

A Note from the AFTAC Commander

By Col. James “Cobra” Finlayson

Greetings to all the AFTAC giants out there, past and present! I'm thrilled to have been asked to contribute a few words to your newsletter, especially since I have heard so much about your legacy, the alumni association as a whole, and your continued efforts to stay engaged with the workforce in a variety of ways.

I believe the Post Monitor editors are including my official biography in this quarter's newsletter, so I won't bore you with the details of my past military assignments, education and job titles. What my bio doesn't cover is something I like to refer to as “Cobra's Countdown” – sort of a list of rules to live by based on my philosophy of being a commander and an Air Force leader.

I attribute a lot of who I am to how I was raised and where I came from. I was born in Heidelberg, Germany. My dad was an Army Warrant Officer, and like all military families, we moved around a lot. I call El Paso, Texas home since I graduated from Austin High School in 1993, and from there I was fortunate enough to attend the U.S. Air Force Academy. I spent the next 25-plus years traveling the world, applying my skills, contributing to the DOD mission, and meeting incredible people along the way.

When I first sat down with my staff here at AFTAC, I relayed four parts of Cobra's Countdown: contact, initiative, communication, and balance. Pretty simple stuff when you boil it down, and I find that keeping things simple is a big key to success.

Contact. I like to walk around a lot and ask questions. I'm inquisitive by nature, and I think one of the best ways to learn is to ask the experts about what they do, how they do it, and why it matters. I love learning new things every day!

Initiative. Quite frankly, the best ideas most often come from the bottom up, not from the top down. All too often I think senior leaders lose sight of that concept. As General Colin Powell aptly said, “Never let your ego get so close to your position that when your position goes, your ego goes with it.”

Communication. It is crucial! We live in a world where a constant stream of information – more like a GLUT of info – comes at us every hour of every day, whether it's email, texts, online messages, Tweets, Facebook posts, phone calls, or breaking news on TV. It's always coming at us. But I am a firm believer that communication should be tailored to ensure the person receiving needs it at that moment in time, or if it can wait.

Balance. As the saying goes, your personal life will long outlast your Air Force career, so it's important to make sure your life is in balance. I imagine those reading this are long since retired from active duty, and you know this saying better than most! Having a career is great, but having a balanced family life is even better.

And speaking of family life, I am blessed to be married to my amazing wife, Kristen, and we have two beautiful daughters together – Aurora and Audrey. They are the ones who bring balance to **my** life!

I hope that gives you a little insight about me, and I'm looking forward to meeting you at one of the many AFTAC functions that our great alumni support during the year. Be sure to make a point of introducing yourself – I want to shake the hands of all the legends who are the foundation of AFTAC's continued success. Thanks for all you do to make our center better!

Cheers,
Cobra