

The Leadership News

A quarterly newsletter on leadership and diversity in the Coast Guard

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Two Leaders Honored for Exceptional Performance and Helping Their Crews to Succeed

by Lt. j.g. Aja Kirksey and YNCS Ann Tubbs, Coast Guard Headquarters (G-WTL)

Two Coast Guard women were recognized for their outstanding leadership during the annual Women Officers Professional Association symposium July 31-August 1 in Washington, D.C. WOPA is a national organization supporting the professional development of its Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard members. In 2001, WOPA established two Coast Guard leadership awards to be presented annually—one for officers and one for enlisted. This year, Lt. Mary Ellen Durley was awarded the Capt. Dorothy Stratton Leadership Award, and BM1 Ursula Walther was awarded the Master Chief Petty Officer Pearl Faurie Leadership Award. Both awards were named for exceptional women leaders at the forefront of women's entry into the Coast Guard.

Lt. Mary Ellen Durley was recognized for her outstanding leader-

ship while assigned to the CGC *Sassafras*, an oceangoing buoy tender located in Guam, for the period of June 2002 to May 2003. Her second year as executive officer of



BM1 Ursula Walther, Adm. Thomas Collins and Lt. Mary Ellen Durley on the day of the award ceremony.

the *Sassafras* proved to be extremely challenging and showcased her strong inspirational leadership skills during difficult homeland security operations.

Since September 11, 2001, the *Sassafras* has safeguarded Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands in a two-week-on/two-week-off homeland security arrangement. In addition to completing its traditional buoy tender missions, the cutter crew has performed boardings, acted as escorts and endured

an environment of last-minute schedule changes. Durley's imaginative management of logistical and personal details proved indispensable to the mission of the *Sassafras* and the morale of the crew, especially during the devastating aftermath of two typhoons.

Always striving to foster a positive work environment, Durley challenged the command cadre, including chief and senior petty officers, to become better leaders and performers. She feverishly emphasized advancements, resulting in 10 petty officer and 12 non-rate advancements out of a crew of 61.

BM1 Ursula Walther was recognized for her outstanding leadership while assigned to Coast Guard Station Little Creek, Va., for the

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period of June 2002 to May 2003. Since reporting aboard last June, Walther has made numerous significant contributions to the readiness of Station Little Creek's crew and boats, including recognizing areas for improvement and increasing the overall appearance and materiel readiness of the boats.

Upon reporting, Walther was required to re-certify as a boat coxswain on the station's three boats within six months. She recertified in a noteworthy 10 weeks, then went on to catalog shortfalls in the unit's training program and began taking steps to correct them. Her determination and leadership substantially improved unit training, the quality of boat crewmen and the unit's qualification times.

Walther's leadership abilities are reflected in her compassionate concern for the well-being of the active and reserve component at the station. She has mentored several members to help them identify their professional goals. In addition, her loyalty to the crew's professional development has resulted in numerous members being promoted to the next grade.

And the Nominees Are ...

The following people were also nominated for these awards:

Capt. Stratton Award

Lt. Kathryn Arnold
Lt. Cmdr. Virginia Cameron
Lt. j.g. Susan Diekman
Lt. Rosemary Firestine
Lt. Darcie Gaare
Lt. Michelle Hoerster
Lt. Cmdr. Gwen Keenan
Lt. Patricia Kutch
Lt. Cynthia Lederer

Lt. Cmdr. Erin MacDonald
Lt. Beth Naff
Lt. Brenda Roderig
Lt. Anna Slaven
Lt. j.g. Emily Tharp
Lt. Cmdr. Katherine Tionson
Lt. Kelley Tobey

MCPO Faurie Award

HS1 Sweet-Charity Bruno
PAC Marshalena Delaney
BMC Paula Jaklitsch
MSTCS Diane Lacumsky
YNCS Elizabeth Meyer
BM3 Shari Redelfs
AMT1 Vanessa Rodgers
YNCS Mary Strange
BM2 Trisha Wagner
YN2 Shawna Ward
MK1 Micha Wisniewski

Nominations for the Capt. Stratton Leadership Award for officers and the MCPO Faurie Leadership Award for enlisted members are solicited in May of each year via an ALCOAST message.

Leadership & Diversity

BEST PRACTICES

Six Leadership Lessons From a Diverse Cutter Crew

by Cmdr. Joseph M. Vojvodich, CGC Gentian, Miami

I have insisted during my entire Coast Guard career that the best place to learn about, value and practice diversity in the workplace is on a tour afloat. All walks of life are represented in a confined microcosm, where many individuals depend on each other for so much during long stretches of time.

Here on the Caribbean support tender, the CGC Gentian, our crew represents more than just a reflection of society. The Caribbean support tender is the

first and only U.S. ship dedicated to promoting cooperation with partner nations by visiting countries to conduct maritime training, maintenance assistance and logistics support. Of an authorized crew of 45, 16 service members represent seven foreign countries. We currently have crewmembers from Suriname, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, the Bahamas, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Panama on yearlong tours assigned as part of the permanent crew. In addition, we have had members on temporary assignments from Haiti,

Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Columbia and Venezuela live on board with us. Our U.S. Coast Guard members include people with various Asian, European and Latin American backgrounds. One member is a Cuban native who, as a young boy, fled on a boat from Fidel Castro's rule. Another member joined the Royal Navy at the age of 15 and served 11 years with the British before joining the U.S. Coast Guard. The *Gentian* has berthing for eight women, and in 2003, we received our first two female international crewmembers. As you would expect, among our members, we have wide variations in technical skills, cultures, languages, economic situations and culinary preferences.

While I do not believe in "magic formulas," I have observed the following factors having positive influences on the cutter's workplace.

Point #1: Everyone meets the same qualifications. Everyone goes through the same indoctrination and qualification process. Regardless of language skills, rank or nationality, everyone is expected to attain certain levels of qualifications by a certain time. "Handicaps" such as a lack of English proficiency or experience on large ships are not accepted as excuses but thought of as opportunities for sailors to help each other and members to acquire new skills.

Point #2: Make performance the basis for opportunity. We base our assignments on each person's qualifications and attitude towards at-

taining more responsibility. When supervisors provide opportunities regardless of ethnic group, culture or any other category of discrimination, the resulting workplace environment ultimately encourages everyone to try to achieve maximum success.

Point #3: Watch for policies that can cause unexpected resentment. For example, the wearing of uniforms, the simplest way to demonstrate organizational unity, can backfire when some people can wear highly desired uniform items that other people cannot. Pride in one's heritage, nation and service is important and necessary, but what does a cutter do with service members from eight different countries? Besides the simple and affordable unit T-shirt, any sailor can wear uniform items from another country. The cool blue camouflage pants that the Surinamese wear are no longer a way to demonstrate exclusivity because anyone can wear them.

Point #4: Invest in your people. Our operations officer is from the Dominican Republic. He is the first international officer to hold such a position on a Coast Guard cutter. He also led the first all-international onboard training team through Navy certification at Tailored Annual Cutter Training. When he reported aboard, he spoke little English, but his tour on the cutter helped him improve his English skills and we also sent him to formal language training. Now he is our "recruiting poster" for the Caribbean support tender.

Point #5: Pay attention to the basics. Everyone needs to be paid on time, fed adequately, housed appropriately and given feedback. Look at the finer points a little more closely and understand the needs of the crew. When the crew performs well, praise them and inform other chains of command, such as the ones from our partnered nations, in a timely manner.

Extra Point: You get what you put into it. I commend the more than 170 Caribbean support tender sailors, past and present, including the 45 international members and dozens of Coast Guardsmen on temporary duty, for their efforts to practice tolerance and embrace the uniqueness in one another since the cutter's inception in 1999. They live in tight quarters in challenging conditions. Our list of ports of call may sound like an itinerary for a cruise ship, but the days in port are often spent in the hot sun or in steamy engine rooms training and assisting our partner nations. We pull together to focus on meeting the objectives for each country visit, typically well over 20 a year. In almost every checkout interview, I hear a common theme. I am told this tour of duty was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. For the people who felt that way, I say their positive experiences are directly linked to their efforts to create a caring and effective workplace that gives everyone the same opportunity to succeed. ☒

For more information about the Caribbean support tender, go to www.uscg.mil/lantarea/cutter/gentian/.

LEADERSHIP ESSAY

Failing ... To Succeed

by BMCS Dennis Endicott, CGC Ouachita, Chattanooga, Tenn.

Given the choice, would you rather work with an individual that struggles to achieve qualifications, advancements, etc., or an individual that has never had a problem achieving any of his goals? Would you rather train the person that takes more than average time to learn or the person that picks things up easily without much effort? I'd rather work with the individual that struggles.

I watched an MK3 leave an oral board recently, in which he was trying to attain crewman qualification. He failed the board and was obviously very embarrassed and angry with himself. He had also struggled to achieve communications watchstander qualification a couple of months prior. But, just as he eventually qualified as a watchstander, I knew that he would also qualify as a crewman. I didn't feel confident because I had in-depth knowledge of his abilities. It was because I had seen him fail and then recover. His history of being able to struggle and recover from failure is an advantage that this young MK3 has over many of his peers.

Experience encompasses more than just positive encounters. Most of our learning is done through error—either our own or the errors of others. It is through the negative consequences of an action (failing a

board, sagging paint, a mistimed engine, etc.) that we grow as individuals. Confidence derived from a successful action does not begin to compare to the confidence resulting from turning a failure into a success.

I've seen Coasties sail along in their careers without ever encountering any kind of substantial hurdle.

I've seen people choose very difficult paths, volunteering for extra responsibility and difficult missions, and they did so without failing in any respect. Some of them will even retire with completely unblemished records. But if they have never fallen, how do we know that they are able to pick themselves up?

One day, that young MK3 is going to make an excellent chief, officer, etc. He's been tested and has risen to the challenge of defeating defeat. When he encounters a situation in the future for which he has not been prepared, we know that he will battle his way through the difficulties. He won't let the inevitable setbacks of dealing with the unex-

pected deter him. His untested peers, however, may not. Having never dealt with defeat or failure, they may simply give up. We simply don't know how they will react to a major setback because we have not seen them deal with any relatively

minor setbacks beforehand.

Compare this MK3 to a college freshman. During the freshman orientation

at almost any college, the main speaker will tell the audience to look to the person to their right and left. The chances are, they will say, one of those people won't be here at the beginning of the next year. How does that happen? In order to be sitting in that orientation, every freshman student had to demonstrate exceptional academic abilities and probably some amount of extracurricular activities. They proved themselves capable enough to enter the college environment. But many of them will not succeed. Why?

Why Struggling Can Be Good

One of the reasons lies in the shock of being challenged.

“The true mark of excellence is an individual's ability to struggle with his or her own shortcomings and eventually prevail.”

Many successful high school students do well without a struggle. Their studies come easy to them. They basically sail through those years with minimal effort. Then, when they are faced with the increased difficulty of college, they do not know how to handle their academic responsibilities properly. They are not used to being challenged, and many of them become discouraged and quit. Had they struggled more through high school, they would have expected difficulties in college and been better prepared to deal with them. Those that struggle always have an advantage over those that don't.

Struggle provides another advantage. It facilitates humility. Knowing that we have limitations provides the incentive and opportunity to seek mentors, accept criticism and improve. The person who never fails may limit or miss opportunities to expand his or her abilities. For example, if a young Coastie rises through the ranks without ever experiencing failure, he may cease to look to others for guidance. Instead, he will assume that no one is a better source of knowledge for decision-making and planning than himself and that his peers and perhaps the world at large have nothing to offer. His success will become limited.

“Pencil Point” Leadership Recognize Your Achievers by Writing Well

by Lt. Greg Thomas, Coast Guard Headquarters (G-WTL)

Last spring I had the honor of attending the commandant's annual State of the Coast Guard luncheon at Bolling Air Force Base in Washington, D.C. At this forum, a senior officer asked me what he should tell Coast Guard Academy cadets in an upcoming speech on leadership. I responded, “Tell them to learn how to write well and they will be better leaders through their ability to communicate needs and desired outcomes.” Some people regard leadership as an action. I feel that

this definition is incomplete. Leadership can and does come from the traditional role of leading by example, e.g., leading the troops into battle. However, leadership also comes from the written word. As we all know, a significant percentage of a leader's time is devoted towards informing, requesting, arguing and evaluating through the written medium in support of a project, mission or mandate. Therefore, it is just as important that leaders be able to communicate effectively in writing as it is to lead from the front.

The perception that continued success is a mark of excellence is not necessarily true. The true mark of excellence is an individual's ability to struggle with his or her own shortcomings and eventually prevail. I know that my struggling MK3 wishes he could achieve success as easily as some of the other junior petty officers at this station. But I prefer to see him face and conquer those challenges. I prefer to know that sometime in the future, when defeat seems imminent, he will pick himself up and carry on. That's the individual with whom I'd prefer to work.

We are going to face some unusual and unexpected challenges in the years to come that will undoubtedly frustrate our personnel. The people who will get us through those tough times will be the ones that have had experience dealing with them, such as my young MK3. If failure is the catalyst to growth, then a little setback is a good thing. ☒

“Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.” –Confucius

The reason I chose written communication skills as my answer to this officer's query was due to a recent experience I had at work. My last transfer brought me from graduate school at the University of San Diego to the Leadership and Professional Development Division at headquarters (G-WTL-2). My first project was coordinating the annual Witherspoon and McShan Inspirational Leadership awards. Our office received more than 50

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nominations for these prestigious awards, and it was truly an honor and a privilege to read the tremendous accomplishments of others. However, it was discouraging to read the substandard prose contained within a few nominations for deserving members. Therefore, I offer a few tips for future nominee writers:

Much like performance evaluations, nominations should reflect the impact and specificity of actions cited. Being able to articulate what the member accomplished, along with how it affected the unit, community or organization, is a must. Many nominations were vague about the impacts of accomplishments or what the accomplishments meant in tangible terms.

My second tip relates to how the award nomination should be written. Unlike performance evaluations, where space may be limited, in award nominations, do not sacrifice sentence structure and content for brevity.

Accomplishments should not be listed in short, abbreviated bullet points. Many of the nominations I read included laundry lists of operational and professional accomplishments, which are outstanding, but failed to include how the nominee exhibited leadership ability to achieve those accomplishments. The bottom line—take the time to thoroughly explain how the nominee succeeded.

My final word of advice is to write your nomination knowing that your words are spoken by the commandant and are forever etched in history. Make your text powerful, lasting and poignant. Doing this will serve your nominee well and demonstrate your abilities to provide “pencil point” leadership. ✕

Nominations for the Witherspoon Inspirational Leadership Award for officers and the McShan Inspirational Leadership Award for chiefs are solicited in November or December of each year via an ALCOAST message.

Inspired To Make a Difference

by Mary Helen Rainey, Coast Guard Headquarters (G-CBU)

As I fly high in the sky away from the Leadership Development Center, I realize there is so much I’m taking with me. When I was accepted into the Leadership Principles and Skills Course, I knew I was off for an adventure. The LDC is located at the Coast Guard Academy, in New London, Conn. As a civilian, this was the first time I had been to the academy and it turned out to be a great experience. The class is advertised by an ALCOAST message and is open to civilian employees (GS-12 to GS-14) and military officers (O4 and O5). The class is sponsored and paid for by the Reserve and Training Directorate (G-WT), so there is no cost to the students’ commands.

Our class was made up of talented present and future leaders with many different career backgrounds from around the country. The class makeup turned out to be the best asset of the training. The workplace is made up of people with very different characteristics, values, work ethics, strengths and weaknesses. Knowing how we act or react to others can make a world of difference in how we lead and follow.

Self-Awareness

The course included an examination of many self- and group-dynamic awareness models. Using these models helped us become more aware of how we act and how our actions might be

received by others (negatively or positively). Once a person knows how they react to difficult situations, they can more effectively deal with issues. As a class, we realized how different we were through the use of these models. We learned from one another, and as time went on, you could see people change their behaviors. These are some of the tools we used to learn about ourselves:

- Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation-Behavior instrument (provides feedback on how people behave with others and how you expect them to act towards you)

- Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (determines conflict management styles)
- Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (identifies personality types)

Chief of Staff Video Teleconference

A video teleconference with the chief of staff had a big impact on the class. We were impressed that Vice Adm. Allen personally took time with potential future leaders of the Coast Guard. Vice Adm. Allen asked us to “rethink how we think,” taking into consideration that the information that we receive is outdated almost as soon as we get it. He stressed the importance of collaborating with others, “as this enhances making the most of everyone’s time.” The class seemed encouraged to embrace some risk taking after they heard Vice Adm. Allen’s own experience, in which he said, “My boss tolerated me making mistakes and kept encouraging me to grow and learn. Vice Adm. Allen’s final advice was to “identify, value and compensate skills, and if you always do what’s right for the organization, you’ll do better.”

He concluded with a question and answer period, in which the class got to ask him whatever was on their minds. Some of the questions were as follows:

Q: How can we find out more information about the Coast Guard programs?

A: The Coast Guard has a pilot project to expand communications using a Coast Guard Web portal.

Q: What do you do if you have a bad boss?

A: Become everything your boss is not. Strive to complement, not duplicate, the boss.

Q: How can future leaders of the Coast Guard encourage taking risks?

A: I don’t mind if mistakes are made, but they must be made from good decisions along the way.

Group Discussions

Many group discussions and team assignments were included in the curriculum during the week. Some of the topics were interpersonal communications, ethical conflict, change management/leadership, emotional intelligence, leadership and motivational theories, and civilian human resources.

Lessons Learned

On a personal note, interacting with different people from the field showed me that there are some real communication disconnects between headquarters and field operations. Now I am inspired to help reconnect the link between these two areas, and I hope to make a positive difference in everything I do. The theme I will take with me from the class is, whether you lead or follow, what counts is, “Did you make a difference?” ☒

The Leadership Principles and Skills Course will be held June 21-25 and July 26-30, 2004. An ALCOAST message with application procedures will be released in FY04. To apply, submit a Request, Authorization, Agreement and Certification of Training (OPM Standard Form 182) to the address in the ALCOAST.

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Article Submissions

We need your articles on leadership and diversity issues and best practices. Article length should be 500 words or fewer.

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This newsletter is sent to every Coast Guard unit.
Please make sure everyone at your unit has the opportunity to read it.

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Devotion to Duty

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