

## Defining “Profession”

One of AFSA's priorities is strengthening Foreign Service professionalism and a shared sense of Foreign Service professional identity. “Profession” is the name given to a particular area of human endeavor where the people involved have specific education, experience, skills, language, and capabilities. Typically, “professionals” perform functions and services that affect others' lives; think of doctors, lawyers, clergy, social workers, career military officers, or accountants. It seems obvious to us that everyone involved in our diplomatic service performs such functions and services, but the professional contours of members of the Foreign Service have not always been so clear to others.

Another aspect of a profession has been duly noted by John W. Lewis, MD, JD, a writer, physician, attorney, and career military officer. He states that professionals operate with “dangerous modalities,” meaning that the tools they use can change lives for the worse as well as for better. Additionally, professionals are distinguished from the rest of the population by the need to self-regulate their work with these “dangerous modalities,” because the general public would not understand how to do it. This certainly holds for diplomatic service rendered as Foreign Service personnel. For the population to trust that the profession is capable of self-regulation, professionals must commit themselves to a higher standard of conduct than the general population. It is partly for this reason that professions commit to a code of professional standards or a code of ethics to guide their work according to high aspirational and practical principles. Additionally, an explicit code of professional ethics can protect the professional from outside pressure to do wrong.

AFSA continues to gather evidence about the weakened state of today's Foreign Service and the need for change. AFSA can help lead the Service back to greater strength and vitality, but the only forces that can really renew the Foreign Service are the engagement and commitment of all its members determined to make the Service what it ought to be – the world's best professional national diplomatic service.