

# Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Bob Papp's Closing Remarks

at the

Coast Guard Innovation 2011 Expo in Tampa, Florida

October 27, 2011

Good Afternoon Shipmates,

And, Good Afternoon to my Shipmates who have “tuned in” via the world wide web!

Has it been a great couple of days or what?

And, what have made the past couple of days so great are some outstanding shipmates.

So, I'd like to start off by thanking just a few of them.

Thank you General Farrell and NDIA for continuing this outstanding partnership.

Captain Sherri Dickinson, Commanding Officer of Sector St. Petersburg.

Captain John Turner, Commanding Officer of Air Station Clearwater.

And, the many other local commands, who provided the support that made this event possible -- from the use of their facilities to making their people available to serve as the color guard, assist with receptions, and the thousands of many other important tasks taking place behind the scenes – you made it look effortless – but we know from experience it takes a lot of effort to look effortless...so thank you!

I am always inspired being surrounded like great shipmates like you – but it is especially inspiring when these shipmates are collectively working together to make our Coast Guard better. Stronger. And at the expo that means greener. More efficient. And, like the theme states, Steering the Course for Enduring Excellence.

Believe it or not, before I learned the theme of this year's conference I had written down one word in my notes as a theme for my remarks. Excellence. Coincidence? I think not! Excellence -- is precisely what we will need to sustain our service into the coming decade, and really into what is our third century of service to the nation.

But excellence is a bit of a broad term.

If you recall, in my opening remarks I alluded to one of my favorite quotes...

It comes from the legendary football coach Vince Lombardi...

"We are going to relentlessly chase perfection knowing full well we will not catch it, because nothing is perfect. But we are going to relentlessly chase it because in the process we will catch excellence."

He ended by saying, "I am not remotely interested in just being good."

I want to expound upon this a bit more this morning. Not because it's football season. And, certainly not because the Green Bay Packers are undefeated. But because to me, Coach Lombardi's last phrase, "I am not remotely interested in just being good," is the type of excellence we will need to sustain our service through these challenging times.

Coach Lombardi's quote is not just inspirational words. It is about being better than you ever thought you could be. This takes Commitment. Attitude. Total dedication. And most importantly, teamwork.

Coach Lombardi made it clear that the bar was not just set high – it was set at the highest level.

To me, this is an excellent message for our service. And an enduring one.

We cannot afford to be just good. Especially not in these challenging times.

I hear a lot of what I call the "Triple D" – Doom, Despair and Decline.

But what we really need are a lot more innovators like you. With Honor. Enthusiasm. Resiliency. And Optimism. Which, by the way spells HERO. We need more HEROs like you to knock out the Triple Ds!

And you have been HEROs this week by pursuing perfection. Perfection in efficiency. perfection in affordability. And perfection in ingenuity.

You infused this week with your HERO attitude! We just saw some of it here in the innovators we recognized on stage... I see it in the many faces in the crowd...and I certainly saw it in the many faces I met walking the expo floor...

People like 1/c Kenneth Miltenberger interning with the National Security Agency...under the tutelage of visiting NSA Professor Dr. Brett Sovereign teaching at our Academy to equip our future officers with the knowledge and experience they will need to confront Cyber Security – one of our newest and most technically demanding challenges...

And, people like Cadets 2/c Katie Schumacher, 1/c Justine Morrison and 1/c Blackburn who are actively working to instill a culture of sustainability in the cadet corps through the Green Guardian initiative...

It shows me that this expo has truly become an incubator for ideas...out on that floor many of the exhibits were not just presentations...they were solutions...solutions to real operational problems...

But it also shows me something has changed. When the operational community encountered challenges, it is no longer just calling back to headquarters. Today, they're calling innovators. Partners. And thought leaders like you to assist them in tackling their most pressing challenges!

I am told word has gotten out in the field, that when you encounter a problem, you call "Doc" Foley back at the Academy and he'll assemble a team to help you!

That shows me we've moved our innovation needle from incremental innovation towards more disruptive innovation...but most importantly it demonstrates to me that we have instilled a strong culture of innovation in our service...

And this culture resides in and runs from our youngest members in the cadet corps...to some of our more mature members in the auxiliary whose innovation floor exhibit featured their social media strategy so they can tweet out...that's right tweet out...as they say, not just news about boating safety, but news and a lesson!

Now, a lot of booths were handing out some good swag...as we call it...so I also looked around for who had the best swag...water bottles, pens, and flashlights were popular...and some more than others...but, I have to say the Chaplains' booth won hands down...they were handing out not just swag, but sacraments!

You'll recall that when Ms. Julie Anixter spoke to us, she emphasized the importance of a, "Core metaphor" – the one image that says it all about your organization or Service...she choose the Cutter Healy because to her it represented the Coast Guard out there on the edge protecting, responding and rescuing...and conducting our challenging maritime missions under adverse circumstances...

Well, for me, the image that represents our, "Core metaphor," is on the cover of my Commandant's Direction...

I choose this photo for the cover of my, "Commandant's Direction," because it depicts an ever-vigilant, tireless Coast Guardsmen standing the watch...protecting people on the sea, protecting against threats from the sea, and even protecting the sea itself...

And to me, what your work this week has done is equip this ever-vigilant watchstander with even better tools to do their job. For that, I cannot thank you enough.

Your job now is to take this same HERO spirit that is so prevailing at the expo, and bring it back to your units, your organizations and your people. You need to continue your pursuit of excellence there with the same passion you brought here. And, most importantly – like Vince Lombardi, you need to set your innovation bar high, and not be remotely interested in accepting anything less!

Thank you. Semper Paratus.

Oh. Wait. Wait a minute now. As the late Steve Jobs was fond of saying, there is just one more thing...One more thing I forgot to do...Could Captain Joe Re please come forward...Captain Re has been putting on this expo for 11 years now...11 years...and, sadly this year is his last one as he has decided to transition to a second career. He has nurtured this expo from what was a small spark during its debut at the Coast Guard Academy...which he likes to describe as a small science fair...to the brilliant beacon for innovation that it is today...

Of course, when I hinted that he might be recognized in my opening remarks, you know what the first thing he did was?

He approached my staff and said, “If Admiral Papp is intent on recognizing me, please ensure he also recognizes all the hard work that my staff, and particularly Cmdr. Hugh Griffiths, my long-time expo assistant, are also recognized for their efforts...as I could not have done it without them.” That’s the mark of a great shipmate. And, that’s just what Capt. Joe Re has been. He’s infused this Expo with his honor, enthusiasm, resiliency and optimism – and he’s made it great!

Thank you Capt. Joe Re.