



CDR Alan J. Carper, SC, USNR
National VP for Junior Officer Programs

Command. While it is something to which most junior officers aspire, many may have not given much thought to all the facets involved once it is achieved. One of the most critical areas, the command philosophy, is of paramount importance. While the commanding officer “drives the ship,” it is the leader’s philosophy that drives the commanding officer. It is, therefore, of utmost importance for future CO’s to give thought now to those foundational beliefs which will anchor his or her actions, attitudes, and expectations. Within days of my being mobilized, I met with our command’s chief of staff who, although quite busy, took time to explain the commander’s philosophy. At the end of our meeting, in order to make sure that I fully understood what he was trying to convey, I was provided a sheet which outlined the points he discussed. While I had served under many senior officers and while most of them had made me aware of their philosophies, never had I received them in writing. I returned to my office and placed the sheet in a place of prominence so that each day, as I would go about my work, I would notice and read through them.

I have discovered over the years that command philosophies are oftentimes embodied in two key points: first, letting the subordinate know what is expected of him or her and, second, letting the subordinate know what can be expected of the commanding officer.

The first point, ensuring that subordinates know what is expected, is of paramount importance. While different commanding officers enumerate their expectations in different ways, they usually touch on the following three points:

Developing A Command Philosophy

Meet the Mission - Obviously a commanding officer’s first expectation is that each person in the command will do what is expected to meet the command’s mission. Therefore, it is of primary importance for him or her to ensure that each person within the command knows, understands, and is dedicated to carrying out the mission. It is this knowledge, understanding, and dedication that will make the difference between winning and losing future wars. In the May 2002 issue of the *NRA News*, this column highlighted the three-step process of maintaining subordinates’ focus on the mission. First, we must describe how our unit’s mission fits in with the overall mission of the Navy. Second, we must emphasize the mission at every opportunity. Third, we must personalize the mission for our subordinates – show them how their work contributes to meeting the Navy’s mission.

Take Care of People - Knowing and meeting the needs of one’s subordinates is pivotal in meeting the mission and ensuring the future soundness of a command. Therefore, when you are expressing your philosophy, you should emphasize that you expect your subordinates to meet their subordinates’ needs. How is this done? By:

- Putting the welfare of their subordinates above their own.
- Being approachable.
- Treating everyone fairly, especially when it comes to rewards.
- Keeping subordinates informed and, whenever possible, explaining why tasks need to be done.
- Listening to others by providing opportunities for feedback.
- Setting an example both in words and deeds.
- Delegating authority and avoiding micromanaging delegated tasks.
- Thoroughly training those under their authority.
- Praising in public and chastising in private.
- Holding subordinates accountable.

- Utilizing the established chain of command.

Take Care of Yourself - This does not imply selfishness. Rather, your philosophy should be one of requiring each person under your command to take responsibility for his/her actions and attitudes. How is this done? By encouraging him/her to:

- Know his/her strengths and weaknesses and seek continuously self-improvement through study and serious application.
- Set realistic professional goals and work to achieve them.
- Work on technical and tactical proficiencies and always to seek to learn more than is necessary.
- Prepare himself/herself for the job of the leader in the next higher rank.
- Learn to make sound and timely decisions by developing orderly thought processes and considering all the effects of their choices.
- Seek responsibility and take responsibility for his/her actions.

The second point, letting the subordinate know what can be expected of the commanding officer, is provided by many CO’s not as the second step in a “bargaining process,” but rather as a way of reducing uncertainty for those under their command. Often these reverse expectations may include statements such as “I will strive always to:

- Be honest and upfront with you.
- Be a team player keeping in mind that I am on many different teams.
- Be dedicated and always give my best effort.
- Try to keep you informed whenever possible.
- Treat everyone with respect.
- Listen without prejudging and expect your frank opinions.
- Hold you accountable.

It is never too early to begin developing your own command philosophy, so I urge you to begin thinking and writing.

I hope to see you in San Antonio! 🇺🇸