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Would ‘I am on a profile’ work in the civilian world?

Commentary by Chief Master Sgt. Joseph E. Thornell Sr.

Air Forces Northern Command Chief

TYNDALL AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – Recently, I was preparing to head out to our unit physical fitness training – or PT as we like to call it – when I asked an Airman why he could not participate in the commander-directed weekly fitness session. He told me that he was on a physical profile that limited him from doing anything at fitness formations.

“Wow,” I thought. “Shouldn’t he be home on quarters then?” I immediately accused myself of being old-fashioned and went to participate in my favorite event, the 1.5 mile run. As I ran, I thought about his statement and reflected on how many times in the last few years I had heard a similar story from assorted Airmen as they failed to comply with commander-directed weekly PT sessions.



It became immediately clear to me that the ‘PT escape tool of choice’ has become the physical profile. I will be the first to say that the physical profile has its place in our service as members recover from injuries, surgeries and other health-related situations that make some physical activities difficult or impossible.

However, attending a mandatory formation in the proper fitness uniform is not a profile item. It is a requirement of both our enlistment oath (*‘Obey the orders of the officers appointed over me’*) and Air Force Instruction 36-2618. It also sends a strong message to your teammates about being a part of them—the Air Force team.

The physical profile only comes into play when you adjust your specific participation at that mandatory formation due to the specific health reason(s) cited in your profile. Too often, we supervisors and leaders allow our Airmen to not attend the mandatory scheduled PT sessions with their offered excuse of, ‘I am on a profile.’ Yes, I am guilty of it, too.

As I completed my run and warmed down with my teammates, I thought of my beautiful wife who had been out of work at her civilian job for the past few weeks in post-surgery recovery without pay. I wondered how those Airmen who seem to have a continuous physical profile will deal with that situation when they move from our Air Force and into the civilian world of work, which we all do eventually. Civilian employers closely follow their rules and policies; they do not allow physical profiles to determine whether you comply. Employers require you to stay home using sick leave or without pay until the doctor says you can return.

I plan to discuss this issue with my Airman at our next fitness session and I encourage supervisors and senior leaders to do the same. Eventually, they will be in that civilian job and asking themselves, “Where is that physical profile?” unless we can change their behavior first.