

"We often miss opportunity because it's dressed in overalls and looks like work." -Thomas Edison

Team USAFA,

When I last wrote to you, it was about ways we can take on uncertainty, both as individuals and as an institution. What I hope you took from that note is that we must confront uncertainty head on, and not be bystanders. When we embrace uncertainty, the fog and friction is no longer just a crisis - that uncertainty creates an opportunity.

The opportunity we find ourselves in has many facets; we are dealing with the unknown, struggling for answers, and working solutions for unprecedented problems. We have cancelled so many things that it becomes impossible to list what we have lost. Countless athletic events, the second half of Recognition and many contact hours of our premier education that have simply been wiped off the calendar. We are looking at an equally long list of things in front of us that will either be cancelled or altered in a significant way. All of those items had value, and all were viewed as important pieces in developing Lieutenants for the Air Force and the Space Force. Additionally, many services and programs on our base have ceased or become unrecognizable. From our outstanding medical support to the defenders and all of the components that keep our facility running, we have all felt the impact. Despite the upheaval on our calendars, what I see is nothing short of an amazing opportunity.

Many of those events and services will no doubt return, but this gives us a unique chance to erase what is left on the whiteboard and ask some tough questions. We get to decide how those things return, if they return at all, and in what form. We get to shape them into what we always wanted them to be, but were unable to overcome the inertia of the calendar or the comfort of last year's plan.

My proposal, my call to action, is that we ask ourselves some tough questions:

Why were we taking on any venture? Did it meet a USAFA priority? Did it meet an institutional outcome? Was it giving us the return for the cost in time, energy and resources? Is there a better way to do it or are we using "last year's script?" Does this contribute to our mission? What is lost when it does not happen? Was all of it necessary? How should it change? What have we learned about teleworking? What good aspects of this new world can we carry forward? How can we function in this new environment and be successful? On and on...the opportunity is there to look around and decide what we really need and take advantage of the moment to make those changes. Break out the paper and start - commit to the process and then commit to the new way forward.

That commitment to the process and the new way of doing things is also something I find inspiring when I look at Lt Col Doolittle and his raiders, highlighted by the Secretary of the Air Force at the graduation of the Class of 2020 on April 18. When they departed the Hornet on April 18, 1942, our predecessors knew there was no turning back; there was no flight path that did not take them over the target and no plan for their return. The plan demanded 100% commitment from the moment they released the brakes. For the pilots the goal remained the same and felt like a mission they had trained for once they were in the air. Similarly, we are blessed that much of our great institution remains unchanged; the commitment to our mission, the years of accomplishment to reflect on and most importantly, a collection of great people that love what we do at the Air Force Academy. We do not need to plan a one-way flight, but it does take commitment to take advantage of the opportunity. With apologies to the History Department for combining Doolittle and Edison, we need commitment and the work to follow.

There are two groups that will emerge as winners and leaders out of this: those that figure out how to commit to operating in this new environment, not waiting for the conditions to change, and those that do the work to emerge from this better aligned, more focused and better set up for the future. I have every expectation we will lead the way.

Let us not miss this opportunity. JS