

December 2008

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Counting our Blessings

At a time of year when people are counting their blessings, we have a lot to be thankful for in Kansas Wing. We are part of an amazing team of more than 50,000 volunteers nationwide who want to serve their communities, states, and nation. How can we strengthen the bond that connects us in our wing? In The 360 Degree Leader, John Maxwell has several suggestions for valuing others and building stronger ties.

First, Maxwell tells us that you have to care about the people with whom you interact. It is important to take a genuine interest in others. People can tell when others are sincere, and they gravitate toward people who are pleasant. Likewise, people move away from those who are negative. A worthy goal for us all is to try to add value every day to someone's experience. There are many ways to add value including a cheerful greeting, a smile, opening a door, or any other act of kindness. You can also make a difference in the atmosphere and the attitude of others in our wing. Kansas Wing is blessed with a dedicated and caring membership. That commitment to caring is what makes volunteering time with CAP a rewarding, positive experience. There are many volunteer opportunities to choose from today. To remain competitive, CAP has to have an edge. In our wing, part of our edge comes as a caring and supportive atmosphere which helps foster success. Cadets entering our program realize that we care about them and want to help them realize their potential with our volunteer time. Officers in our midst also know we care. A good example of this is how the Salina unit came together and supported Lt Col Kobbeman when his wife passed away. His CAP colleagues were there for him because they care about him as a person.

Second, Maxwell encourages leaders to learn about others. Get to know people and spend time trying to understand what motivates your fellow volunteers. We all add value and bring unique talents and skills to the wing. I have been spending a lot of time getting to know members of the wing better since I took command. In October, at Scanner Training I was able to get to know 2nd Lt Leighton Davis from the 77th Composite Squadron and Cadet 2nd Lt Sara Wildman, a recent transfer from Maryland Wing, better. I was impressed with both individuals and I can see that they have skills and knowledge that can help our wing accomplish the mission better. We are pleased to have three cadets, all pilots, who have transferred to the Salina unit and bring their experience and talent with them. Joining Cadet Wildman is C/Lt Col Mitch Edwards, who will lend his experience and expertise to serve as cadet commander at our December encampment, and C/1st Lt Matt Simmonds who served with me this summer at National Blue Beret. 2nd Lt. Davis is an Emergency Management specialist. As professionals in a field in which we work, they have amazing experiences to share. I encourage you to reach out and get to know some of the members of the wing better. You will find it is very interesting and rewarding.

Third, Maxwell shares the principle of respect, which he ties to appreciation. Respect is one of Civil Air Patrol's Core Values. It is imperative that we respect our fellow members and others because we all come from different backgrounds. Captain Mark Lahan, the wing Director of Cadet Programs, shows a great deal of respect toward those he interacts with and great professionalism in his interaction with others. One way to show respect is to be open to listening to the ideas and concerns of others. Another way to show respect is to accept a decision when it is made and realize that the person who made it has the authority to do so. Decisions made by leaders must be respected in CAP. While it is easy to show respect by using customs and courtesies, Maxwell suggests that letting others know you appreciate them is also a way to show respect for their efforts and contributions. Saying thank you or sending someone who made a difference a note takes little effort but can mean a lot to the member. Whether our members are at wing headquarters once a year or once a week, I strive to make sure all feel valued and supported. I encourage you to do the same.

Fourth, Maxwell tells us we should contribute or add value to others. Little can add to your credibility like a dedication to adding to the value of others. This is especially true when you are not obligated to add value or not receiving a direct benefit from doing something. Adding value to peers lets them know that you are on their side. Cheer for others to win or succeed, and they will appreciate you for it. Together, we make a powerful team. I am always impressed by how much support I see members giving each other. A member in particular who always seems to show a lot of support for others is Major Jeff Morris. Major Morris serves as the Director of Aerospace Education for the wing and as Director of Information Technology. In addition to these roles, he also directed an SLS recently and volunteers for a variety of projects. Both Major Morris and Lt Col Mike Madden gave up their free time recently and drove out to Wing Headquarters to work on the phone and internet systems. Their efforts meant a lot to Donna, June, and the rest of the staff.

Fifth, Maxwell advises us to affirm people. An affirmation is a statement of truth you make firm by repetition. Basically, affirmations help others believe in and realize their dreams. For people to reach their potential, dreams have to become more real than their doubts. You can help others build their confidence. Anyone who works with cadets has often offered this kind of support. It can also be done with officers. A staff member who I feel exemplifies this principle is Major Jerrol Bahner. When interacting with others, Major Bahner always has something positive to say about their

efforts. Earlier this year, I saw him mentor a new unit Safety Officer. He was polite and kind as he helped her realize what she needed to do in a role that was new to her. Her efforts were not all on target and she had some areas in which to improve, but his interaction with her left the officer feeling as though she could succeed if she worked at it. This does not mean that people will always succeed. However, when their efforts fall short we have to deliver that message in a way that gives them hope for future attempts and a path to achieve the success they seek. Not all people will follow the path you show them that leads toward success; however, providing it is of key importance.

Sixth, Maxwell tells us to make sure we succeed or win with people. When you succeed with people, you gain the opportunity to influence more people. The leadership loop completes a cycle and begins again. As additional people enter our lives, we have to take an interest in them, get to know them, and believe in them. Each of us is responsible for helping new members join the Kansas Wing team and succeed. Leading others allows us to understand, enlarge, and empower those who work beside us. Remember, one of the greatest resources we have is each other. A blessing that I am reminded of every day is that in Kansas Wing we are fortunate to have assembled an outstanding group of people who are willing to work hard and make sacrifices for the success of their community, state, and nation. I wish you a happy, healthy, and safe holiday season and appreciate your hard work, dedication, and commitment to caring. The new year holds great potential for all. I look forward to meeting its challenges and embracing its opportunities with you.