

The Leadership News

A quarterly newsletter on leadership issues in the Coast Guard

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Achieving Gender Diversity on Small Cutters — It Can Be Done!

by BMCM William R. James, CGC Cochito, Norfolk, Va.

The newest classes of Coast Guard cutters are built to allow just about any mix of male and female crewmembers aboard. This allows women to serve at sea on a wider variety of ships and allows all to reap the benefits of a diverse crew. However, there are certain preparations, both physical and psychological, that need to be made to accommodate a mixed-gender crew on a small ship. During my command of two 87-foot patrol boats, I was fortunate to make the transition on both from all-male to mixed-gender crews. I offer the following lessons and observations to assist others in doing so.

In today's society, ship's crews, or anything else that is all-male or -female, is an anomaly ... it's just plain *normal* for there to be a mix of gender, age, culture, etc., in today's social and work settings. Certain military units are the last holdouts of the all-male crew, but even those are dwindling in number: Navy submarines (by policy) and small Coast Guard cutters seem to be about it. I can't speak for the Navy, but I believe we must open all Coast Guard units to every qualified Coast Guard member before we can be truly diverse. Of course, we must maintain single-gender zones where appro-

priate, such as locker rooms, bathrooms and berthing areas.

Despite the best intentions, changing to a mixed-gender crew can be problematic, but nothing beyond the abilities of the average motivated Coastie to solve.

Even the most open-minded men may have some concerns when they first learn women are to join the crew. Some of these concerns are based on the unknown, some on prejudice, some on scuttlebutt. No matter how silly some of them may seem, each concern is *real* to the person who holds it, and each needs to be addressed openly before women arrive. Here are some of the concerns I've heard and how I've responded to them:

"We'll have to change our habits."

True. The tenet for such change is reasonable accommodation to achieve the more important goals of diversity and equal opportunity. Gone are the days of dashing from your berthing area to the head in just your boxers — every crew member will be clothed when in a common space — at least with a robe. Everyone will lock the door to the shared head to avoid "surprises."

"We'll have to clean up our language and be careful about what movies we watch and magazines we read."

Maybe. The test I use is — if you would say it, watch it or share it with your sister, it's probably OK. But we all have our individual tolerances for salty language and explicit entertainment, and we need to consider each other's feelings, regardless of gender. I've never permitted pornography or sexually explicit material aboard ship in the first place, so that's not a "change" that can be "blamed" on the women.

"We may be open to false charges of sexual misconduct."

True. First off — don't do it, and you won't be guilty of it! I consistently and constantly stress *honesty* in all we say and do; appropriate, respectful be-

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havior to each other and obedience to rules are the most basic forms of honesty. If allegations are made, they will be investigated just like any other alleged offense and decisions will be made based *only* on sufficient and proper evidence. There will be no knee-jerk reactions simply because the alleged misdeeds are sexual in nature.

“Women can’t do all the work we do.”

Maybe. Each of us is different, with strengths and weaknesses that we all must recognize and make accommodations for. FN Fred is too big to fit under the engines, so he wipes down instead of cleaning the bilge. SN Sam can’t throw a heaving line to save him, so he works the bitt instead. One person can’t bring the anchor up on deck, so we assign two. Just like anyone, let’s see what the women can and can’t do before we make pre-judgments about their abilities.

“Our wives will be suspicious of us getting so close to other women.”

Maybe. Again — don’t do anything to be guilty of! Be honest — discuss this with your spouse, discuss the accommodations made, the necessity for gender diversity, the “hammer” to punish violators. Like always, introduce your family to your shipmates; let these two groups of people that are so central to your life get to know each other.

The best thing I’ve found about command is the chance to serve with, lead and develop the crew. It’s exciting, and even entertaining, to experience the transition from an all-male to a mixed-gender crew. With some forethought, preparation and an open mind, it can be the highlight of your tour. ✠

BMCM James has served aboard eight ships, including six patrol boats, during 12 years at sea.

Leadership Award Winners

Congratulations to two Coast Guard women who received leadership awards from the Women Officers Professional Association on July 21 in Washington, DC. WOPA is a national organization that supports the professional development of its Coast Guard, Navy and Marine Corps members.

LT Veronica Streitmatter of the CCG Acushnet in Ketchikan, Alaska, was given the CAPT Dorothy Stratton Leadership Award, which is awarded annually to one Coast Guard officer. As engineer officer, Streitmatter pursued innovations to the ship’s qualification processes and quality of life. She reworked the engineering watch routine to in-

clude a casualty drill once very watch, resulting in the completion of 190 basic engineering casualty control exercises and 18 qualified watch standers out of her 22-person department. Streitmatter sought out opportunities to develop her shipmates, including three leadership forums, which enhanced the participants’ leadership and followership abilities. The result has been increased teamwork and a decrease in the number of conduct issues by junior personnel. Her efforts to recognize her shipmates has led to the awarding of dozens of informal unit awards known as Acushnet Anchors, which are placed on sailors’ ball caps; team awards for 19 shipmates; 10 Commandant Letters of Commendation; and two Coast Guard Achievement Medals.

YNC Selinde Brock of Group/Air Station Astoria, Ore., received the MCPO Pearl Faurie Leadership Award, which is awarded annually to one enlisted Coast Guard woman. When Brock began her assignment as chief of the Personnel Reporting Unit, she faced serious challenges, including personnel problems and complaints from all of the nine major commands the PERSRU served. Brock immediately delved into the underlying issues causing the systemic poor performance. Her hands-on approach eliminated delays in several PERSRU systems, including pay, awards and the shipment of household goods. Many of these delays had been languishing for years. Brock demonstrated insightful leadership by holding her subordinates accountable while simultaneously showing compassion for their

needs. Her rare ability to combine these skills resulted in the delivery of vastly improved work products from the entire staff. Brock again showed her leadership acumen by then shifting from a hands-on man-

agement style to more of an oversight role, thus empowering the petty officers that worked for her and enabling them to develop their own leadership skills. ✠

Nominations for the Stratton and Faurie Leadership Awards are solicited in May of each year via an ALCOAST message.

“Searching” is Excellence

by CDR Joseph Vojvodich, Coast Guard Headquarters (CG-66)

For more than two decades, many industry experts have considered Tom Peter’s book, “In Search of Excellence,” the “bible” for American business management. The book presents management principles for excellence that are still true for successful companies today.

The Coast Guard and the former U.S. Life-Saving Service have known for well over 125 years that the principle of “searching” is excellence.

When a horrific storm in 1896 forced Keeper Richard Etheridge to discontinue routine beach patrols on Pea Island, N.C., due to high water, this bona fide Coast Guard hero and his men did not stop *searching* the coastline. Not by *looking*, but by *searching* — actively processing what the eye had seen — Surfman Theodore Meekins distinguished a faint distress flare and immediately reported it to Etheridge. The rest is history. Seven members of the Pea Island Life-Saving Station rescued nine individuals off the schooner E. S. Newman in perilous surf and were posthumously awarded the Gold Lifesaving Medal.

Successful Coast Guard people know the subtle distinction between

searching and *looking*. Many casual observers cannot tell the difference. Anyone can *look* through a pair of binoculars, gazing into the vast horizon. But the person who *searches* is actively engaged, straining to make out silhouettes in the darkness or movements in the seas. It is this level of commitment that produces excellence.

Two years ago, the Caribbean support tender, the CGC Gentian, participated in an exercise with three other vessels from different countries. The go-fast detection exercise pitted a blockade of four vessels against a pursuit boat. Amazingly, the Dominican Republic ship was the only one to detect the mock trafficker, while the vessels with state-of-the-art radars and night vision scopes failed to identify the target. The Dominicans had “willed” themselves to success. Every available sailor was topside searching for any signs of the go-fast. Clearly, national pride was on the line, and the search became personal.

Searching is not restricted to the flying bridge. In the book, “Character in Action: The U.S. Coast Guard on Leadership,” authors Donald Phillips and retired ADM James Loy provide an account of a young ma-

chinery technician named Mark who wrapped himself around a hole in a burst fuel line on board a cutter during a refueling at sea. Why did Mark make himself into a human bandage and put his life on the line? He was deeply engaged in his duties. In an instant, he searched and found a way to save the ship. He knew if fuel sprayed onto the hot engines, the cutter would have had a disastrous emergency.

No single aspect of leadership will promote the principle of searching. Leadership by example, empowerment, praise in public, effective communication and many other sound leadership practices will encourage more searching and less looking.

Meekins could just as easily have dismissed the readily undistinguishable sighting on that 1896 night, and nobody would have known that he suspected a flare. Our legacy of personal commitment binds us to the heroes of the past. Searching for migrants, smugglers, the distressed, or a better way to do business — this is the Coast Guard’s principle for excellence. ✠

The Coast Guard recently filmed a reenactment of this historic event to showcase the monumental effort of the well-trained Pea Island crew. The video is projected for distribution during 2005.

Leadership Tips from the Deck Plate

by HS3 Michael Long, Air Station Port Angeles, Wash.

Usually we turn to leadership experts or gurus when we want to learn what makes a good leader. These experts are usually senior people with years of managerial experience. It is rare that junior people give advice on leadership. I think it is important for leaders to broaden their perspectives and think about what the people who work for them consider as important leadership qualities.

Here is a list of traits that those of us at the deck plate level would like from our leaders.

- **Listening.** Be open to listening to your people and guide them if necessary.
- **Respect.** Treat the people who work for you the same way you treat your boss or your peers.
- **Leadership by example.** Your people will have more respect, appreciation and loyalty for you if they know that you are willing to do tasks with them if needed.
- **Communication.** This is the glue of any good relationship. Clearly explain commands, ensure they are understood, and then follow their progress.
- **Inspiration.** An inspired worker will do the very best they can at every opportunity. Ignite the souls of your people to achieve greatness far beyond what you or they imagined possible.
- **Direction.** Know your goals. A leader without direction is like a cutter without a compass.

Share your vision with your people; it makes them feel included and more likely to work toward your goals.

- **Knowledge of your people's talents.** Give them opportunities within their areas of strength to help them be successful.
- **Practicality.** Don't set your expectations of your people so high that they cannot be achieved.
- **Loyalty.** Never put yourself before those who work for you.
- **Pride.** It is imperative for a leader to love what they do. Without pride, your work suffers.
- **Honesty.** Without integrity, it will be difficult for people to trust you.
- **Courage.** Never avoid challenging experiences that might test you.
- **Empathy.** It is important for your people to feel that you are concerned about them instead of feeling that they are just a body that can be easily replaced.
- **Commanding presence.** Demonstrate leadership with a purpose. Know how to accomplish tasks.
- **Resilience.** If you fail at a task, do not let its failure control your next attempt.
- **Teamwork and collaboration.** Everyone has ideas, but your people may not have a platform in which to share them. Don't miss out on the promise of innovative ideas.
- **Sense of humor.** This shows your people that you are only human.

A great leader is someone who inspires the right qualities and moti-

ations from those who work with them and for them. If you are strong in the above traits, you will get the most from your people, the true mark of an excellent leader. ✘

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Article Submissions

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

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LEADERSHIP ESSAY

Old Guard ... New Guard ... Coast Guard

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

“That man is definitely old Guard!”

“Well, that’s the new Guard for you!”

I’d bet that most of you have heard versions of these quotes. Describing something or someone as “old Guard” or “new Guard” is a pretty frequent occurrence. Perhaps you have even been tagged as one or the other. What do these terms signify, and are they positive or negative?

I attended a retirement ceremony recently, where a senior chief celebrated thirty years of exemplary service. Nearing the end of his speech, he made a point to address the district Command Master Chief (who sat in the audience) directly. He said that there was no such thing as old Guard or new Guard. He was in the Coast Guard, pure and simple.

Evidently, the senior chief and the CMC had had conversations about the senior chief’s old Guard approach in this new Coast Guard. The senior chief was known as a hard man. He could be harsh with his crew, unyielding with his superiors and a bit of an egomaniac. However, he was also one of the most knowledgeable and experienced people in his field, a reliable source for the unvarnished truth and a perfectionist. I believe that an impartial party would probably define him as a man of contradic-

tions. Even so, why did that categorize him as old Guard?

I’ve observed that people labeled as old Guard have some common personality and professional traits. They are resistant to change, pessimistic and skeptical. They tend to form their leadership and management practices around proven techniques and look to results over processes. We find them predominately in operational billets where decisiveness and timeliness of action are critical to success. They don’t often reflect on their methods, and when they do, their objective has more to do with mission accomplishment than personnel or resource management.

On the surface, many of these traits appear to be counter to the service’s expectations of its personnel. How can resistance to change, pessimism and skepticism be anything but faults?

Let’s look at how they develop. First, our operational people are trained to be pessimistic. During their years underway, they participate in countless drills preparing for the day when fire will break out or the ship will be sinking. During their years ashore, they stand countless watches waiting for the distress call that will eventually come. They sail in ships and boats that carry re-

dundant safety features and participate in boarding teams where every member is paired with another. They work in a dangerous environment where death overshadows all. They constantly prepare for the worst. They know from experience that poor preparation can kill — both those who they are charged to protect and their own. Optimism is a luxury that they can ill afford to have. They have saved lives being pessimists ... even their own.

They have also come to believe that an unproven idea or individual is a danger to everyone. Because there are time constraints when performing our missions, these individuals are afforded very little opportunity to spend validating new leadership and management theories — especially regarding their own personnel. Everyone at an operational unit has to carry their own weight — all of the time. They are skeptical of theories that are based on surveys or study groups rather than the time-tested methods that have been passed down from one generation of Coasties to another. They believe that the field is no place for experimentation.

The old Guard approach is pitted against a new Guard camp of reformers. The new Guard includes

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personnel in all pay grades, ranks and experience levels that search for a better way to do the Coast Guard's business. They utilize graphs, statistics and surveys, and the foundation for their approaches springs from inspirational management and leadership theories and doctoral theses. They are driven to improve the process of leadership and management. To them, *how* a mission is accomplished is as important as *if* the mission is accomplished. Although they can be found in all types of billets, their jobs are generally not operational. They tend to be somewhat removed from actual field units. And, in today's environment, they are very people-oriented.

So, is one approach better than the other? I think not.

Much of the progress we have seen in personnel management — including educational opportunities, pay, benefits and improvements in work environments — is due to this new Guard camp. Their efforts have resulted in some very tangible improvements in the service.

The old Guard camp has also had significant successes. Most of the front-page headlines that regale the public with heroic or seemingly impossible feats are due to these operational men and women. Their ability to get the job done, under any kind of circumstances, is the mainstay of our service's excellent reputation.

Their successes, however, don't seem to mitigate the friction that exists between the two groups. There was a very obvious resentment between that senior chief and the CMC. The senior chief was angry at being criticized for his methods, and the CMC was annoyed that the senior chief couldn't see his point of view. I think, however, that the senior chief had the right idea. He didn't profess himself to be old Guard. In fact, he said there was no such thing. I've found this difference in perception to be consistent among others to whom I've talked.

By labeling the senior chief as old Guard, the CMC was in fact defining himself as new Guard and implying that the latter was preferable to the former. I believe that he was wrong in a couple of respects.

Prudence and Cynicism

First, the terms "old" and "new" Guard are simply ways to view the growing process that the Coast Guard is constantly undergoing. The service is always changing. New mission requirements, social and political trends, standard of living expectations, etc., all require that we reevaluate our methods and procedures and adapt ourselves accordingly. Our new Guard reformers are critical in this regard. They are looking forward, weighing alternatives and setting our future path. But their enthusiasm and desire to improve the service has to be tempered by prudence and cynicism. Our old Guard camp provides this service. Their pessimism and resistance to change adds a brake to the growing process that keeps this ser-

vice from sailing full speed into uncharted waters. The struggle between old Guard and new Guard could really be a check-valve in halting a bad decision. An unchallenged change could be counter-productive and life threatening. As an organization, we must always remember that new ideas and policies are not necessarily better ... they're just newer. Only time and careful implementation will prove their worth.

Secondly, by criticizing the senior chief's approach, the CMC marginalized his contributions. His unit was not successful despite his approach ... it was successful because of it. Effective unit leadership is often at odds with progressive personnel management. Although, we would all like to be able to balance mission needs with personnel needs, the mission must always come first. The senior chief knew this. I'm not sure that the CMC did.

And finally, if we refer to people like the senior chief in such a derogatory way and discount the contribution that his pessimistic, skeptical approach brings to this organization, we could lead him to believe that he has no place in today's Coast Guard. Can you imagine this service if our most experienced leaders decided to leave because they felt out of touch? We have recognized a problem with juniority. How will we solve it if people like the senior chief are minimalized by thought or policy? If we propel ourselves into the future without holding onto some part of our past, we are very likely to overshoot our goal. Enthusiasm

to make things better should not overshadow the proven methods (and people) that have been accomplishing our missions for decades. We need to have people like the senior chief grab this service by the arm and slow things down just a little bit. We need the

practicality that he developed over his tenure. We need his maturity. If we make people like the senior chief feel as if they are outdated and out of touch, we do them and ourselves a great disservice. We forgo the “brake” that this service needs to achieve excellence, and we

disrespect an individual that is greatly responsible for the level of excellence that we currently enjoy.

The senior chief was correct. He was not old Guard or new Guard. He was in the Coast Guard ... pure and simple. ❖

Asking “Why?” — A Simple Question with Big Results

by LCDR Darryl Verfaillie, MSO Pittsburgh

I think we would all agree that these are dynamic times for the U. S. Coast Guard. From post 9/11 events, to our transition to the Department of Homeland Security, we remain focused on ensuring the readiness of our service and the security of our country. Through it all, the dedication and perseverance of our people have remained at a constant high state. Neither extended deployments nor a grueling personnel tempo has kept our people from continuing to answer the call and keep our homeland secure.

During these busy times, it is easy to lose focus on professional development while concentrating on the immediate task at hand. Supervisors need to ensure that we continue to encourage personal and professional growth in our people. In the current environment of short-fused tasks and personnel shortfalls, it is far too easy to overlook opportunities for our people to provide input and formulate solutions not readily apparent. Instead, we may unknowingly allow time constraints to make us dependent on the precedent set in place by those before us, rarely asking our folks *why* we have always done a certain thing a certain way.

Asking “why” forces our team to think outside the boundaries of “the way it’s always been done” and challenges each person to become an expert within his or her mission area. By asking the question “why” and asking for recommendations on issues that arise — be it from the officer of the day or the duty petty officer — we encourage our people to develop critical thinking skills necessary for day-to-day problem solving. By en-

couraging our teams to commit to individual problem solving, we provide the command with a fresh view on situations and issues. I clearly recall being a young LTJG serving as the command duty officer and briefing the executive officer on various issues. I was told that I should never bring a problem to the command without also presenting a viable recommendation for a solution. As a result, I would always try to ensure that I not only had a recommended solution, but an alternate recommendation as well, and whether accepted or rejected by the command, I felt some ownership in the process.

Through the years, I have tried to adhere to this mindset and now, as an XO myself, I have the opportunity to question “why” and to look for answers beyond what was once considered the norm. I take responsibility for the professional training and development of my team, and whether I accept or reject recommendations brought to me, I have increased confidence in those who have taken the initiative to think through the process rather than presenting the command with yet another issue to resolve.

Of course, supervisors owe it to their people to clearly define their expectations ahead of time. If you are going to use this technique, you must tell your people that this is part of your “leadership style,” rather than catch them off guard the first time they come to you with a problem. You can use the opportunities that already exist, morning muster, quarters, all-hands, staff meetings, etc., to send the message that we all have ownership in the process. ❖

New Civilian Leadership Award

A new award to recognize one inspirational civilian leader annually is being established. At press time, a name for the award was being considered. Watch for an ALCOAST in November or December seeking nominations for the first selection of this prestigious, new award.

Honor



Respect



Devotion to Duty

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