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"THE NEXT STEP IN LEADERSHIP: DECIDING TO PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST"

Remarks as delivered to the APEX Conference by Inspector General Joseph E. Schmitz of the Department of Defense, Arlington, Virginia, Friday, September 17, 2004.

Thank you for that fine introduction Brem [Morrison, Assistant Inspector general for Inspections and Evaluations]. Ladies and gentlemen of Senior Executive Service (SES), good morning.

Some years ago as a young commander in the Naval Reserve I had the opportunity to attend a "Command Excellence" course, which, in many ways is very similar to the one you are attending here.

It is designed to help you take that next big step in leadership by enhancing those skills that make one a good leader and a good decision-maker so that you will eventually be able to fulfill your duties when you become a commanding officer – or, in this case, a member of the Senior Executive Service.

Over the years I have found it somewhat amusing that most of these "command excellence" courses still use the old 1949 film "Twelve O'clock High." It was part of the course I attended and I'm sure a good number of you have seen it on one of the old movie channels, too. For those of you who are movie buffs, here is some interesting trivia I pulled off the web recently on "Twelve O'clock High."¹

- This film is used by the U.S. Navy as an example of leadership styles in its Leadership and Management Training School. The Air Force's College for Enlisted Professional Military Education also uses this film as an education aid in its Noncommissioned Officer Academies.
- John Wayne turned down the leading role that was later played by Gregory Peck.
- The B-17 bomber crash landing at the airstrip near the beginning of the movie was no special effect. Stunt pilot Paul Mantz was paid \$4,500 to crash-land the bomber. Mantz of course walked away from the wreck. Until the 1970's, that was the largest amount ever paid to a stuntman for a single stunt.
- This film is frequently cited by surviving bomber crewmembers as the only accurate depiction from Hollywood of their life during the war.

¹ Earth's Biggest Movie Database at www.imbd.com.

The trivia item I found most interesting was the one about the B-17 crash being staged. For years I thought that was actual combat camera film footage. It certainly looks real enough. But sometimes things aren't always what they seem to be – which is why we have IGs.

And that is what I am here to talk to you about today – specifically what role the IG should play in your fulfilling your duties as a leader.

You have already demonstrated a high degree of leadership skills and made your share of tough decisions. Otherwise, you wouldn't be here. But as the movie “Twelve O'clock High” so amply demonstrates, the higher you go, the tougher those decisions become.

So what do you do when you are confronted with one of those tough decisions that will have in all likelihood have a major impact on your organization, the people who work for you, and, in all probability, your career?

You need something to turn to – something you can use as a principal or moral concept that will put things into perspective. No! I'm not talking about the IG. Not yet, anyway!

What I'm actually talking about is “The Principle of ‘First and Second things’.”

“[T]he principle of ‘first and second things’ as C.S. Lewis calls it . . . [is] that when second things are put first, not only first things but second things too are lost. More exactly, when there are great goods, or ultimate ends and proximate ends, if we put lesser good, like survival, before greater goods, like values to survive for, then we lose not only the greater goods, the values, but even the lesser goods that we've idolized . . . [T]he society that believes in nothing worth surviving for beyond mere survival will not survive.”²

If you understand that, the decisions you must make – while they will not be easier – will be clearer. And one of those decisions may be to involve my office.

That's why I appreciate your invitation to this gathering this morning – so I can explain to you our mission and role in the national defense.

My job as Inspector General of the Department of Defense is to serve as an “independent extension of the eyes, ears, and conscience” of my Commander, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. It is my statutory duty objectively – the Army calls it “doggedly” – to pursue the truth, and to present my findings to Secretary Rumsfeld, to the Congress, and ultimately to the American people, as plainly as I see it.”

² PETER KREEFT, A REFUTATION OF MORAL RELATIVISM: INTERVIEWS WITH AN ABSOLUTIST 133 (1999); see C.S. Lewis, *Time and Tide*, reprinted in *GOD IN THE DOCK* (1942) (“You can't get second things by putting them first; you can get second things only by putting first things first. . . Civilizations have pursued a host of different values in the past: God's Will, honour, virtues, empire, ritual, glory, mysticism, knowledge. The first and most practical question for ours is to raise the question, to care about the summum bonum, to have something to live for and to die for, lest we die”).

Your job – in fact all of our jobs – as our Commander-in-Chief so aptly put it for those of us, both civilian and military, who are engaged in the global war on terror, is to always do “not only what is legal, but what is right.”³

At some point in the future, those two duties may intersect, which is why it is important for you to have some idea of what we do. I’ll start by introducing three OIG class members – all of whom have had distinguished military careers.

Jerry Hanson is our Deputy Inspector General for Inspections and Policy and served in the U.S. Army. Brem Morrison works for Jerry as our Director of Inspections. He served in the U.S. Air Force. Don Horstman is our Director of Investigations of Senior Officials. He served in the U.S. Navy.

[The Inspector General provided the APEX a description of the OIG DoD organization functions using the OIG organization chart as shown at <http://www.dodig.osd.mil/orgchart.htm>.]

One of the most important things we do in the Office of the Inspector General – and one of the most important things you will be called upon to do as an SES – is to make decisions.

Teddy Roosevelt once said, “In a moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing to do. The worst thing you can do is nothing.”⁴

I agree. And by the way, so does my boss.

Last month at a staff meeting, Secretary Rumsfeld admonished us all that “the search for unanimity breeds shallow thinking.”

What in the world does that mean? In a nutshell, the boss is telling us all – including his Inspector General – that when faced with a difficult leadership decision do not do nothing.

Do not decide important matters by default – lest ye be, to quote Teddy Roosevelt again, “among those cold and timid souls, who know neither victory nor defeat.”⁵

Thank you very much. I would be glad to take questions, especially if they address “First Things.”

³ President George W. Bush, President Honors Public Servants (Oct. 15, 2001), at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/10/20011015-8.html>.

⁴ *Motivational and Inspirational Corner, America's System for Success* at <http://www.motivational-inspirational-corner.com/getquote.html?startrow=21&Authorid=4>.

⁵ Theodore Roosevelt, *Citizenship in a Republic: Address at the Sorbonne, Paris, France* (Apr. 23, 1910) in 13 THE WORKS OF THEODORE ROOSEVELT 510 (National Ed. 1926).