



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES AIR FORCE  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

REPLY TO  
ATTN OF: Your Supervisor

SUBJECT: Complete Staff Work

TO: A New Lieutenant

The concept of complete staff work is one that will serve you well throughout your career in the Air Force and any other endeavor that you undertake in life. Simply stated, complete staff work means that in accomplishing a task, you as the action officer do everything possible to facilitate the accomplishment of the task by the person making the decision. I am willing to bet that you will not find that definition in any textbook but let me illustrate my view of this concept.

Assume that you are serving as an executive officer and your boss receives an invitation to deliver a speech. There are several actions that you could take. You could tell your boss of the invitation and ask him what he wants to do. There is nothing wrong with that approach but there is not a lot right about it, either; it is a graphic example of incomplete staff work. Complete staff work would dictate that you accomplish the following. Decide in your own mind if this is the type of forum that your boss would be willing to address. If it is, consult his calendar to determine his availability on the requested date. If you decide that he is available and that, based upon your experience, or that of those around you that the boss would entertain such a briefing, you would next prepare a letter of acceptance for his signature. At this point I have assumed that the organization has asked your boss to speak on a specific topic or you have selected a topic that you know he is comfortable with. You would also have coordinated with the motor pool for transportation, alerted the Public Affairs office of the potential need for a speech and coordinated with anyone else that could play a part in this undertaking. After accomplishing all of these tasks, you then go in to see the boss and have a conversation similar to this:

Sir, you have been invited to speak at a meeting of X organization a week from tomorrow; your schedule is free. I am aware of the relationship you have with the president of this organization and I recommend that you accept the invitation. If you agree with my decision, please sign the acceptance letter. I have coordinated with Public Affairs and they are adapting your speech given six weeks ago to this new audience.

Hopefully, this simple example gives you a feel for the concept of complete staff work. If you will recall a previous letter in this collection addressing the Boss, Supervisor, and Commander, you should get the feeling that complete staff work is a natural extension of analyzing and responding to the management style of your boss.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paul G. Patton".

Paul G. Patton, Colonel, USAF  
AN OLD LIEUTENANT