

Winter 2009

Why Comply?

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Recommended Citation

Reno, Loren M., "Why Comply?" (2009). *Business Administration Faculty Publications*. 29.
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From the E-Ring

WHY COMPLY?

My experience has been that most people do a task better if they understand (and agree with) why you want them to do it...or to do it that way. This pertains to compliance in spades. Here is my view on that.

For starters, a culture of trust underlies the foundations of our Air Force. Note that integrity first is our first core value. Note the emphasis on honesty in the honor code we all embraced in our commissioning source...not only not lying, but not tolerating among us those who do. The same goes for cheating. We seek to instill/reinforce these from the beginning because our systems and processes depend on it. While some tasks do require a 7-level to sign it off, and others require the endorsement of a more senior officer, so many things ride on the word of a single airman. "Your word is your bond" is nowhere more true than in the USAF.

The second point I'd make is that our AF Instructions and Technical Orders have been very deliberately written...with more deliberation than the average person who is executing the instruction or order requires. In cases of Technical Orders, much of them have been written in the blood of others, i.e., the warnings, cautions, notes, and process steps are just the way they are because a mishap caused us to amend and improve the process, and we documented that in the TO. Recall that the "O" in TO means "order," not "suggestion."

There is a third point I'd like you to consider that I didn't think about when I was younger. It's a standardization and reliability piece. As a senior leader, I depend on more people and actions than I have time to check-on. When a trusted civilian, SNCO, or officer answers a question for me, I may well up-channel that information without further checking. More tactically, maintainers are sent out to repair or maintain engines and aircraft that aircrews depend on to do missions their commanders have sent them to do. Use the same track for refueling and loading aircraft, securing parts, providing ground transportation, maintaining AGE, etc.

Commanders depend on airmen like us to do tasks in a predictable way with predictable outcomes. They depend on us to do things right, and by-the-book is as right as it gets. (When I had a 1Lt review this article, he suggested I mention AFTO Forms 22 here...he's right!) When we find better ways, we change the book, but we need the discipline in our actions that provides responsible commanders on up our chain with dependable, predictable, and reliable outcomes.

When I hear about C-5 aircraft wheels/tires falling off in flight or communication contractors puncturing an underground fuel line (real examples from the past month), the cause is usually failure to comply. You probably have observed the same. "Why comply" is because it underlies all we're about in the USAF, it is the safest and best way to do things, and others are depending on us to comply. That's my view.

— LT GEN LOREN RENO

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