to leadership, and given me constant feedback to help me constantly improve my Air Force writing and understand the ins and outs of Air Force life. Because I do not have much time in civil service, I struggle with some of the cultural aspects of the Air Force that are very different from industry. There are many customs and traditions that I was not aware of, and having a mentor who has spent a majority of her career in the civil service has been a wonderful opportunity to learn how I fit into the Air Force culture.

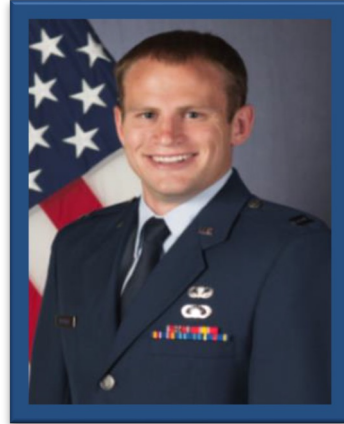
The majority of my mentoring journey has been through informal mentors within my work unit. However, this past year I was assigned a formal mentor through MyVector which allowed me to experience a different side of mentoring. Initially, I thought I wanted a mentor who was in my career field and could give me specific advice for my immediate future. However, I was assigned an active duty mentor who is outside of my career field and MAJCOM. At first, we struggled to find common ground in our mentoring sessions. However, as our monthly meetings continued, we started to connect on a more personal level outside of strictly work talk. She was able to walk me through choosing my master’s degree as well as some personal decisions on hobbies outside of work. I have found that having a mentor who is very different from me has given me some valuable feedback on how I am perceived by those outside of my immediate circle. I have found myself looking forward to our sessions and wondering what unique perspective she will bring to my next big question.

I have found my mentoring journey to be highly successful. I have learned a lot from the women who have taken me in as their mentee, and I hope to be able to do the same someday. I am looking forward to eventually having mentors who are male, of different nationalities, or who simply think differently than I do. Every mentoring relationship I have had has taught me something valuable about myself, and I am excited to continue learning throughout my Air Force career.”



# Major Andrew Beckman

## AFLCMC



The words, "U.S. AIR FORCE" are sewn into my jacket that I wear every day, because of my mentors. Each stage of life requires role models to help you along the way and it is no different in the professional world. In 8th grade I went to Colorado on a family vacation and my parents took me to see the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA). We went there because it was a tourist spot but little did we know that it would change my life forever.

While sitting in 9th grade, I saw that a representative from USAFA was coming to our career center and I went. The recruiter had never seen a 9th grader show up to the event and knew I had to be serious. The Colonel, my mentor, helped me for 4 years get into USAFA and mentored me on what things to focus on in high school and making sure my application was competitive.

After getting into USAFA, which I never thought was possible, I told myself I had to go and was ready for the challenge. While at USAFA, I needed a significant amount of mentors to help me get through the academics, provide advice on AF careers, and teach me how to lead and be an AF Officer. My mentors could be contacted at any time and they helped me get through the toughest four years of my life. Walking across the stage and shaking President Barack Obama's hand was one of the greatest days of my life, and I could not have done it without every bit of feedback and advice from my mentors. After USAFA, I owed the AF five years as an Acquisitions Program Manager Officer. While going through the last couple years of the Academy and for the first few years of being a LT, I thought I was going to "five and dive," meaning get out after my five year commitment. My mentors are the reason I am still in uniform and will continue to serve my country, due to their help to my wife and me along the way. Michelle, my wife, and I made a decision for me to continue to serve because of the multiple ceremonies or lunch we have had with senior leaders and their spouses. Michelle and I were able to discuss, with senior leaders, marriage, serving, moving, careers, etc.

It is important to find multiple mentors and to receive as many opinions about major decisions as possible. Use the knowledge and advice from those that have come before you.



# Thomas A. Patton

## 360 Degree Mentoring



I began my career in Contracting in 1981 at the San Antonio Air Logistics Center. I was very much an introvert, very much buried in my own shell, largely clueless in communicating with and relating to people, and not very inclined to do so. I considered my Contracting job a summer job before going back to graduate school in mathematics. This was a time when Contracting was done on paper, PCs were not a thing, and social media was a billboard. Getting a career launched in Contracting was actually an awesome opportunity for me, but it was one I did not initially appreciate.

In those early years I do not recall formal mentoring programs. But what I am extremely thankful for are the efforts my co-workers and colleagues, Contracting Officers and supervisors took to pull me out of my shell, to engage me in face to face interactions. I still remember them all today from those formative years. They did not call themselves mentors, nor did I think of them as such at the time, but they gave me exactly what I needed when I did not know to ask. With their help I crawled out of my shell, became engaged and interested in my new profession, and began to develop myself in ways I had not anticipated nor seen as necessary. I joke about it today, but essentially, Contracting gave me a life.

Looking back on things today, after 41 years, I feel my life has been full of mentors. Most did not call themselves such, but I always listened to what they had to say; whether family or friends, colleagues, customers, strangers, supervisors or leaders, I thought about them and what they had to teach me. Similarly, I have always tried to share what I've learned and help others along their life road. Always, I've been willing to think critically about myself, and accept criticism as a tool for improvement.

The key life lesson takeaways to me are that to be mentored, to be a mentee, you have to be open to input and willing to contemplate negative feedback. To be a mentor, you have to be willing to open up and communicate, to share what you've known or experienced, to engage and be engaged, to care about your colleague, your subordinate, or your supervisor. If you are, life offers you truly 360 degree mentoring, filled with opportunities to learn and to be learned from.

The added value of mentoring programs is they add intention. We frequently do not realize ourselves what we are lacking; nor do we immediately pick up on what others need from us. Adding intention to mentoring leads us to think about these gaps; to seek out what we need and reach out to a formal or informal mentor, or to see a need to volunteer your time and help develop another.



Do YOU have an Air Force or  
Space Force mentorship or  
coaching testimonial to share?

Send your inputs to [AF.A1DI.Coaching@us.af.mil](mailto:AF.A1DI.Coaching@us.af.mil)

