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 by Staff Sgt. Jessica Hines
31st Fighter Wing Public Affairs

9/18/2014 - **AVIANO AIR BASE, Italy** -- Commanders, officers, chiefs and first sergeants came together for a leadership development seminar, Sept. 15, as part of a 3-hour lecture on servant leadership.

Taught by internationally recognized author, James Hunter, the seminar focused on practices and principles that encompass what it means to lead by the "neck up."

"The whole challenge of leadership is if you can get people from the neck up; can you get the hearts, minds, spirits, creativity and excellence of those around you," said Hunter. "That's what leadership is all about, if you can develop the skill to inspire and influence people to excellence."

With 35 years of experience, Hunter claims that his work is nothing new in the leadership department, but rather a tried and true model of a successful unit; whether it's a member's family, community or work environment.

"The principles of servant leadership are self-evident. This stuff has been around for centuries, everybody agrees with it," he said. "I'm not here to instruct you, I'm here to remind you."

"Everything you need to know, you already know," he explained to the full room Aviano's leadership team.

Hunter gave examples of how servant leaders influence the world around them by using their authority to inspire, rather than their power to order.

According to Hunter, historical figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Teresa epitomized servant leadership by exercising their authority and relationships they worked to build with those around them.

"Authority is built on service and sacrifice," he explained.

While some may point to differences between servant leadership and the rigid structure of the military chain of command, Hunter has delivered speeches to various military branches and units with much success.

Wanting to bring Hunter's expertise to a new era of Aviano leadership, Brig. Gen. Barre Seguin, 31st Fighter Wing commander, invited the leadership-guru to expand upon the principle of servant leadership to the wing's most senior personnel.

"I feel that it is my highest calling to ensure that I provide leadership development for those that are entrusted to my care," said Seguin, who's taken a hand-on approach to mentorship, just four months since taking command.

"This is the first of a series of leadership development sessions that I plan to do with this team," he added. "We're all here together so we can provide each other with mutual support to improve our own leadership skills, to the benefit of those we're entrusted to develop and care."

Of all Hunter's philosophies on servant leadership, he claims that the true mark of a leader is the ability to leave a group or community better than before and that people shouldn't wait for the opportunity to lead.

"Servant leadership is about being a servant right where you are," he said. "And then when you get to be the leader - you're ready; because once you're a leader, then it gets revealed who you really are."

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Brig. Gen. Barre Seguin, 31st Fighter Wing commander, talks with commanders, officers, chiefs and first sergeants before a leadership development seminar, Sept. 15, 2014, at Aviano Air Base, Italy. Taught by internationally recognized author, James Hunter, the seminar focused on practices and principles of servant leadership. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Jessica Hines)

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