

Coast Guard Leadership Competencies

Leadership competencies are the knowledge, skills, and expertise the Coast Guard expects of its leaders. The 28 leadership competencies are keys to career success. Developing them in all Coast Guard people will result in the continuous improvement necessary for us to remain always ready — Semper Paratus. While there is some overlap in these competencies, they generally fall within four broad categories, described below:

Leading Self

Fundamental to successful development as a leader is an understanding of self and one's own abilities. This includes understanding one's personality, values, and preferences, while simultaneously recognizing one's potential as a Coast Guard member.

Leading Others

Leadership involves working with and influencing others to achieve common goals. Coast Guard members interact with others in many ways, whether as supervisor, mentor, manager, team member, team leader, peer, or worker. Positive professional relationships provide a foundation for the success of our Service. Developing the competencies within this category will increase the capacity to serve.

Leading Performance and Change

The Coast Guard and its members constantly face challenges in mission operations. To meet these challenges, leaders must apply performance competencies to their daily duties. Having these competencies enables each leader — and the Service — to perform to the utmost in any situation.

Leading the Coast Guard

The Coast Guard does not exist in a vacuum. As leaders gain experience in the Coast Guard, they must understand how it fits into a broader structure of department, branch, government, and the nation as a whole. At a local level, leaders often develop partnerships with public and private sector organizations in order to accomplish the mission. The Coast Guard “plugs in” via its key systems: money, people, and technology. A leader must thoroughly understand these systems and how they interact with similar systems outside the Coast Guard. An awareness of the Coast Guard's value to the nation, and promoting that using a deep understanding of the political system in which we operate becomes more important as one gets more senior. Leaders must develop coalitions and partnerships with allies inside and outside the Coast Guard.

28 Leadership Competencies

Category: Leading Self

Accountability and Responsibility

Coast Guard leaders know ours is a military service and recognize the organizational structure and the chain of command. Each individual is sensitive to the impact of his or her behavior on others and the organization. Leaders take ownership for their areas of responsibility, are accountable to effectively organize and prioritize tasks, and efficiently use resources. Regulations and guidelines that govern accountability and responsibility allow leaders to use appropriate formal tools to hold others accountable when situations warrant.

Followership

All Coast Guard members are followers. The followership role encompasses initiative, commitment, responsibility, accountability, critical thinking, and effective communications. Followers look to leaders for guidance and feedback; they expect challenging tasks to both learn and develop competence. Actively involved, they seek to understand through listening, responsible questioning and feedback. Followers have the responsibility to work with leaders to ensure successful mission accomplishment.

Self Awareness and Learning

Coast Guard leaders are self-objective. They continually work to assess self and personal behavior, seek and are open to feedback to confirm strengths and identify areas for improvement, and are sensitive to the impact of their behavior on others. Successful leaders use various evaluation tools and indicators to assist in this process of understanding themselves. Coast Guard leaders understand that leadership and professional development is a life-long journey and always work to improve knowledge, skills, and expertise. To that end, they seek feedback from others and opportunities for self-learning and development, always learning from their experiences. Leaders guide and challenge subordinates and peers, encouraging individuals to ask questions and be involved. Leaders are open to and seek new information and adapt their behavior and work methods in response to changing conditions.

Aligning Values

Coast Guard leaders develop and maintain an understanding of the Coast Guard Core Values of Honor, Respect and Devotion to Duty. Leaders align personal values with organizational values, reconciling any differences that exist. Leaders embody the highest standards of Coast Guard Core Values, can communicate their meaning, hold peers and subordinates accountable to these organizational merits, and use them to guide performance, conduct, and decisions—every day.

Health and Well-Being

Leaders consider the environment in which they and their people work, attending to safety and well-being. They effectively identify and manage stress. They set a personal health example with emphasis on a program of physical fitness and emotional strength. Leaders encourage others to develop personal programs including physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

Personal Conduct

Leaders demonstrate belief in their own abilities and ideas; are self-motivated, results-oriented, and accountable for their performance; recognize personal strengths and weaknesses; emphasize personal character development; and use position and personal power appropriately. They understand the relevance and importance of Coast Guard Core Values and strive for personal conduct that exemplifies these values.

Technical Proficiency

Coast Guard leaders' technical knowledge, skills, and expertise allow them to effectively organize and prioritize tasks and use resources efficiently. Always aware of how their actions contribute to overall organizational success, leaders demonstrate technical and functional proficiency. They maintain credibility with others on technical matters and keep current on technological advances in professional areas. Successful leaders work to initiate actions and competently maintain systems in their area of responsibility.

Category: Leading Others

Effective Communications

Coast Guard leaders communicate effectively in both formal and informal settings. Good listeners, they reinforce the message they convey with supportive mannerisms. Leaders express facts and ideas succinctly and logically, facilitate an open exchange of ideas, ask for feedback routinely, and communicate face-to-face whenever possible. They write clear, concise, and organized correspondence and reports. Successful leaders prepare and deliver effective presentations. In situations requiring public speaking they deliver organized statements, field audience questions, confidently communicate with the media and other external entities, and distinguish between personal communication situations and those as a Coast Guard representative. Competent coaches, supervisors, followers, performance counselors, interviewers, and negotiators, leaders know how to approach many situations to achieve organizational goals.

Influencing Others

Coast Guard leaders possess the ability to persuade and motivate others to achieve the desired outcome: to create change. They influence and persuade by communicating, directing, coaching, and delegating, as the situation requires. Successful leaders understand the importance and relevance of professional relationships, develop networks, gain cooperation and commitment from others, build consensus, empower others by sharing power and responsibility, and establish and maintain rapport with key players.

Respect for Others and Diversity Management

Through trust, empowerment, and teamwork, Coast Guard leaders create an environment that supports diverse perspectives, approaches and thinking, fairness, dignity, compassion, and creativity. They demonstrate sensitivity to cultural diversity, race, gender, background, experience, and other individual differences in the workplace. Leaders guide and persuade others to see the value of diversity, building and maintaining a healthy working environment.

Team Building

Leaders recognize and contribute to group processes; encourage and facilitate cooperation, pride, trust, and group identity; and build commitment, team spirit, and strong relationships. Coast Guard leaders inspire, guide, and create an environment that motivates others toward goal accomplishment; consider and respond to others' needs, feelings, and capabilities; and adjust their approach to suit various individuals and situations. Coast Guard leaders have a historical perspective of leadership theory that they continually develop through personal experience and study of contemporary leadership issues. They work with subordinates to develop their leadership knowledge and skills. Coast Guard leaders adapt leadership styles to a variety of situations and personify high standards of honesty, integrity, trust, openness, and respect for others by applying these values and styles to daily behavior.

Taking Care of People

Successful leaders identify others' needs and abilities in the Coast Guard, particularly subordinates'. They ensure fair, equitable treatment; project high expectations for subordinates and/or their teams; express confidence in abilities; recognize efforts; and use reward systems effectively and fairly. Leaders appropriately support and assist in professional and personal situations and use formal programs to resolve situations positively.

Mentoring

Drawing on their experience and knowledge, leaders deliberately assist others in developing themselves, provide objective feedback about leadership and career development, and help identify professional potential, strengths, and areas for improvement. Successful leaders identify with the role of mentor to their staff. They have the skill to advise and develop others in the competencies needed to accomplish current and future goals. Leaders seek out mentors for themselves and may be engaged in the formal Coast Guard mentoring program both as mentors and mentees.

Category: Leading Performance and Change

Customer Focus

Coast Guard leaders know who their customers are and make every possible effort to find out their customers' needs and to hear their customers' voices. Leaders understand the importance of measuring and monitoring the degree to which their customers' needs are met or exceeded and continually strive to improve that. Coast Guard leaders understand the distinction between "customer" and "boss" and act accordingly to balance competing demands.

Management and Process Improvement

Successful leaders demonstrate the ability to plan, organize, and prioritize realistic tasks and responsibilities for themselves and their people. They use goals, milestones, and control mechanisms for projects. Leaders seek, anticipate, and meet customers' needs—internal and external. To achieve quality results, Coast Guard leaders monitor and evaluate progress and outcomes produced by current processes, ensure continuous improvement through periodic assessment, and are committed to improving products, services, and overall customer satisfaction. They effectively manage time and resources to successfully accomplish goals.

Decision Making and Problem Solving

Leaders identify and analyze problems; use facts, input from others, and sound reasoning to reach conclusions; explore various alternative solutions; distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information; perceive the impact and implications of decisions; and commit to action, even in uncertain situations, to accomplish organizational goals. They evaluate risk levels, create risk control alternatives, and implement risk controls. Successful leaders are able to isolate high-importance issues, analyze pertinent information, involve others in decisions that affect them, generate promising solutions, and consistently render judgments with lasting, positive impact.

Conflict Management

Coast Guard leaders facilitate open communication of controversial issues while maintaining relationships and teamwork. They effectively use collaboration as a style of managing contention; confront conflict positively and constructively to minimize impact to self, others, and the organization; and reduce conflict and build relationships and teams by specifying clear goals, roles, and processes.

Creativity and Innovation

Leaders develop new insights into situations and apply innovative solutions to make unit and functional improvements. Leaders create a work environment that encourages creative thinking and innovation. They take reasonable risks and learn from the inevitable mistakes that accompany prudent risk-taking—and they apply this same thinking to those who work for them, encouraging innovation and helping their people apply the lessons learned. Leaders design and implement new or cutting-edge programs and processes.

Vision Development and Implementation

Leaders are able to envision a preferred future for their units and functions, setting this picture in the context of the Coast Guard's overall vision, missions, strategy, and driving forces. Concerned with long-term success, leaders establish and communicate organizational objectives and monitor progress toward objectives; initiate action; and provide structure and systems to achieve goals. Leaders create a shared vision of the organization, promote wide ownership, manage and champion organizational change, and engineer changes in processes and structure to improve organizational goal accomplishment.

Category: Leading the Coast Guard

Stewardship

The Coast Guard's unofficial motto was once, "You have to go out – but you don't have to come back!" This bravado was a testament to the bravery and commitment to service of Coast Guard men and women. But a more appropriate motto might be, "You have to go out, and you have to come back, and you have to bring our resources back because we'll need them again tomorrow!" Performing the mission at ANY cost is an unacceptable risk, not only to those immediately involved, but to all those who would have benefited from the efforts of those people and their resources tomorrow, and next week, and next year. Protecting the nation's investment is important and presents a difficult decision when it means failing now in order to succeed tomorrow. Achieving the proper balance is a crucial element of leading.

Technology Management

Technological advances make it possible to improve mission performance, provided prudent investments are made up front. Coast Guard leaders use efficient and cost-effective approaches to integrate technology into the workplace and improve program effectiveness. Leaders develop strategies using new technology to enhance decision-making. They fully appreciate the impact of technological changes on the organization.

Financial Management

The Coast Guard's budget and financial management systems are analogous to a nervous system. Leaders must demonstrate broad understanding of the principles of financial management and marketing expertise necessary to ensure appropriate funding levels for their areas of responsibility. They prepare, justify, and/or administer the budget for the unit or program; use cost-benefit thinking to set priorities; and monitor expenditures in support of programs and policies. Leaders seek and identify cost-effective approaches and manage procurement and contracting appropriately.

Human Resource Management

Coast Guard leaders understand and support the civilian and military staffing systems and assess current and future staffing needs based on organizational goals and budget realities. Making decisions that are merit-based, they ensure their people are appropriately selected, developed, trained, assigned, evaluated, and rewarded. Leaders take corrective action when needed. They guide and mentor others in appropriate interaction with these system elements. Leaders support personnel completing requirements for advancement, special programs, or future assignment; recognize positive performance and development through the formal reward system; and assist others in requesting formal training or developmental assignments.

Partnering

The Coast Guard exists within a broader envelope of partners and stakeholder organizations. Leaders must develop networks and build alliances, engaging in cross-functional activities where it makes sense. Leaders collaborate across boundaries and find common ground with a widening range of stakeholders at the local and national level and use their contacts to build and strengthen internal bases of support.

External Awareness

Leaders identify and keep up to date on key national and international policies and economic, political, and social trends that affect the organization. Coast Guard leaders understand near-term and long-range plans and determine how best to be positioned to achieve the advantage in an increasingly competitive national economic climate.

Entrepreneurship

Leaders seek and identify opportunities to develop and market new products and services within or outside of the Coast Guard. Leaders are willing to take risks and initiate actions that involve a deliberate risk to achieve a recognized benefit or advantage.

Political Savvy

Coast Guard leaders identify the internal and external politics that impact the work of the Coast Guard and the Department. Leaders approach each problem situation with a clear perception of organizational and political reality and recognize the impact of alternative courses of action.

Strategic Thinking

Coast Guard leaders react to crises immediately and routinely solve urgent problems. In keeping with the concepts described as Stewardship, Coast Guard leaders must also consider multiple time horizons and very complex interactions. This requires thinking strategically, which consists of adopting a systems view, focusing on intent—what are we really trying to accomplish?, thinking across time horizons, creating and testing hypotheses, and being intelligently opportunistic—taking advantage of current conditions.