



24th Air Force Command Chief NOTAM



Good Pain

Have you ever seen the words “good” and “pain” side-by-side in the same sentence? I clearly remember when I was first introduced to this phrase.

The *Little Brown Book*, paragraph 4.1.14., directs NCOs to provide career counseling to subordinates. Well, long before the birth of the *Little Brown Book*, my supervisor conducted annual career counseling sessions with every one of his Airmen. It was during one of those sessions I was introduced to the notion of “good pain”.

My supervisor was explaining Air Force benefits, entitlements, and opportunities available to me when he paused and said, “Kevin, here’s the bottom line. Whether you’ll be an ordinary or extraordinary Airman will likely depend on your willingness to experience “good pain”. Good pain? I wasn’t sure what he meant by this oxymoron, but I’d learned from previous conversations with my supervisor to give him a minute or two; he’d eventually provide a translation I could understand.

He said, “Kevin, are you willing to do what you *need* to do and not just what you *want* to do? More importantly, will you do those things so many others are unwilling to do? Let me give you a few examples of what I’m talking about.”

When you have the option to roll over for an extra hour of sleep or to crawl out of bed to hit the road for PT, which will you choose? Will sleep win every morning until you’re a week away from your PT test? As the world’s most well-rested couch potato, will you then expect to cram a year’s worth of fitness into a week’s activity and then blame failure on everything but yourself?

When you’re one class shy of your Community College of the Air Force degree and that last class happens to be your least favorite subject, will you enroll, suck it up, and get it done or will you wake up one day as a less than fully operational capable master sergeant unable to get promoted to senior master sergeant because you put off one class, one measly three-credit class, one your peers did ten or more years ago? Will you then spend more time badmouthing the value of CCAF or the unfair expectation levied on you than it would have taken you to complete the class in the first place?

When you’re invited to enroll in the Senior Noncommissioned Officer Academy correspondence course the day after you get your line number for master sergeant, will you enroll, bust your butt, and knock it out or will you engage your supervisor in a buffoonerous discussion of the dictionary definition of the word “should” because you’re “smart enough” to know *The Little Brown Book* doesn’t say “must” or “mandatory”? I know what your supervisor “should” do at the end of that conversation; I think you do too, don’t you?

I’m glad my supervisor introduced me to the concept of “good pain” that day. If he hadn’t, I may not have learned how to appropriately respond when my leadership’s expectations of me didn’t line up perfectly with my own. I may have made too many choices in favor of my own wishes over those of the Air Force, my unit, and the Airmen I was responsible for. How disastrous may that have been for the Air Force, my unit, and the Airmen who saw me as “the example” to follow?

I’m no glutton for punishment, but I’m definitely a believer in the value of “good pain”, especially if it involves something which will make me a better Wingman, Leader, or Warrior.

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