

Successful Units

Lesson Objective:	Comprehend the characteristics and traits which contribute to making a successful unit .
Behavioral Objectives: At the end of this segment you will be able to:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe the characteristics of a successful unit. 2. Describe the resources necessary to contribute to a successful unit. 3. Discuss the four questions to ask when defining a successful unit. 4. Discuss how a unit measures its success.

Overview

What constitutes a successful CAP unit? While there is no “recipe” for a successful unit, there are some common characteristics and traits successful CAP units share. Part of your job as a unit commander is to understand what constitutes success for your unit, formulate a plan to achieve success, and encourage your unit to be successful.

This section will show you how to help your unit become more successful by defining what a successful unit can be, describe the resources of a successful unit, and how they are developed, give you four questions to ask when evaluating your unit, and show you how to measure your unit’s progress.

Characteristics Of A Successful Unit

CAP has identified six basic characteristics of a successful unit, those characteristics promoting mission accomplishment and balance, while complementing the talents of the unit’s members. These characteristics are:

- a. ***The unit supports all three facets of the CAP mission.*** Successful units recognize that each facet of CAP’s mission: Emergency Services, Cadet Programs, and Aerospace Education, are inseparable. Successful units may concentrate on one area, but ultimately work towards the fulfillment of CAP’s total mission of public service.
- b. ***Unit members actively participate in CAP activities.*** Successful units have wide participation in activities, not just two or three people who carry the unit. Everyone does their part to see that the unit can do its job. It is completely understandable when work or family takes precedence over CAP activities, but trouble comes when members and/or command constantly rely on a minority to keep the unit going. When members assume responsibility over a position or task, their duty is to carry out their responsibility, ask for help when they need it, or relinquish responsibility if they can’t fulfill their duties. Members must also understand that EVERY MEMBER has a role to play in carrying out the unit mission.

Characteristics of a successful unit

- The unit supports all three facets of _____.
- Unit members actively participate in _____.
- Successful units have an _____.
- Successful units have _____.
- Successful units have effective, positive _____.
- Successful units embrace _____.

- c. **Successful units have an effective retention program.** Successful units actively work to keep their people. They do so primarily by communicating with their members, openly appreciating their members' contributions to the squadron, and having an effective training program to ensure members feel comfortable in their CAP jobs and have the chance to grow. Units who show how much they value their members tend to keep their members longer.
 - d. **Successful units have a well-developed staff.** Successful units have a well-developed staff. By this we mean the unit is staffed adequately with trained members. This way the work is evenly distributed and time is left for all members to engage in the activities that they joined CAP to do. Units with only two or three people on staff to complete squadron business serves as an invitation to burnout and poor performance. Why? Because there aren't enough people to do everything right. In addition, the people who are repeatedly tasked to do the work often do not have time to take part in the activities (flying, ground team, working with cadets, etc) they joined CAP for. Successful units give a share of responsibility to a larger staff, reducing the workload for each staff member.
 - e. **Successful units have effective, positive leadership.** Successful units have strong leaders who are responsive to the needs of the members, encourage innovation and performance, and show appreciation for the contributions of the members. They guide the unit towards mission accomplishment. Unit leadership takes two forms: command leadership, the unit's formal leaders, such as the commander, or deputy commander for cadets; and informal leadership, those members with the ability to bring members together. Each type is equally important.
- Some commanders discount the value of informal leadership in the squadron environment, but overlook the necessity of having informal leaders garner peer support for the unit objectives. In successful units, both the command leadership and informal leadership structures work together toward unit goals. In addition, unit leadership must be a positive force. No one, especially volunteers, likes to be ruled by dictatorial leadership.
- f. **Successful units embrace meaningful change.** Successful units are not afraid of change, if that change will make a positive difference to the unit. Units which can balance the need to innovate and respond to evolving environments against the sometimes overwhelming urge to change just for the sake of it are more likely to be successful. Key to managing change is the ability to judge whether innovation will actually be positive for the unit. Units blending change, while retaining practices that already work, achieve success.

What else is needed to build a successful unit? Successful units know how to build and use their resources.

Resources Necessary For Unit Success

People

Your unit's first, and most important asset, is people. People in this instance falls into three categories: Members, families, and staff members.

Members

A unit's members are its lifeblood. From the cadet on the ground team, the cadet sponsor member-parent who shuttles cadets to activities, to the pilot searching for the downed aircraft, CAP is as great as it is because of the people who serve. It's is your job as the unit commander to utilize these members correctly, choose carefully the members you assign to higher responsibilities, and encourage all to do their best for the unit.

Families

Just as important are the members' families. Family support of their member's involvement in Civil Air Patrol is key to the member's level of participation. As you know, a member's first priority is their family, and without

Resources necessary for unit success:

- People
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
- Assets
- Partners
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____

family support, the member's effectiveness will suffer (see the section: Working with Families). Your job as the unit commander is to explain to families how their loved one's involvement helps Civil Air Patrol, and how much their relative enjoys being a part of CAP. You must also be sure to always welcome family members to meetings and activities where permissible, to let them see how their CAP member makes a difference.

Staff

Your unit's staff members are a particularly important resource, because quite simply, they help you keep the unit running. From the routine task of constructing the bulletin board to the critical tasks of ensuring that training and flight records are updated and ensuring that members have the proper training to support their duties, your staff is invaluable. Successful units understand the importance of cultivating and building their staff. A strong staff builds a strong unit.

Assets

Successful units have the assets to do their jobs effectively. They've developed the infrastructure to carry out their operations, and have developed a network of contacts lending them assets when needed. These assets can include: vehicles, buildings, computers, radios, aircraft, office furniture, uniforms, supplies, training aids, and countless other things. Successful units determine what assets they need based on what they do, and develop plans to acquire those assets they will use the most. They also develop contacts to obtain assets they may need, but do not have the resources to acquire or store them, and use their assets effectively.

Partners

Successful units know they can not operate in a vacuum. They understand the importance of having partners to work with them to accomplish the mission. Basically, these partners fall into five categories: higher headquarters, the USAF liaison office, other CAP squadrons, state and local agencies, and schools.

Higher headquarters

Perhaps the most important partner units have is their higher headquarters. The wing headquarters is indispensable as a partner, because when properly used they can provide training, advice, assets, and tools to evaluate squadron effectiveness. But perhaps more basic, the wing headquarters sets the overarching goals which every unit in the state works to achieve.

Region and national headquarters also play valuable roles. They provide training and guidance to assist the local units in carrying out their duties: from training cadets to managing aircraft and vehicle utilization.

Successful units recognize that higher headquarters is designed to help, rather than hinder, squadron operations by providing units with the guidance, resources, expertise, and support is performing the mission.

USAF liaison office

The USAF LO is a valuable partner because they help CAP interact with the Air Force. At the unit level, this can include arranging for tours and orientation flights, airlift for unit activities, base support, advice on how to file for expenses reimbursed by the Air Force, and a host of other topics.

Other CAP squadrons

The CAP squadrons in your wing are also partners, and best of all they understand the problems that your unit has, because chances are, they've also experienced them. Successful squadrons realize they work with, not compete against, other squadrons in their wing. To that end, they are the first to assist their collateral units, and ask those same units for assistance when they are experiencing a problem. They realize CAP squadrons are most effective when they work together: sending experienced staff officers back and forth to train junior members, lending assets when necessary, jointly putting together activities which would not be possible if one squadron worked alone, etc.

State and local agencies

State and local agencies, such as state emergency management agencies, local fire and police departments, and national guard units are partners because they are primary agencies working in emergency services, disaster relief, humanitarian aid, and counterdrug operations. They either partner with us or employ us to assist in these efforts. Successful units establish relationships with these agencies so that they know of our capabilities, and feel comfortable calling on CAP. The time for CAP to get to know state and local agencies is before a disaster occurs, not after.

Schools

Finally, schools are valuable partners in that they are a prime conduit to recruit young people, as well as teachers, into Civil Air Patrol. In return, CAP can provide the best aerospace education curriculum America has to offer – free of charge – to America's classrooms; creating a win-win situation for both. Successful squadrons develop relationships with local school systems to advertise CAP, recruit new members, and also help school teachers give students of all ages an appreciation of how much aerospace impacts their lives.

In reality, CAP has many partners: other military services, local businesses sponsoring local units or offer discounted goods and services, airports, and many others. Units should strive to build constructive partnerships with those businesses and organizations that can help Civil Air Patrol, subject to the limitations contained in CAP and CAP-USAF directives. Units should not be afraid to nurture these relationships, to help expand the capabilities of their members.

Four Questions Successful Units Ask

Successful units typically ask many questions to help measure their progress. The four broad questions listed below are a good beginning. On the surface, these questions seem pretty straightforward. However, within each broad question is a series of more detailed questions which vary from unit to unit, and must also be answered.

Four questions to ask

- What does the unit _____.
- How does the unit interact with its _____?
- What do _____?
- How do members _____?

- a. **What does the unit accomplish?** What does the unit do? Every unit has a specialty: flight line, ground team, flying, aerospace education, cadet leadership, something that differentiates it from other units. The question asks: "How well does the unit do at its specialty?" The question also implies how the squadron balances the needs of CAP's three-fold mission. Does it do its specialty to the exclusion of everything else, or does it try to use its talents to accomplish the total mission? This question also addresses unit goals, relationships with partners, adherence to directives, ability to garner resources, and many other items.
- b. **How does the unit interact with its partners?** Within this broad question are many smaller ones such as: Does the unit know who its partners are? Does the unit build positive relationships with its partners? How well do the partners work with the unit? Does the unit try to find new partners? If the unit has a poor relationship with its partners, why, can it be fixed, and does the unit want to fix it?
- c. **What do members do?** Do the members have a broad range of talents? How well do they accomplish the mission and work towards accomplishing squadron goals? Do they welcome new members into the unit? How well do they embrace change? Questions like these gauge the members' ability to perform the mission and bring the unit together.
- d. **How do members interact?** Successful squadrons don't have of intrigue and in-fighting. They debate and even disagree over some issues, but successful squadrons encourage their members never to get so wrapped up in the fight that they forget what they are fighting about. Successful units teach their members how to work together and positively work out their differences, putting their energy into solutions. Members in successful units talk to each other, become friends, come to each other for help, and share their successes and failures. Its not always pretty, but successful squadrons always strive to become better.

Actually, the questions units ask themselves do not have to be limited to these four. But the questions listed above are a good beginning towards seeing how well your unit is fairing, in terms of what it does, how it spends its time, and how it works with people.

How Units Measure Their Success

What are the criteria to measure success? Below are five items that are good measuring sticks against which to measure a unit's success. Units measure success against:

Units measure their success against:

- Unit's own _____.
- Wing's similar _____.
- Wing _____.
- Squadron's own _____.
- The four _____.

- a. **Unit's own past performance.** The most "personal" measure for a unit is to compare their present performance against past performance. Many unit's compare annual membership, retention, and activity statistics to see whether they are outperforming themselves. It's an effective measure, but flawed when used as the sole means to measure unit performance. Other factors, such as those mentioned below, are also important when measuring unit performance.
- b. **The wing's similar units.** It can be useful to compare unit performance against that of other units of like structure, number, and specialty. If your unit's performance lags behind the performance of other units like yours, you can investigate to find out why, and if necessary and desired, make changes to catch up.
- c. **Wing goals and objectives.** Successful units perform well when measured against wing goals and objectives. That is, they support wing efforts and contribute to the wing's overall success. Units that are unsuccessful tend not to support wing goals and objectives, and prefer to stay out on their own. By not working with the wing, they aren't in a position to receive assistance and guidance from the wing. More importantly, they may in fact work in opposition to wing goals, hindering the performance of the wing as a whole.
- d. **Their own goals and objectives.** Successful units achieve their own goals and objectives. They have the teamwork, talent, and tenacity to get the job done for themselves.
- e. **The four questions.** Successful units answer the four questions listed earlier in this section positively. They know what they are supposed to accomplish, they understand the importance of interacting with their partners and are effective at this, each member knows the role they play in making the unit successful, and the members work well together.

Building a successful unit takes attention to detail, understanding and advocacy of the mission, and an understanding of your unit's capabilities. Unit success is measured in terms of how well the unit completes its missions, compared against the cost to its members, the wing, and other units.

What is a successful unit? In the end, it is a unit that completes its assigned mission efficiently, within its limits and resources, and without burning out its people.