

## INSIGHTS

# Perspectives on Leadership and Character

Alison Yang, Spencer Stuart

Paul Yang, Spencer Stuart

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**Interviewed By:** Douglas Lindsay<sup>1</sup>

**Lindsay:** My guests today are Allison and Paul Yang, United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) class of 2015 and 2016, respectively. Allison and Paul are a married couple home based in the Washington, DC area. Both work for Spencer Stewart, a global executive search and leadership advisory firm as associates in executive search. Both served in the Air Force with distinction winding up their careers in 2022 as officers in intelligence and maintenance leading large teams. The pair recently contributed to an article on veterans and leadership in a Spencer Stewart publication.<sup>2</sup> The article featured profiles of 10 prominent Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), three of whom are USAFA graduates, and currently lead United Airlines (Scott Kirby), McAfee (Greg Johnson) and Johnstone Supply (Lance Devin). We will spend the next few minutes getting to know Allison and Paul and we'll talk about their work with Spencer Stewart. We will then focus on the top qualities they believe make the best leaders. Finally, we'll ask them to share one or two bits of advice they would give to those who want to be leaders. Thank you both for your time today. As we get started, would you give us a little backstory on your lives before you got to the Academy? What was your growing up experience like?

**Paul Yang:** Sure, I can start. I come from an immigrant family. My parents moved to the United States in 1993. When I was about two and a half years old, we moved to Queens, New York, where my mom was a pharmacist and my dad was a truck driver. It was an interesting sort of startup story is what I'd like to call it, in the sense that

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<sup>1</sup> This conversation was originally broadcast on the Long Blue Leadership Podcast which can be found at: <https://www.longblueleadership.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.spencerstuart.com/research-and-insight/veterans-in-leadership-how-military-careers-can-shape-corporate-success>

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I spent my weekends teaching my parents the English that I had learned during school. It was also a little bit of a challenging household as well. There was a lot of stress growing up in this country and not knowing the language and trying to navigate being in a completely different environment. That heavily influenced how I operate and how I think about being a problem solver, paying attention to detail, facing adversity, etc.

**Alison Yang:** I have a bit of a different childhood. I had what you would describe as an all-American childhood. My mom was a first-grade teacher and my dad was an Air Force officer. I had two younger brothers close in age and we were all best friends. We had to be best friends because we moved every few years or so but it really taught me how to be resilient how to adapt to a lot of change in life. I ended up growing this love for people. I loved meeting new people everywhere I went. I know sometimes it can go the other way where you hate moving, but for some reason I really clung to that.

**Lindsay:** Those are very different origin stories. How did that translate into wanting to go to the Academy?

**Alison Yang:** I think I'd always been a very outgoing kid, always driven to be an achiever. This passion for people I would say started in high school and I prided myself on knowing everyone in the in the class. I was class president and was friends with the dorks and was friends with the popular kids. My proudest moment in high school was when I was a benchwarmer on the varsity basketball team and I was voted captain of the team. I would go up against the star player on the opposing team. I'd come off the bench, flip the coin and go sit back down on the bench. Sort of like a Rudy story as they would throw me in the last few minutes of the game. I was really proud of that. I also saw the service aspect from my dad. I saw a lot of women in leadership and knew that's something I could do and that I would love to do, that I'd love a challenge. I would definitely say that all stemmed from my childhood.

**Paul Yang:** For me, my parents really encouraged me to go out there and learn what's out there and get involved as much as much as I could. We had this rule in the house where we would speak Korean. But, when you're outside of the house, you speak English all the time. Which is interesting, you know, because my parents wanted to learn the language and get familiar with it. But that ingrained in me this idea that there's this whole world of knowledge out there, and there's all these things to do, especially being in a brand new country. So, throughout my childhood and growing up, I spent a lot of time getting involved in different clubs and different sports just because I wasn't familiar with it. I wanted to learn it and figure it out. So, I did a varying range of things. I did Model United Nations (UN) and I tried out the robotics club. I wasn't very good at it, but I tried a couple of different sports. That influenced me when I got to the Academy, because I tried out for a sport that I never played before. I ended up playing the whole season. It was a great, great time to try that. I didn't really know that the Air Force Academy existed, I just knew that I wanted to give back to this country. I wanted to be able to serve and wanted to be able to give back. And so, I guess I always knew I wanted to join the military. I guess that's what kind of led me down the path of going to the Academy. I enlisted out of high school and I was really fortunate and lucky to be surrounded by some key mentors that told me that this place called the Air Force Academy existed in Colorado Springs. They said I should apply and that I didn't have to work until I finished the application. I was very fortunate to have those folks that championed me and that shaped my view of leadership later on in life.

**Lindsay:** Allison, was it something you were familiar with, because of your dad? How did you come to know about the Academy?

**Alison Yang:** He was not an Academy grad. My junior year I was considering options. I heard about the Air Force Academy and knew about it from my dad, who

had friends who had gone to the Academy. I stepped into the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) in my high school and said, "I'd like a pamphlet on the Air Force Academy." They were like, sit down, what sports are you in? I was like, "Whoa, I just want a pamphlet." That sort of started things. Once I started the application process, which as a lot of people know, it's an intensive application process. You actually feel like you've achieved something when you submit your application. I was really excited to have that opportunity. I just knew it was right for me, especially as someone who was an achiever.

**Lindsay:** What was it like when you got here? You both accomplished a lot in high school, a lot of activity and were really busy. Were there some questions about what did I get myself into?

**Alison Yang:** I loved it. I had watched a lot of videos about basic training. But I have a really funny story. On my in-processing day I was ready to conquer it, you know, I got through all the screaming on the footprints. I was like, I just have to make it to my room and I'll have some roommates and I can commiserate. We can do this together. I finally get to my dorm room and I had two roommates. One of them wouldn't speak to me. She was too nervous to talk. The other one started hyperventilating and she couldn't calm down. That said, both of them are incredible officers still in the Air Force today. Both made it through, but in that moment, I said to myself, "I'm going to have to do this." It was a little bit of a reality check once I got to that moment.

**Paul Yang:** For me, I would say the in-processing and basic training at the Academy felt in an odd way familiar, because I had gone through enlisted basic training. I went to the prep school and then went through basic training here. So, by the time I they came around, I kind of knew, Okay, I'm going to get yelled at, they're going to break us down and go through this whole process. But I felt this need or this kind of calling to help my other classmates, because many were coming straight

out of high school. That desire to kind of share what I had known, even if it's something as simple as rolling socks and folding your t-shirts in the right way to meet the to meet the measurements. I figured, you know, this is something that I know that could be helpful, in some way, shape or form. Let me let me go ahead and share that. My whole early stages, or the early days at the Academy, that's what I felt called to do. Sharing that knowledge.

**Lindsay:** What would you say are the couple of important moments or what impact that the Academy had on you during that time in terms of your development, not just as a person but as a leader?

**Paul Yang:** I had never played a game of soccer in my entire life. Maybe it's because I grew up in New York and there are not many fields. When I got to the prep school, one of my buddies in my squadron said, "Hey, you should try it out for this team. You seem athletic, you like to run, why don't you come out to the field and try it out?" I did, and I enjoyed it. I didn't know how to kick a soccer ball the right way, but I knew how to run. I knew that I was competitive and sort of headstrong in that way. I would say that was a highlight. I got lucky because the person that would be starting in the position that I was in as a left back ended up getting injured in the early days of the season. So, I found myself in the situation of okay, I basically know how to play the sport. I can listen to my coach's advice. But I now found myself in a starting position. I wasn't very good, but I felt what an opportunity to be able to play this sport at this level, having never played it before. And the Academy, certainly you know, only a place like that is where you're given an opportunity like that, right? That was like a pretty big moment, and for me a very proud moment.

A lowlight, for me, was about halfway through the Academy. I was going through some personal things. I maybe lost sight and I let it affect my academics,

particularly one class, and I ended up failing a course. At the end of the semester when you fail a course you go through a board process. I almost got disenrolled and my advisor really championed me. He said, “Hey, it’s okay, these things happen.” He kind of brought me back down to earth and I went through the board process and ended up obviously not getting disenrolled. But it was a big, tough pill for me to swallow of, hey, there are things in life that you need to focus on and make sure that they’re squared away and good to go. To ensure that it doesn’t leak into other areas of your life particularly if there are high stakes involved, like enrollment at the Air Force Academy. I think that’s an important part. Because we tend to focus on the positives, right? We don’t realize that without those crucible moments, those kind of lower points that you have, that help us frame out who we are and our perspective.

**Lindsay:** It sounds like it kind of changed your trajectory, a little bit about reassessing, “What am I doing here? What do I really want to get out of it?” I had a similar experience. My first semester sophomore year I came in at a 2.0 Grade Point Average (GPA), just above the line so to speak. It was close enough to the sun, so to speak, that it was my crucible moment. It was a real evaluation moment for me to go, “Okay, I need to do some things differently if I want to keep making this happen.” Allison, how about you? What were some high and low points for you?

**Alison Yang:** One of my favorite things about the Air Force Academy is just the incredible opportunities that it affords cadets. I did the jump program, an immersion trip to Poland, a language trip to Morocco, a DC trip for a history class, I was on the women’s club lacrosse team and got to travel all over the place, and I was able to march in an Inauguration Day Parade. All of those were just incredible moments. I would say the biggest thing that had an impact on my leadership is I was able to be the Cadet Squadron Commander my senior year. I learned that peer leadership is a hard thing. I think that

being a cadet and a leader of cadets is harder than any officer leadership position I had because there’s formal structure within the military and there’s a natural chain of command. But when you’re leading your peers, you have to live with them every day too. So, it’s a total exercise in dealing with people interpersonal skills, and you get that direct feedback. It was a great lesson to me that not everyone is going to love everything that you do and especially as a person who really loves people and who wants to be friends with everyone. Learning that sometimes as a leader, you have to make tough decisions, or you have to do things that maybe not everyone will be on board with. That was a great lesson for me at that time that I carried on throughout my officer career.

**Lindsay:** Taking those experiences that you had at the Academy, how did that translate into saying, I want to be a maintenance officer or I want to be an intelligence officer?

**Alison Yang:** I loved my political science and international relations classes. That drew me into an interest in the intelligence field and just really synthesizing data about the world, understanding what drives our adversaries, what motivates people and then ultimately, proposing actionable solutions to leaders to make decisions. So, really enabling operations, which I loved. It would get me as close to operations as possible without actually flying in a plane. I tried powered flight, but I threw up every time so I knew that being a pilot was not for me. But that foundation in my classes actually at the Academy drew me into the intelligence field.

**Paul Yang:** I chose to be a maintenance officer and I put that as my top choice. Early in my Firstie year, when we were putting in our preferences, I was thinking through, “What is the career field where I can support the flight-line and solve everyday problems?” We don’t have to go too much into the details here, but it’s a tough career field operationally. And, I gravitated toward that.

**Lindsay:** I do want to ask a question about how you all got together. You are Class of 2015 and 2016, both at the Academy at the at the same time, and now and you're married. Can you talk a little bit about how that started or how you met?

**Alison Yang:** I first remember meeting Paul when he walked into an interview that I was holding for my second in command when I was a Cadet Squadron Commander. I was looking for my Superintendent and Paul interviewed for that role. That was the first time I had met him. I was dating someone else at the time. So, I had no romantic interest in him. But that was the first time I remember meeting him and I hired him. He worked with me for a semester and we became great friends after that.

**Paul Yang:** It's six o'clock in the morning and Allison was sharing Weiss (her maiden name) Advice up on the staff tower at Mitchell Hall before breakfast when everyone is just trying to make it through the day. I learned from a distance, and I had a lot of respect for her and I obviously still have a ton of respect for her now. When I found out that I was moving into Cadet Squadron 30, and I was applying to be her Superintendent, I was like, wow, I would love to get to know this individual. So, this is kind of a running joke where our relationship started with Alison being my boss, and she still is today. That's sort of like our founding story, if you will.

**Lindsay:** So, Paul, sitting in Mitchell Hall hearing that that information, what was your reaction?

**Paul Yang:** I personally enjoyed it. I think Allison is very good at telling you what you need to hear. So, I really appreciated that even in the early waking morning hours of the day. Allison was getting up there and saying some true things like, "Be a friend," "Support somebody," and "Be there for one another." "If you have a tough test, at the end of the day, you'll be done with it." I mean, just simple things that might not sound like

a lot at the surface level, but it really hits home because it's just real. It's true and it's honest. So, to answer your question, Doug, I loved it.

**Lindsay:** The Academy and the experiences that you've talked about really springboarded you in your careers because you obviously had success. So, what was it that you think you got out of the Academy that really helped set the stage for you?

**Alison Yang:** I think I would go back to the whole peer leadership thing. The fact that I had already been leading people as a senior and then I went straight into my job as an Intel officer. I was leading a floor of 75 airmen at an Ops Center, and it was just awesome. I had all these people around me and I knew how to interact with people. When you have an operational mission, it just becomes even more important. I think that really set the stage. All of the character and leadership development that we were taught at the Air Force Academy, all of that becomes second nature, you know? We had already learned that by that point. Being that kind of leader for people I think really helped me springboard as a second lieutenant into a successful Intel career.

**Paul Yang:** Part of it is the wealth of resources that the Air Force Academy has. Even if it's just walking down the hallway and talking to your Air Officer Commanding (AOC), who had spent probably 10 plus years in a specific career field and knows people in other career fields. The networking aspect that the Air Force Academy provides is huge. Or maybe it's your instructor for one of your classes that came out of a career field to teach at the Air Force Academy. So, utilizing that network and just knowing the wealth of knowledge and resources that were there was huge.

**Lindsay:** It's always interesting to me to see the path that people choose because I certainly had my own path when I was there as I found my way through.

Even though we all go through a similar process, how we personalize that is really interesting. So, can you talk a little bit about what that transition was like in terms of kind of getting into the space of leader development that you're in now?

**Paul Yang:** So we decided to transition out at the same time, which, by the way, many of our colleagues and close friends thought we were crazy to be separating at the same time due to the sheer amount of risk there. But, we took a leap of faith. We attended a career conference through a junior military officer hiring and transitioning company. When we attended the conference, Allison and I we really kind of focused on the company culture and the mission of the company. Because we were coming out of the military, we naturally gravitated toward companies that had a clear and defined mission orientation or goal, something that is founded on clear values that aligned with the things that we felt we aligned with. Actually, when we attended the career conference, they told us to attend as individuals, rack and stack them in your in your brain, and see where their alignment is with location with career fields and different areas. We came across an executive search firm, Spencer Stuart, and we just absolutely fell head over heels in love with the company culture and the type of work that they do. It aligned with how I think and how I approach my day to day, which is championing other people, giving people a chance, and solving problems. Being an executive search organization, that's essentially what you get to do. You are helping your clients solve problems. In this case, it would be leadership gaps, whether it's succession planning, maybe someone's retiring, et cetera. You are talking to people and potential candidates for a role that they maybe otherwise wouldn't have landed on their radar in the past. So, being able to learn their story and help them figure out what their goals are. If there's an alignment with where they are trying to go with an opportunity that a company can offer, then great, let's talk about it.

**Alison Yang:** I agree. Everything that Paul says is accurate and maybe just to answer just the beginning of your question, why we made the decision? We were both hard charging on active duty and really loved the service. For us, we just had decided we were going to be in a position where one of us will have to deploy, the other will have to go back to teach, or something like that. We could see our career paths taking divergent directions. So, we decided let's just see what else is out there and let's see what we can do. Paul had some experience from his dad and the business experience he's had in this country. For me, I didn't even know what corporate life was like. I said, "If not now, then when?" We made the leap and everything Paul said about Spencer Stuart the culture is incredible, and that is why we joined. We've really enjoyed our time so far in the year and a half we've been there.

**Lindsay:** What was it that really helped you land successfully on the other side (getting out of the service)? We know sometimes people struggle a little bit there in terms of what do I want to do?

**Paul Yang:** We were doing it together. We naturally just had someone across the dinner table championing each other and going through the same experience together. So, being able to talk through ideas, talk through all the different scenarios and just having an ear that would listen was really, really helpful for us. I wouldn't say that's the only way, but just having a partner through that tells a broader story of making sure that you surround yourself with folks that have been through something like this before or is going through it and being able to talk through things and act as a sounding board was really helpful for us particularly.

**Alison Yang:** We are also huge proponents of transition companies, especially for junior military officers. We would have had no idea and we partnered with Cameron Brooks. We spent a whole year in their program. They helped us translate our military skills into

corporate speak, helped us with resumes, and then we had about 20 different companies that were aligned to our experiences that we would have never thought we would be qualified for. If it were not for a program like that, I'm not sure we would have known. Not only that, we had all these different industries we could compare. So, Paul and I got to say, all right, do we want manufacturing? Do we want banking? Do we want to be in professional services? We ultimately chose that incredible experience overall.

**Lindsay:** Any regrets?

**Alison Yang:** None.

**Paul Yang:** No regrets.

**Lindsay:** You talked about executive search. Can you walk us through a little bit what that looks like?

**Paul Yang:** At our firm, we are in executive search. That's actually a world we didn't know existed prior to going to the career conference and starting in this firm. But basically we help large mid to large size companies on the public and private side, assist leaders to make career moves or we help clients solve their internal succession and leadership planning. What that looks like on a day-to-day basis, just to kind of maybe break it down is a lot of calls, a lot of internal and external conversations where you're running projects or searches internally and just making sure we're following the process. We are making sure we're managing things internally and hitting all the dates for the deliverables. Then externally, lots of meetings with clients providing updates on our market feedback. And also, this is probably the bulk of the amount of time that we spend, is having conversations with potential candidates to make sure that we go through the full assessment process and doing our full due diligence to ensure that the folks that we would be potentially putting forth on a search or on an opportunity are aligned well.

**Alison Yang:** Paul and I are both in different practices within the firm. I'm in the industrial practice, which means that I help recruit, assess and place executives in any domain within industrial. So that could be oil and gas, that could be manufactured products, engineered products, aerospace and defense, or distribution at large. It could be anything within the industrial sector and anywhere from a vice president level up to a CEO. Paul is in the financial officer practice where I'm in more of a functional practice.

**Paul Yang:** We call it financial officer practice or basically Chief Financial Officers (CFOs). So, most of my work is with finance executives. CFOs and key deputies. Since it's functional, I spend a lot of my time across many different industries. Because I think CFO speak is pretty transferable from one company to another, from one industry to another, with the exception of a few that are just different. That's the difference between a focused industry versus a functional practice.

**Lindsay:** What you talked about, that idea of being able to connect with people, serve with people, influence, championing others, and solving problems, it sounds like you've found your space on the other side in terms of what it is that you really enjoy. What your purpose is. Is that fair to say?

**Alison Yang:** Absolutely. And that's one of the reasons why we why we love it so much is we really feel that we've landed in a place where we can utilize all these skills. Also, when we are assessing talent, one reason that it's just great to have been a leader in the military is that when these executives are talking to us about change management or change leadership within the organization, we don't just know it conceptually, we know it practically from our time in service. So, we know if they're just blowing smoke. We found that to be very valuable. In our veterans article, having access to folks like Scott Kirby and Greg Johnson, who know of these search firms because that's how they hire people. So it's

been really neat, not only just being able to practice something that we love, but then also being able to talk to really incredible people.

**Lindsay:** I think you hit on that piece of being able to not just talk about it, but kind of share your experiences. I think that gives a different credibility of being able to say, “Yeah, I’ve been there, done that,” and talk about it that way, whether it’s a CFO or in industrial. Right?

**Alison Yang:** Absolutely.

**Lindsay:** With that in mind, what are some of the challenges or mistakes that you see leaders making today?

**Paul Yang:** One of the things I know is if an individual jumps from one company to another company too frequently, that could be an important thing. That could mean a lot of things, right? It could mean that an individual was in the ecosystem of a private equity firm and they’re buying and selling companies and moving from one company to another, which is fine, if you can speak to that. But if it’s not a situation like that, then it sort of signals that someone maybe hasn’t done their full due diligence on an opportunity before taking on that role. So that’s something that I would say. It usually doesn’t reflect too positively.

**Alison Yang:** My advice, springing from that would be, we’ve talked to plenty of folks that they find themselves in a situation or in a company that they might not like, or in a specific role that they might not like. It doesn’t mean that they have to leave the company. It doesn’t mean that there aren’t other things that they can try. So, my advice from that particular mistake would be, see what else is out there within that company, because the consistency of moving from one scope of responsibilities to another within the same company reflects a lot more positively than, “Hey, I was there for eight months and I didn’t like it and I left.” A better story would be, “I was there for about a year. I wasn’t enjoying my job.

I moved here within this part of the company and that’s where I really found my passion for X,” and then you can expand from there. Maybe some other ones that we see are people getting experience outside of their respective functions. Paul’s got a better example of this with finance, maybe you can go into that?

**Paul Yang:** I think this is just the product of being in the functional practice where I’m talking to a lot of different CFOs in varying different industries. I think it has a history of being a little bit siloed, but that’s not the case anymore, right? You have folks that maybe start out as an accountant. Or maybe they start in a big professional services firm and they work their way through accounting and audit, et cetera. I think the best ones are the ones that expand beyond just their specific functions. What I mean by that is maybe this is someone who has an accounting background, but takes the time to learn other aspects and areas of the business beyond what they see behind the numbers on finance. So, in a manufacturing organization, that would mean getting close to the business, getting close to the manufacturing floor, getting close to the product and really understanding, touching, feeling, and seeing the product that their business is manufacturing. It really helps that particular individual really translate what the numbers they are working with and managing and what that really means to their client or customer base. Those that are better able to speak to that, I have found that are the ones that tend to be more operationally oriented, the ones that can speak more about the business and not just finance.

**Alison Yang:** Another big mistake that we see, maybe the biggest mistake, is burning bridges. You hear that at the Academy to never burn a bridge. Within executive search, we extensively vet people for our clients. We have people that look phenomenal on paper, people who show up to an interview and they have an incredible interview, and have great results on paper. If you’ve got colleagues or peers or bosses that you have a bad reputation with, we will find it, and we will hear it. So,



it all comes back to being a person of character. You also see the mistakes that leaders make when it comes to interviewing for jobs, which is not being prepared and not presenting in a professional manner. We've had people show up late to board meetings and have been completely taken off the list as a possible candidate as a result.

**Lindsay:** Alison, you mentioned something about character and being a person of character. Are you seeing more interest in that area as you're going through executive search in terms of not just about what it is that you do, but how you're showing up?

**Alison Yang:** Yes, absolutely. I wondered that when I went into corporate America if we would see these companies that we work with, these client companies, what they would focus on or if they are just looking for people who can just drive results within a company. I'm telling you more often than not, we have calls where most of it is we are looking for someone who knows how to lead people or they are going to have to come in here and do a lot of change management. It's also something we really value at Spencer Stuart. At our firm we screen for character. That's one the four things we screen for when we assess people. So yes, there's quite an emphasis on it and it's awesome.

**Paul Yang:** I'll speak about the practice that I'm in. Pure finance capability, especially in a public company, is all public. You can see the public filings. You could look and see their company performance and ensure that the performance is there and it's measurable. But more often than not, we will find that someone could be a high performer based off of just pure numbers and pure historical performance. And then we will meet members of the board or other members of the team in which they'd be working with on a day-to-day basis and the feedback would be, "That is not someone that we can see ourselves getting along with and working with on a day-to-day basis," or "That is not someone I feel

a connection with," or something like that. That usually means that they are a good finance professional or they're good at what they do, but people are not really sure that this is someone that would inspire others of the company. So, to Alison's point, I think at the end of the day, there will always have to be an underlying baseline of capabilities, but what brings someone to the next level, is one's character.

**Lindsay:** I would like to transition to the article that you worked on where you looked at the top CEOs and what sets them apart. The article focused on CEOs who are veterans and their experiences. What are the top five takeaways that you are seeing that really make those effective leaders different than everybody else.

**Alison Yang:** I can talk to the first two and then Paul can talk to the last three. Tying into that article, one thing that we've talked about most of this podcast is interpersonal skills and how important that is. It's not groundbreaking, but it's very real and it underpins most if not all other qualities that these top-performing CEOs all have. The first one that was also highlighted in the article as a team first mentality. It's about as simple as it gets. Can you bring the team along? Is the team a part of your mission and your story? Sometimes when we talk to people, if they're all about themselves or if they can't describe how they've impacted their team or how they brought the team along, it's very obvious and very clear. There's a lot of culture change that happens in these organizations and if you can't have a team first mentality, that won't necessarily happen. So, that would be the first one. The second one is humility. Being able to understand that you are not the smartest person in the room, but having the strength to make a decision when you need to. But, also making sure you're valuing all opinions. So, humility is the second one.

**Paul Yang:** Another one is something that Scott Kirby, the CEO of United Airlines, had mentioned when we

spoke to him as we were working on the article. He talked about how folks that come out of the military have no quit. When we asked him to expand on that, he talked about how when someone is asked whether or not they're willing to potentially make the ultimate sacrifice for this country, any other ask following that in and out of the military becomes, I don't want to say easy, but it's going to fall short of it. Right? So, there's this idea of being resilient and understanding how to perform under pressure when there are high stakes. I think that would be the key third theme. Being resilient in tough times and knowing how to perform under pressure when the stakes are high. Then, the next one is stakeholder management. I think that's a very common thing that we would hear both in the military and out of the military. Understanding and having the ability to work with a variety of different people. It kind of goes to that point of being broader than just what your function is. Understanding what one decision does to the rest of the organization and how it affects others around you. In the military, there's so much connectivity between the squadron, flight, group, or wing level that it naturally just happens. But out in the corporate world, sometimes you can get siloed and you might not see the direct translation of how decisions affect other people. So being able to understand who are the internal and external stakeholders is important. I think the fifth one, Alison already talked about a little bit is change. Especially with AI and the incredible technologies that are out there. It's a very fast moving world. Being able to understand what is happening and being able to understand how that translates internally to one's organization is important.

**Alison Yang:** When it comes to change management, one of the key questions we ask the people we assess is where was the business when you came in and what have you achieved since then? So, it's where was it, where is it now, and how did you do it? That's one of the ways that we assess for change management.

**Lindsay:** What I'm encouraged about is each one of those five are things that you can actually get better at. You go, "I'm not where I want to be, but I can do that." Is that fair to say?

**Paul Yang:** Yes. No one is perfect in any of these areas. It takes practice and it takes time. Oftentimes, we'd be speaking with folks on the phone or in a meeting where we realize someone will have that introspection to look back and say, "Okay, this is an area that I'm not good at." Maybe it is team building and maybe they're 15, 20 years in their career and they're like, "You know what, I need more experience building a team. What is an opportunity at this company where I have the opportunity to do that?" And then, seeking that out and putting it into practice is a key thing. Recognizing that there are these areas that I need to improve on. But to your point, Doug, these are all things that can be practiced and learned in real time.

**Lindsay:** As you are assessing them, whether it be from the industrial side or the CFO position, are you finding that these leaders are receptive to the feedback that you are giving them in terms of some of those areas where they're not where they need to be? Are you seeing an openness and a willingness to lean in and learn about that?

**Alison Yang:** It's interesting you say that because if they are open to hearing it, they're showing humility. You know, you assess that just in the way that they interact with you as a person. Are they too busy for you? We often get people ask us questions like "How can I be better?" I think if you meet a real stinker, then they're probably not going to be as receptive to things like that.

**Paul Yang:** And there are more candidates for a particular role on any given day. There is a high volume, right? So, that means not everybody is going to be able to get the job that they want, and that's just the fact of life. There are those that come back and say, "Hey,

I know I was a finalist, or maybe I wasn't a finalist, but what feedback do you have for me? How could I have done better?" To Alison's point about having that level of humility to say, "Okay, I didn't get this, but there's got to be a reason why. What are those reasons? Is it the team building? Is it I did not share enough about change management? Did I not talk about a certain result or maybe it was how I presented myself and showed up to the meeting?" I think that also has to do with our firm because we have both our clients and our candidates put that trust in us and they look to us for that advice. We are transparent because a) we have to be, and b) because they need it. It's all about uplifting others and providing feedback to others so that they can get to where they are trying to go.

**Alison Yang:** We are a little bit like a broken record here, but the one theme that captures all of this is care about people. If you care about people, your interpersonal skills are likely decent. You have the humility to set yourself aside. You have a leg up on stakeholder management, which enables you to have teams that perform under pressure and operate well through change. It's also the difference between having people who just get the job done because they have to versus the people who get the job done because they want to. They believe in you and they believe in the mission. So, if you are good at caring about people, if you just care about people in general, you'll get there. And that would be our advice.

**Lindsay:** Thank you both for your time today.