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National VP for Junior Officers

The following article has been published with permission from its author, CAPT Billy Martin, Commanding Officer, NRC Memphis. Thank you, CAPT Martin.

The Navy has directed that every command establish a mentorship program along with a governing instruction. This instruction is in the works, as we speak, and is spearheaded by two talented officers (CAPT Jack Crockett, the CO of PERS-6 Unit and CAPT Dave Gates, the former CO of Recruiting Support Unit). You will be hearing more about this program in the coming months. Nevertheless, it gives me an opportunity to say a few words about the tradition of mentorship, which is essential and necessary to good leadership and must be present in any command that has any expectation of being successful.

To the Ancient Greeks a “mentor” was a “loyal friend or wise advisor – a trusted guardian and teacher.” We find the first mentor in the story of the *Odyssey*, a book written by an author named Homer. In this book, Homer imparts the story of Mentor (a wise and trusted friend) who was asked to guard the household of Odysseus, who must leave his family to fight in the Trojan Wars. Mentor meets her obligations by successfully watching over the kingdom and becomes a trusted guardian and teacher to Odysseus’ son. (In actuality, Mentor was the Goddess Athena, in disguise.)

Like Mentor, ALL of us are called to serve as an example and a guardian to those we serve and with whom we work. I do not know what guiding principles CAPT Gates and CAPT Crockett have in mind for our Mentoring Instruction. However, I do not have to try very hard to

Mentoring Is Synonymous with Good Leadership

conjure up what it would entail to serve as a successful mentor and the benefits derived for all concerned in any given command.

A mentor should be concerned with his/her “apprentice’s” professional development, training, personal welfare, and individual readiness. In definitive terms, a mentor would ensure that evaluations and fitness reports were submitted on time, that individuals were appropriately recognized when warranted and deserved, were suitably trained with the proper schooling, were provided time and access to Professional Development Boards (PDBs) and subject to the wisdom of its members, and were accurately considered to take advancement exams when expected. Regardless of what our final instruction asserts, good mentorship is indistinguishable from good leadership.

Our nation’s defenders (our personnel) deserve our very best leadership and mentorship. You may recall my past comments on the CNO’s notion of covenant leadership . . . leaders and their subordinates make promises to each other – we promise (to each other) a personal commitment to mission accomplishment – in turn, leaders promise their personal commitment to the growth and development of those they mentor. We must always remember that we are answerable to each other – but more importantly (and this is a characteristic of leadership, and sound mentorship, that is forgotten the most often by many in leadership positions) – we are **accountable** to those WE SERVE.

Our lives frequently lack the conscientious discrimination required to decide and act properly. Our own personal motivations are often obscured, complicating our decision-making. We are often not our own best judges regarding professional and personal courses of action. Consequently, telling the truth, to others and to ourselves is one of the cornerstones of sound mentoring and the foundation of good leadership. Furthermore, we cannot “go it alone.” Accordingly, we need to serve as a mentor and be mentored to, in order to discuss and explore personal and professional issues effectively.

Narrative ethics tells us that values are transmitted through the telling of stories and is most effective when we (or the others for whom we are mentoring) see ourselves as an integral part of the story. Does our life story reflect the behavior of someone committed to improving the lives of those we lead? What kind of environment do we create that promotes or nurtures positive mentoring and leadership? In order to be truly effective, we need to model the behavior we want inculcated and demonstrated in our sphere of influence. More people than you can imagine look up to you and follow your example. In other words, we ALL serve as a mentor – good or bad – for someone (*whether we intend to or not*). Therefore, wouldn’t we prefer they point to us as the person whose qualities they most admire and want to emulate? At all times, remember that there is always someone watching you who wants to be just like you.

Finally, great leaders make other great leaders (or, expressed another way – great mentors make other great mentors). This is the most important part of leadership and mentorship – If I am not creating other leaders (future mentors), then my leadership (mentorship) offers little lasting value. Consequently, what legacy will you leave with your mentorship? You can measure part of your success as a mentor right now – how many of your enlisted evaluations and officer fitness reports were submitted on time? How many of your personnel were provided access to a PDB and the insight of its board members? How many of your personnel were able to take the most recent advancement exam? How well did you do?

If you are reading this and think that my words apply only to COs, XO’s, and Senior Enlisted Advisors, then you have missed the point. We all, at some level, have a leadership role to play and an obligation to share our wisdom, experience, and insight with those who may not have had the same advantages. Leadership, *at any level*, can always make a difference through engaged mentoring. You can improve the lives of

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others, which otherwise might not occur, through your thoughtful mentorship. Each of us inevitably grows with the help of a mentor. In fact, we are more apt to arrive at good decisions (personal and professional) with the aid of a mentor upon whose advice and judgment we trust. To reiterate, mentors serve as honest advisors who tell us the truth . . . , ***“and telling the truth, to others, and ourselves, is one of the cornerstones of sound***

mentoring and the foundation of good leadership.”

Take care of yourselves and each other. (. . . *and again – remember – the contents of my remarks that you read each month in the POM are my own personal views and are NOT necessarily endorsed by the Department of the Navy. I encourage all of you to explore independently and critically these issues on your own.*) ⚓