

Daniel Frazier
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Transcribed interview

Interview with Lt. Col. Charles Payne

Frazier: Ok...ok sir, just for uh, just for the taping, or for the taping or anyone who watches or listens to this later, could you please state your name, job title, and the name of the organization that you work for.

Payne: Ok, my name is Charles Payne, I'm the deputy commandant for the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets.

Frazier: Ok. Where are you originally from and what did your parents do for a living?

Payne: I was born in Augsburg, Germany. My dad was military, so I lived all over the United States, most of it on the east coast. I ultimately lived in North Carolina for 3 or 4 years and graduated from high school in North Carolina. Again, my father was in the military.

Frazier: Oh ok, that's interesting, my mom was born in Germany.

Payne: Ok.

Frazier: How long have you worked here?

Payne: I have been at Virginia Tech since July of 2001. I am on my 8th year.

Frazier: Alright. Ok so you, as you said, you have been here for a good number of years. Probably more than most [laughs].

Payne: Mmhm.

Frazier: Through your experiences here, what has been the best aspect of your job? That makes you say, you know, this is, I'm glad I made this decision to take this job.

Payne: Welluhhh [thinking], well, I have a direct impact on students, not just one hour a day either, those cadets that are in 3rd battalion under my essentially control. I impact them routinely often, directly and indirectly, that's probably the best benefit in terms of doing something tangible. In terms of the work environment, I have a wide latitude in terms of what I do on a daily basis, that's provided by the commandant and I enjoy that. So I am essentially free to exercise my time as I want to in the pursuit of the deputy commandant for this battalion.

Frazier: Oh ok, that's interesting. So, as most people usually have, most people, I'm not gonna say all, but most people usually have that one thing that, that, that they don't like about their job. Do you have anything, any aspect, that's like that?

Payne: [sighs], Ummm, I do and frankly that is that I do not think the Corps gets the support or recognition that it deserves from the university.

Frazier: I agree [repeats several times] with that. How, what's one way do you think that, say a student, maybe such as myself or somebody else, to, who understand, well, maybe not understand, but has friends and they feel the same way you do, that they [the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets] don't get enough recognition for what they, that they go through, the lessons that they learn and the camaraderie that can be found here. What do you think these students could do to help, you know, get the Corps recognition?

Payne: Are you talking about the student body at Tech?

Frazier: Yes sir.

Payne: I'm not sure the student body at Tech per say could do anything, uh, I mean really the students as students can't really do a whole lot; it's the administration in terms of resources in the Corps that really would make the biggest difference, especially in terms of our goals, maintenance of the dorms, the upper quad, and things like that.

Frazier: Ok, now, as you stated, that one part of the job, you like having a direct influence on the cadets here.

Payne: Mmhm.

Frazier: Do you feel that, let's say, just civilians, more say, the cadets more mixed with civilians here on upper quad, do you feel that would affect how you conduct your job in anyway?

Payne: No, nope. I would not alter anything that I do. You're basically saying somehow if the Corps were more integrated with the student body? I mean that what your [stops speaking].

Frazier: Yes, yes sir.

Payne: No, no I wouldn't because what I do really has to do with cadets, here on the upper quad so in other words even though let's say, and I don't know how, the corps was more involved with students elsewhere on campus, that still would not impact how I do business, no.

Frazier: Yes sir. So, what would be a typical day, I mean I know things, you know every day is not the same, what's the typical day, like what's the routine that you usually go through?

Payne: Well for us as deputies of the Corps, our days really there are no two alike, of course as you know, we, our day starts out by coming in, coming into the office attending the morning formation with cadets and from that point on it can be, there's no telling on a given day, for instance I may interview some of the cadets in morning, I field questions that and I field questions from cadets, and I'll discuss issues with the chain of command. A lot of times, I'm interfacing with agencies on campus and off campus to resource training and upcoming events, field phone calls and emails from parents. [pauses] Any variety of things, attend meetings,

yesterday for instance I attended a university presentation regarding minority cadets and recruiting. I mean every day is really different. Today I spent 5 hours and drove 100 miles to facilitate getting buses from Pulaski County to take cadets up to Bedford this Saturday and that's where I was coordinating and resourcing resources. Tomorrow I'll do any other number of different things, so every day is different. Every day to some degree I'm interfacing with cadets, whether it's the chain of command or cadets that have problems or cadets I need to talk to about certain academic issues.

Frazier: Ok, so, obviously, I think some people, not me, because I mean, this is one of the things I respect about you sir is that, you know, you really do care about the people here.

Payne: Yea [low audible].

Frazier: Some other people I feel, because, you know like I said, there are different views about people who view the Corps of Cadets. And it's there that some people feel that, you know, through my own asking, "How do you feel about the Corps of Cadets?" and some people have said that the Corps has this aura where they try to push themselves away from the student body to some degree. What would you, being in your, job that you are in, what would you say to people who have pessimistic view about how people view the Corps and your position here?

Payne: Well, the problem is, the problem is that cadets, number 1, are expected to hold themselves to a higher standard because this is a leadership program and we're expecting them to learn from the cadets to be ladies and gentlemen and to conduct themselves in accordance with the honor code number 1, with cadet regulations and the pylons, so in other words the "anything goes" mentality doesn't prevail in the Corps, *laissez-faire* sort of "come as you go" approach doesn't work in the Corps, so if our cadets seem a little stand-offish, I would try to explain to civilians [chair squeek] to that that's not the case. I know our cadets have civilian friends, a lot of them have civilian girl and boyfriends, but it's that not only are they students, they also have requirements back up here on the upper quad so a lot of time they are in a hurry; they don't have time. They can't saunter around haphazardly and lazily so yea, they're focused, they've got things to do, they're busy, and really I think the larger issue is the average student does not have any understanding what-so-ever or alertness or knowledge of the military. Now our students are not military and the Corps is not military, but it's based on a military model. And so therefore, students in general just don't understand the lifestyle or the focused attitude of our cadets.

Frazier: Ok, I think that that's a pretty good response. If I was pessimistic, I'm pretty confident [laughs], that I'd be quiet. Now, on the other end of the spectrum, there are people, they look at it [the Corps], that are like "Wow, I really wanna do this." What, being in the job that you're in, what would, what kind of advice would you give people, who are saying "I wanna try this, I want to give it a shot." What kind of advice would you give them?

Payne: Alright, now I'm gonna speak bluntly. A lot of people who hire, first of all a lot of people who own companies, a lot of hiring managers, a lot of bosses in the United States are my age. Now, for instance, in the field your interested in law enforcement I know a lot of people. Here is what I will tell you: Your average employer today is totally unimpressed by the average college graduate. Employers across the board are dissatisfied with the college graduates that they hire.

The average college graduate today, frankly, is not up to task in the eyes of many employers. I'm talking about in terms of reliability, loyalty, meeting suspense's, adhering to policies, the things that really matter. The Corps of Cadets reinforces all of those qualities that employers are seeking. Cadets are up earlier in the morning than anybody on campus and they're at a formation early. They know they have to meet standards, they understand what it means to be on time, in the right place, in the right uniform. They are in leadership positions. They have a variety of things they do every day for 4 years. What will I tell a civilian student? Being in the Corps of Cadets will instill in that individual a mindset, a world view of being a responsible, efficient, confident, reliable, and all those other things that employers are looking for. The most marketable person today in the United States and this is among the top 500 companies, is a young officer getting out of the military. That's the most marketable person in military today. The reason is, employers know that 26 or 27 year old recently departed officer has just spent 3 or 4 years on active duty in the military, where they have met people often in harm's way, employing millions of dollars worth of equipment under tough circumstances, and done very well. They are a proven commodity. Cadets, even though those that are Corps only, when they show up, all things being equal, an employer is looking for a discriminator when he or she is hiring someone. So any given year, tens of thousands of students graduate from American colleges and universities and corporations are swamped with hundreds of resumes. Employers are looking for something that makes that individual stand out and somebody that's a proven commodity, somebody that's got someone to say "Hey, I know what leadership is. I've done it!" [binder snap] is gonna be the one to win the interview. That's what I'd tell'em. That's what the Corps brings to the table.

Frazier: Right [low audible]. Moving to a, to a more personal stance sir, what would you say to somebody, who said, "Ya know, I wanna go to that, I wanna stance," and, "I would like to be a Deputy Commandant of the Cadets." What would you tell that person?

Payne: That they wanna be a Deputy Commandant?

Frazier: Yes sir. Or maybe the commandant of the entire Corps.

Payne: Well, then they'd have to spend at least 20 years in the military and retire at least as a senior officer because that's a requirement to be a Deputy Commandant.

Frazier: What kind of traits, would you, in your mind do you see that this person would have to have?

Payne: Well, I guess the notion if you're, again, if you're talking about Lieutenant Colonel or Colonel, you can't achieve that rank unless you've been confident and reliable and you've been successful and you've commanded units in the real military and you worked people and you disciplined people and you've had to meet budgets and use resources. I mean, those guys make the rank.

Frazier: Ok, now, it's safe to say that your job isn't like most other jobs.

Payne: Nope. You're exactly right.

Frazier: I think that, I think that that's pretty safe to say that. So, with that being said, what advice would you give to somebody who's looking for, you know, any kind of job? You, you know, you need to be reliable, you need to have loyalty, you need to take accountability for your actions, be responsible like you said. But, as far as, other than that [getting thoughts confused], let's see, what am I trying to say here? What kind of life lessons do you think that would be the most important thing, other than being responsible? Like, say like when you're on the job...

Payne: Alright, let me I think I understand what you're trying to say. Here's the bottom line: Here's what I tell all cadets, I told you this when I interviewed you 2 years ago or whenever it was: College is really as much about growing up as it is learning academically. One of the problems with American today is that many, many, many college graduates are very immature. We have numerous college graduate with degrees that they're still kids. In fact, there's a book out called *Death of the Grownup*, which is about that voyage, where you got people in their 30's that they think like kids. Here's what I'm gonna tell ya and I'm gonna give ya an example to highlight my point: Again, college students do this routinely all the time and so do young college graduates in the work force, where if they go up and after 4 and drink too much, they call in sick the next day. Or if there is a storm and they maybe don't feel like driving to work, they call the boss and say "Well I can't make it today cause I can't get out." In the real world, what that means is, when money is tight and positions have to be cut, and people who'll be laid off, the very first person an employer is going to lay off is that person who couldn't make it to work or is not responsible, in other words that individual that's not reliable and that's not responsible. That's how an employer thinks. In other words, the college kids at Virginia Tech that goes out and through the night and drinks himself into a drunken stupor and skips all his classes on Friday, he carries that mentality with him into the work force. That's gonna be the first guy to get laid off when things get tough. So, what I'd tell him is: Get in your head now, your knowledge alone, your proficiency in your major is not enough to do well in the job you're in. It's those intangibles that are gonna matter. Responsibility, reliability, loyalty to the organization and your boss, efficiency, all those things. The intangibles are as important as the degree and demonstrated proficiency in a specific skill.

Frazier: Yes sir, yea, now that's a good piece of advice. You don't hear a lot of people really address it in that aspect. You know, cause I think, like you said, a lot of people are immature.

[Cadet sounding off in the background]

Payne: Things are sugar-coated at the university. The career services on campus, people are not going to talk to you like this. It's sugar-coated. The other fact of life is that it is a brutal world. Look at the economy; look at what's happened in the last few weeks. White collar workers are being laid off in droves.

Frazier: Yes sir.

Payne: So again, having a degree from Virginia Tech and having been in a fraternity, and sure enough, it doesn't mean anything. The employer is going to keep the person that is the most proficient and reliable and responsible and let the other person go that's not.

Frazier: Yes sir. So, [coughs] I think that's pretty thorough. Is there anything else that you would like to share to anybody who would listen to this taping.

Payne: Yea, I'll say to them that I'm very frustrated. Those of us that, those of us on the commandant's staff, those who us who have served in the military, we're real frustrated by a lot of young people today who never consider this lifestyle because this is a tremendous lifestyle that teaches more life lessons and preparedness for life in the work force than anything else that exists. The university is a very artificial world and regularly, whether it's professors, counselors, or career services or anywhere else, rarely do they really talk to students about the hazards, the pitfalls, the brutality, the harshness of the work world, and most, in my view, most students aren't ready for it. The Corps, the military prepare people again to be successful and to be resilient in the face adversity. A good example of that is what happened after the shooting on April 16th. The Corps was very resilient. The Corps functioned and provided services for the university when everybody else sat around, startled by what had happened and in some cases were unable to function. We functioned like nothing happened. I don't mean to minimize, what I'm saying is, society still functions in face of a catastrophe. It has to. Doesn't have to the luxury to sit on the sidelines, but what the argument I'm trying to make is that this environment [chair squeaks], this program, and other military programs like it prepare student to be successful. I wish we had more students that would do what I just talked to a cadet to yesterday. I'm interviewing sophomores right now. He's a sophomore cadet this year, but he was a civilian at Tech for a year. He was a civilian at Tech for a year and looked around and then decided that he wanted to come to the Corps. So he came to the Corps, he's now a sophomore in the Corps, but he was at Tech for a full year as a civilian and as a civilian, looked at the Corps and thought "I wanna do that," and now he's here.

Frazier: Alrighty, well sir, that basically wraps all the questions I had.

Payne: Ok.

Frazier: I really want to thank you again for being with me and...

Payne: Your Welcome.

Frazier: you know, being able to open up to anyone who ever will does listen to this.

Payne: Well, some may not like it, but that's ok. I'm not here to worry about their feelings. I'm here to make them successful. Not everybody will agree with my approach.

Frazier: Well, in my own personal view, I think we probably do need more approaches like yours in the world because I agree with you. I think things are sugar-coated and you know, people need to be, you know, like you were doing this interview, people need to be straight. They need to...

Payne: The universities are not, particular large state universities like this, the idea is not to offend anybody.

Frazier: I agree with that [smiling].

Payne: That's the central theme: don't offend anybody. And I don't have a problem with that per say, but see your gonna be offended everyday when you go to work.

Frazier: Yes sir. So...

Payne: Ok!

[Turning off recorder]