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Several years ago, I began writing down key lessons I have learned in hopes that I might be able to turn them into a column. Recently, as I was looking at my calendar, I noticed that by the time you receive this issue of the *NRA News*, our Fall National Conference will have come and gone; and I will no longer be your National Vice President. Therefore, I thought I better write this column while I still have the chance!

Lesson #1: Fear ignorance more than you fear mistakes. A common blunder made by many of us is one of possessing a dread of others thinking us to be less than all-knowing or even ignorant. As a result, occasionally we make uninformed decisions, unwise choices, and take ill-advised courses of action. If a situation calls for an immediate decision, go with your gut instinct and trust your experience. If, on the other hand, a situation is not emergent, then take time to study and think through the problem, perhaps quizzing others who may be more knowledgeable. There is no shame in not knowing something when you have not had occasion to learn, but it is folly to make pronouncements blindly especially in the business of war when lives and treasure are at stake. When we do this, we tend to choose wrongly and to make it difficult for others to want to follow our leadership.

Lesson #2: Network. Everything else being equal, people prefer to work with those whom they know and trust rather than strangers; therefore, it is in your best interest to get to know as many people as possible both inside and outside your

Seven Keys to Success for Junior Officers

community. A week ago, I spoke to a commander who, in spite of his lack of education and experience in law, was requested by name by an admiral to serve as his Assistant Inspector General because he knew by experience that the commander's character was one of fairness and his work was always excellent. How do you network? Get to know others in your unit; don't homestead in one unit or Reserve Center; attend your community's workshops and conferences; and occasionally call or e-mail others for advice or updates.

Lesson #3: Have fun while performing your duty. Too often we equate the word "duty" with "dull." As I look back on all the units in which I have served and all the jobs I have done, I can think of very few cases in which I did not enjoy the experiences. I treasure the memories of the camaraderie of the wardrooms in which I've found myself and the missions that I have helped execute.

Lesson #4: Always do your best, and then make it a little better. I once attended a seminar in which I was told that it takes 75 percent of one's time to take a project the last 25 percent to completion. Therefore, I should "not sweat the small stuff." Imagine if everyone took this attitude, our 100-meter Olympic athletes would run only 75; we would have never reached the moon; and your house would have only three walls. Perhaps this attitude explains why many have chosen to leave most of their tasks undone and why they have a reputation for doing work that is "almost right." Always set yourself a goal of doing your absolute best and then think of some way to make it even better.

Lesson #5: Don't become overly concerned with your career and personal recognition. We all know of others who aggressively promote themselves at the expense of others or even the mission, and

we resent them; but how often do we do the same thing? I have found that, on balance, if you pursue excellence in all you do, you won't need to seek recognition; it will come as a natural consequence of your effectiveness. When Ronald Reagan served as President, he had a plaque on his desk in the Oval Office that read, "There is no limit to what a man can do or where he can go, if he doesn't mind who gets the credit."

Lesson #6: Be very concerned about those over whom you are responsible.

When you are responsible for others, always consider their welfare above your own. Do not sleep until they have a place to lay their heads. Do not sit down for chow until providing for them. Look for opportunities to help their careers; seek occasions to provide them recognition. If they are having pay problems, fight for them as if it were your checks that were in danger of bouncing. My father is a retired Naval officer who once told me how, in the early 1950's, he was a seaman apprentice and his squadron sailed for Panama while he stayed behind to attend a three-month class. Unfortunately, they took his pay record; and, in spite of his best efforts, he was not paid for a quarter of the year. Mom took a train back to the Midwest to live with her parents, and he moved out of their little apartment and into the barracks. "Why wasn't this immediately fixed?" I asked. "Because the officers didn't care about an E2," he responded.

Lesson #7: Always try to find a way to say "yes." Inertia is the enemy of progress. I know many who, thinking it the safest and most conservative route, have a knee-jerk reaction of saying "no" to every new idea, project, or initiative. While it is obviously not possible to do it in every case, a sure way to bring out the best that is in others and in yourself is to try to say "yes" whenever practicable. ¶