

During the course of this day you will have caused to himself a challenge and have  
achieved. This you have accomplished with ease good grace. In addition as some of these chief  
may have noticed there are valid time-honored reasons behind such pointed barb. It was not  
to some thing, but then with blind faith in the fellowship of Chief Petty Officers. The goal was  
made in you that first is inherent with the donning of the uniform of a Chief.

It was our intent to impress upon you that Challenge is good: a great and necessary reality  
cannot use you -- which, in fact, strengthens you. In your future as a Chief Petty Officer, you  
be asked to embrace adversity. Beyond that impressed upon you today. You must face each  
challenge and adversity with the same courage and good grace as demonstrated today.

# Be The Chief

By experience, by performance, by the rank of Chief Petty Officer, you have advanced to Chief Petty  
Officer. In the United States Navy -- only in the United States Navy -- the rank of E-7 carries  
unique responsibilities. No other armed force in the world grants the responsibilities, nor the  
challenges you are now bound to observe and expected to fulfill.

Your entire way of life is now changed. More will be expected of you; more will be demanded  
of you because you are an E-7, but because you are now a Chief Petty Officer. You have not  
been promoted one rank, but you have a special responsibility to your comrades, even as they have a special  
responsibility to you. This is why we in the United States Navy may maintain with pride our  
accomplishment once we have attained the position of Chief Petty Officer.

**"To be in it, you must be about it"**

Responsibilities and privileges do not appear in print. They have no official standing  
referred to by name, number nor file. They exist because, for over 100 years, Chiefs  
freely accepted responsibility beyond the call of printed assignment. Their actions  
once demanded the respect of their seniors as well as their juniors.

But you be the fountain of wisdom, the ambassador of good will, the authority  
as well as in technical applications. "Ask the Chief" is a household phrase in  
you are now that Chief.

What you have now achieved -- and the word "exalted" is used advisedly -- exists  
performance of the Chiefs before you. It shall exist only as long as you  
live in these standards.

Never forget this day. It was our intention to test you, to try you, and  
has assured us that you will wear "the hat" with the same pride as  
you.

When I am in clasp your hand, and accepting you as a Chief Petty

# Welcome Aboard Chief!

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To all of you who have ever been thanked for your service.

And replied with, “my pleasure.”

And you meant it.

Because you are truly here to serve.

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## Foreword

*“The (Sailor) entering the Navy today has a higher education, is more inquisitive, and is looking for better and more efficient ways of completing tasks. They also ask ‘why’ a job must be completed. This, in turn, leads to more creative thinking on the leader’s part. We must depart from the adage ‘It’s always been done that way, so why change now.’”*

So true, right? That quote – one of my favorites – is a spot-on reflection of today’s Sailor. Yet, it is also 100% accurate in its original context, which was then-Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (MCPON) Delbert Black describing new Sailors in an article that appeared in a 1969 issue of Proceedings magazine. Yes, 54 years ago, the U.S. Navy Chiefs were already working on ways to foster and develop the country’s next hungry, ambitious generation. The Chief Petty Officer mess – the most storied group of leaders in any professional organization since 1893 – has been leading, coaching, and mentoring at the deck plate level both up and down the ranks.

The results don’t lie. For more than 120 years, the front-line leaders in what is undisputedly the world’s top premier combat force have not only led and raised youthful Sailors – they continue to pass down wisdom, information, and lessons learned to those who are donning their khaki caps for the first time. You may have heard this tradition of “paying it forward” to be known perhaps as Initiation, or “Chief Season.” While this is *part* of the process, it is only one small sample of the greater effort. The rest of it occurs 24/7, and, in formats like this one.

In this particular situation, you have a Navy Master Chief (me) chronicling lessons in an attempt to set my successors up for hopefully a small win or two they maybe otherwise would not have enjoyed. If you are a Chief, you’re used to this. Everything you have in the Navy happened because of either a Chief’s influence on you or another Chief’s leadership or influence on an officer or other front-line leader who put time and effort into you. I am simply applying a bullhorn to this process.

Why me? Why now? For one, I'm turning over and transferring to the next command, and instead of providing one turnover document to one person (my relief), I'm offering a ton of my lessons learned to all my Mess and most definitely the greater Mess (and really, anyone aspiring to be a Chief). Until this rank of Master Chief, trying to effectively communicate these lessons would have been nearly impossible. There's simply too much a Master Chief sees that enhances and contextualizes these lessons. And now approaching my final years, I feel like the time is right to push these forward.

The Chiefs Mess simply can't continue to function effectively as the Navy's backbone if we aren't putting pens to paper and trying to support each other as best as possible, at every opportunity. Six weeks of annual training isn't going to cut it in the long term. We owe more. Officers run the Navy, and they are constantly working and developing to try to run things smoother. Well, *the Chiefs make the Navy run*. We are the doers, and that's why you're reading this. Per our Chief Petty Officer creed, we are tasked to pass down all the leadership goodness, know-how, and stick-to-it-iveness we learn through the decades. No, *really*. It's right here:

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*It is required that you be the fountain of wisdom, the ambassador of good will, the authority in personal relations as well as in technical applications ... You are the Chief. The exalted position you have achieved ... exists because of the service, character, and performance of the Chiefs before you. It shall exist only as long as you and your fellow Chiefs maintain these standards.*

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The above is our marching order. Every Chief must understand and *accept* that the sole reason "being the Chief" means what it does is because of "the service, character, and performance of the Chiefs before you." Think about this. You won't find anything like this on the civilian side. There's no example of an accountant stepping into H&R Block and being told, "You are the tax master because of the service and character of every tax master who came before you. My great granny used an abacus to do taxes god damn it!" It's not a thing.

But in the Navy, this is a thing, and it is *our* thing. So, while I am an active Master Chief, and while I am still healthy and of relatively sound (but salty) mind, I am taking a moment to give back into the system – and for anybody – not just the Chiefs mess of which I have been a part of for so long.

This guide is not a book of scientific facts or authoritative doctrine. In fact, I've omitted almost any doctrinal references because doctrine and instructions change so often. If you can't quickly read and learn doctrine and instructions, then this guide is not what has been holding back your progression.

It *is* however, a collection of “stuffs” I have learned which made me a leader of better utility to many of my colleagues. Consider it one person's mental white board of “stuff worth trying.” If these approaches work for me, I have no doubt they will work for you – especially since you're here. Remember, you don't “go up” in leadership. You “grow up,” and hopefully some of this will challenge you to do so.

Full disclosure: I am a six-year Chief, a 10-year Senior Chief, and a 14-year Master Chief. Your reaction to that is going to land somewhere between, “Wow, that is messed up that people can promote that fast,” or, “Whoa – apparently this person does not play, and maybe knows a thing or two I can benefit from.” Spoiler: We're going to talk a lot about assumptions and biases throughout these pages.

Almost none of the techniques, approaches, or suggestions in this guide were created or invented by me. I've included as many sources and credits as I can recall in the back, including some books throughout. Above all, my mentors imparted a lot of knowledge to me, so view this guide not as something from me to you, but from the *Navy* to you.

Also, this is not a handbook of advancement hacks or cheat codes. If getting promoted is your top goal, this is not the place for you. If you try what is in here, you will increase your chances to be *successful* as a Chief. But I can't promise you advancement. That is beyond my control, and hey, you can *be some body* or you can *do some thing*. This is a guide for people who want to *do some things!*

The Navy is full of good Chiefs. But to win the next war, we're going to need more *great* Chiefs. We need you to be *the* Chief. That's what these lessons are about. Take all those lazy monikers you're familiar with and bury them. There are no "boot" Chiefs. There is no (cringe) "World's Okayest Chief." There is no "fake it 'til you make it" about a Chief. To be valuable in the CPO Mess you need to be *about* the CPO Mess. You need to be 100% bought-in. To win in the coming fight, you need to be *the Chief* your people tell stories about. You need to be the "my first Chief" featured at the start of every story told by a successful officer.

To be great at anything, you need to build processes which result in long-term, sustained life success. This runs counter to the quick-win mindset of corporate culture, and it's a lesson I learned very early in my career. As a new arrival to my first duty station, my Chief provided me a training pipeline, and part of that roadmap included a handful of virtual courses I was to complete as I found the time. Well, as a new and ambitious Sailor looking to make an impact, I brought the pipeline back to Chief the next week with almost all the courses completed.

Proud of myself, I was surprised when Chief said, "Shipmate, this isn't some test to see how fast you can finish these. This is a process to build you into a good Sailor. I know how long these courses should take and what you should get from them. Did you even learn anything from these in that amount of time?"

Turns out my first Chief was a *great Chief*. I checked into boot camp at age 30, bringing in with me 14 years of a civilian career. That Chief wanted me to see the difference between how the Navy operates versus the "instant gratification" I was used to in the corporate world. Too many of us want to be the lion chewing the meat without taking the time to hone the techniques that make a great hunter.

What techniques should a Chief focus on? Well, I divided this book into topics Chiefs told me they need help with. The table of contents is what it is, and there's no snappy military acronym for that chunk of words. And certainly no easy street to application. But if you're ready to seize the opportunity - if you're ready to be *about it* - it's right here for you.

## Purpose

*Good Chief: "Come work for me and I'll take care of you."*

*Great Chief: "Remember: I work for you, Shipmate."*

***Every successful Chief is rooted in purpose.*** Why? Most realize a Chief's unique and special role. There is no equivalent to a U.S. Navy Chief Petty Officer anywhere else in our Navy, our military, or the world. Therefore, our purpose should readily manifest because that alone is pretty cool. Mind you, that is not a "Kool-Aid" statement - that is a fact. And if you rolled your eyes at it, then you are not ready for anything else these pages have to offer. (And, this is just a friendly reminder not to be "afraid to drink the Kool-Aid." Kool-Aid is absolutely delicious, and I much prefer leading in a Navy that has Kool-Aid available than to be in some other country's poverty-ass, no Kool-Aid having Navy).

Your purpose is "why" you get out of bed every day. It is why you enlisted. It is your value and your rationale for doing everything you do. No one carries more purpose than the august Navy Chief. Is it the anchor we wear? Maybe. But I will tell you when a Sailor looks up the chain of command, not too many of them are deriving any motivation from an unremarkable set of bars on the collar.

An example of purpose that really struck me was from the 1918 Blue Jacket's Manual, which focused on the "Duties and Responsibilities" of the Chief Petty Officer. My favorite piece is: *"Do your work from a sense of duty. Be thorough in all you do and require of your subordinates thoroughness and military exactitude. The sense of duty is a feeling that impels you to do these things not because you have to do them, but because it is your duty to do them."* That right there is some high-quality Kool-Aid!

***Many under-performing, under-motivated, but otherwise passionate Chiefs can turn themselves around right quick if only they re-discovered their purpose.*** And no, passion and purpose are not the same. Passion is skin-deep. Purpose is in your soul. These are two very different words, but often confused. Passion can be



seen or heard (often loudly and tactlessly), while purpose is felt. Example: a passionate person might say “I really love my job so much – I don’t want to get promoted and have to deal with all those other aspects because I am just so passionate about my job.” A passionate person might also be prone to get up on a soapbox on the regular. They might receive feedback like, “Oh don’t mind Chief Jacobs ... he curses a lot but it’s just because he is so passionate.”

Does that sound problematic? It can be. Do you want to be known as a “high and right,” “knee-jerk” and “passionate” Chief who uses colorful language and flies off the handle and in turn, may fail to make critical points? Do you ever hear a person who says, “But I digress” a lot? That is a person who fails to make their points, usually because passion dilutes their argument. Do you enjoy frequently apologizing for “losing your shit?” Folks who are disproportionately passionate tend to make a habit of that. I’m not telling you showing passion in life is a negative (far from it), but when leadership is involved, letting people feel your purpose is going to unlock a lot more for you than your passion will.

People who have a healthy sense of purpose don’t need to raise their voice, jump into arguments, or even justify their actions. The actions speak for themselves. It looks like this: “Chief, I feel bad you had to spend so much of your weekend here helping with that contingency. You should take a few days off.” “Sir when stuff like this happens and our people are in a spot halfway across the world, the Chiefs take care of it. This is what separates us from literally any other organization. It’s my pleasure to have helped.” That’s purpose. And why do we default to those decisions? Because of the people who did before us.

Any decision you make should be easily explained by your subordinates as emanating from your purpose. This is the best quality a Chief has, and it can be the easiest thing people learn from you if you allow it. The intangibles a Chief brings, founded in purpose – are unique to you. And they are extra valuable when you face all of those infamous duties you were told about that *don’t* appear in print.

What does this look like? I'll share with you the greatest contributor to my sense of purpose I received since I put on this uniform. It is a line from one of my favorite mentors that he wrote in my charge book: "The Chief is entrusted with the nation's youth." Think about this - no, really - think about this. Think about who you are charged to lead. Everyone, from everywhere. Kids who have never tied a tie or lived on their own. Folks from broken homes, folks from no homes. We are tasked to lead and mold people who are searching for their lives. This is *purpose*, and we as Chiefs are chartered and honored to do this.

*The greatest detractor from purpose is ego.* But thankfully, nothing squashes one's ego quicker than the day the Chief realizes who they actually work for. The Chief works *for their Sailors*. We'll pause here to give the new Chiefs some time to catch up, but, absolutely, YES. WE. DO. Now, do we "report" to our Sailors? Absolutely not. That is completely different. But we absolutely work *for* them. And they should see us that way. The Chief is the leader, the coach, and the advocate for the Sailor. And when challenges and barriers come into play, it's the Chief springing to action. New Chiefs, I am telling you, keep a log of all the work you do for the day and then try to tell us that at least 90% of the items you're working aren't *for* your Sailors.

To be successful working for the nation's most valuable commodity, Chiefs must draw from their purpose. And on that note, have you ever wondered why the rank of CPO is so special? Have you considered why this is the only advancement that requires an Initiation process complete with a full character makeover? The answer is simple, and it is a critical narrative you must apply if you are to be successful in the Chiefs Mess: "*To be in it, you must be about it.*"

"To be *in* it, you must be *about* it." It is very difficult, if not impossible, to be a successful member of the Chiefs Mess - carrying on the legacy and making a difference every day for the Navy and our Sailors - if you were to operate half-in or half-out of the Mess. If you operate every day 100% *in* and your ways exude the values and expectations of Chief, then you are the most positive form of contagious there can be. When a force of Chiefs operates together and under a vision, they

absolutely dominate. “*To be in it, you must be about it*” is not some cheap way of excusing the cringe mantra of, “what happens in the Chiefs Mess stays in the Chiefs Mess.” To be *about it* means you are comfortable handling everything inconvenient (and humbling) that comes from doing the right things for our people and the Navy above yourself. It means every day when you depart the Chiefs Mess, you *return with honor*. And if you struggle with this, take yourself back to pinning day.

It didn’t compare to when you “put on” First Class, did it? The rank of Chief is unlike any other promotion. You don’t “put on” Chief. You don’t “pick up” Chief. You must physically and mentally “become” Chief, and that comes with purpose. This transition affects all areas of your life, and with it, we’re brought back to that choice. Are you a Chief who wants to *be some body*? Or do you want to *do some thing*? If you understand anything we’ve discussed about purpose, and you understand that every day we are closer to a *real war*, then you understand we need people who want to *do some things*.

***A good Chief works with a passion. The great Chief uses their purpose to make a difference.*** Improve the Navy and everything around you every day. Return every person you meet better than when you found them. Think about all the leaders you’ve ever admired during your career. I guaranty there were at least a few of them who had intangibles that you gravitated to. They had an energy or an “ism” about them that just drew you closer. And when they mentored you, you listened. When they made high-profile decisions, everyone said, “Of course they did.” They had a way about them where everything just made sense, and felt right.

To me this is the purpose, and this is what all Chiefs should strive toward. Embrace this (be *about it*), and you will go as far as you want in your career.

Two great books about Purpose: Legacy (Kerr) and Start With Why (Sinck).

### Side Note: The Stoics

Where do so many ideas shared by leadership authors and organizations like the Chiefs Mess come from? Well, I found some influence from the Stoics. In particular, the ideas Marcus Aurelius and Seneca were putting out centuries ago are still very much alive and mainstream today. Check these out:

**“Like a vine that produces grapes, and seeks for nothing more after it has produced proper fruit. So a man when he does a good act does not call for others to come and see, but goes on to another act, as a vine goes to make more grapes.”** This is the daily purpose of the Chief. Is it not? To grow and develop all around them and to seek no credit for their work? Chiefs are wine, my friends, wine!

**“If a thing is difficult to be accomplished by thyself, do not think that it is impossible for man; but if anything is possible for man and comfortable to his nature, think that this can be attained by thyself too.”** The power of the network of the global Chiefs Mess! When you’re locked into a network of leaders conditioned to get out there and *do some things* ... we’re going to find a way!

**“What can take place without change? Canst thou take a bath unless the wood undergoes a change to become heat? And canst thou be nourished unless the food undergoes a change? And can anything else that be useful be accomplished without change?”** Sailors hate two things: 1) The way things are and 2) Change. Fun fact: Did you know the Navy used to sail ships using actual sails? I’ll take change all day any day!

**“A man’s true greatness lies in an honest purpose in life, founded on a just estimate of himself and everything else, on frequent self examination, and a steady obedience to the rule which he knows to be right, without troubling himself ... about what others may think or say.”** This is the backbone of Laying the Keel and CPO Initiation: Self-Awareness. It is the core of everything we do, and if you are not out there identifying areas for your own self-improvement, then what exactly is it you are doing for your people?

## Balance

*Good Chief: "Be the hardest working person in the room."*

*Great Chief: "Work smarter, not harder."*

I have nothing against hard work. I consistently contend that when challenges arise and calories need to be put toward them, it helps to remind people that this is the U.S. Navy and therefore "going hard is authorized." That said, the old mantra that there is some sort of science equating "hard work" to success simply has no consistent basis in fact. To take it one more step outside the box, I will even make the case in this section for intentionally seeking out lazy people. No, really. We're going there.

But first, let's examine relationships as they pertain to balance. Ever see a junior officer working marathon days on shore duty and burning out in the process? Of course you have. Ever see the same thing happen to a Chief being burned out by their JO, or, the LPO burned by the Chief? Of course. We *all* suck at this.

When we burn out, we are not balanced. And typically, if one person is burned, multiple others are also suffering the collateral damage. This is not effective leadership, and this is not balance. Balance requires synergy between Chief and JO as much as between Chief and LPO, and it translates over to work-life balance and other areas.

What does this look like? "You said my duties don't appear in print!" Well, let's start by examining the (condensed) roles and responsibilities of the LCPO, per the **OPNAVINST 3120.32D SORN**:

-The LCPO/LPO assists the division officer in administering, supervising, and training division personnel.

-The LCPO or LPO assigns division personnel to daily tasks and oversees the accomplishment of division priorities.

-The LCPO/LPO assists the division officer with preparation of watch and liberty lists, assists in training and PQS qualification of junior personnel, and ensures divisional administration is forwarded to division officer for review and forwarding.

-The LCPO/LPO are accountable to the division officer for the proper operation of the 3M System within their division.

If you have a new perspective after reading that, then great. If it surprised you that the LCPO and LPO have almost the exact same function, then great (the balance on that side is paramount). Remember how officers *run* the Navy, there it is. Now, let's read what Department Heads are responsible for, per the SORN:

- Organize and train the department for battle readiness, including supervising the training of departmental personnel in damage control.

-Prepare and maintain the bills and orders for the organization and operation of the department. Assign personnel to stations and duties within the department.

-Coordinate the department safety program with the unit's safety officer and supervise the department's division safety officers.

-Make frequent inspections of the personnel, material and assigned spaces of the department. Ensure proper cleanliness and upkeep of departmental spaces. Each department head or a representative inspects daily and reports the condition of the department to the XO, who then makes a similar report to the commanding officer.

-Control the expenditure of allotted funds and operate the department within the limit of such funds. Ensure economy in the use of public money and stores.

-Assume responsibility for the proper operation, maintenance, preservation, custody and inventory of equipment assigned to the department.

-Maintain custody of the keys for departmental spaces and storerooms except those assigned by regulation to the custody of another officer. Designate subordinates within the department to have duplicate keys.

-Supervise the training and professional development of junior officers assigned to the department. Develop division officers regarding morale matters or discipline within the department and keep the commanding officer informed of any matter adversely affecting the department, command, or the naval service.

-Execute the maintenance and material management system or a current unit's maintenance project for the department.

-Oversee department administration and record review as required by other regulations and instructions; initiate fitness reports, evaluation sheets, review periodic marks and makes recommendations to the executive officer for meritorious acts and disciplinary matters. Forwards special requests to the executive officer with recommended action and provide justification for special privileges including applicable comments on past conduct and performance.

-Supervise the execution of PQS topics applicable to the department. Qualify personnel for watch stations and equipment/system operation and maintenance.

-Reports to the commanding officer for the operational readiness of the department; the general condition of the machinery and other issues affecting operational readiness; and for any matters relating to the department which may affect the department, the command, or the Navy. The department head also reports to the executive officer for all administrative matters and advise the executive officer of direct reports to the commanding officer.

If you recognized a lot of those duties as regular items for Chiefs, good on you. We absolutely execute those functions and orders. But do not forget who is ultimately responsible for those. In other words, do not make the mistake of starting a turf war between you and your DH/DIVO over who does what. There are times you will be paired with tough personalities and egos, and if you find yourself being

combative versus educational, you might want to take a step back because your approach could become damaging for your Sailors.

We've discussed the balance needed between you and your LPO, and you and your officers. What about the balance you need between you and your CMC? Let's check out those responsibilities, per the **OPNAVINST 1306.2K**:

-Assist commanders and COs in all matters pertaining to the warfighting readiness of Sailors, their families, and the command. This includes the welfare, health, job satisfaction, morale, utilization, and training of Sailors to promote standards and maintain good order and discipline. They will advise commanders and COs on the formulation and implementation of changes in policy that affect the command. Furthermore, they will provide solicited and unsolicited advice and recommendations to the chain of command as well as to their respective ISIC.

-Establish and maintain conditions that ensure the unit is fully prepared for warfighting, while maintaining a productive and positive command climate.

-Develop a CPO Mess climate that develops and maintains the highest levels of material and warfighting readiness, professional excellence, and esprit-de-corps.

-Possesses a detailed understanding of the different phases of the optimized fleet response plan and their role in ensuring success.

-Instill a culture of excellence throughout the command, sharing responsibility for successful training, certifications, and assignments.

-Promote and ensure that official ceremonies, which honor Sailors, are embraced and properly executed.

-Assist in the management and delivery of proper, accurate and timely communications throughout the command(s).

-Communicate with and support Navy families.

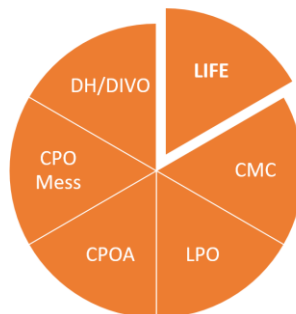


-Maintain awareness of and assist with command programs designed to ensure a professional command culture and climate.

An entirely different bin, right? Your CMC exists to represent you, advocate for you, mentor you, and ensure you are operating the way a Chief should. The CMC isn't there to operationally task you. They aren't telling you which Sailor to put on your watch or tell you what you owe your DH. The CMC, will, however, hold you accountable for command programs, investigate matters brought to them by your seniors (or sometimes juniors), will convene DRB when necessary and advise the CO/XO on next actions, and the CMC will hold you accountable for all matters of Sailor growth, especially when it comes to the training and development of your people and each pillar of Brilliant on the Basics.

*The Chief is the fulcrum between DH/DIVO, LPO, and CMC.* There are all sorts of boards, your mid-term counseling, your goals, and all other “surprises” and “fires” that pop up requiring CMC’s attention or advice. In addition, you must balance your obligations to the CPO Mess. You need to be present at SOQ boards, ranking boards, CDBs, collateral duties, meetings, trainings, running SAILOR 360 commitments, CPO Initiation, helping out with ceremonies, attending events to help advance your rating, standing “of the watch” requirements, handling inspections, and you know, the “other duties as assigned” part.

#### CPO Balance



You also have your obligation to the CPOA you paid into. Burning burgers and selling swag, planning your Khaki Ball, running back and forth from the trophy store, and volunteering at the soup kitchen. Then, there's you know, LIFE.

The "life" piece is tricky because "work life balance" has no universal standard. I'm going to unpeel this by explaining that there is one leader I worked with who championed "work life balance" above everything, and yet did not come close to following it. "Do as I say not as I do" rarely translates to success in the military. That person always, always worked, and as a result, the leadership team rarely left the building. Again, when you weigh that against the overall output of the sacrifice ... not close. The good Chief is a great multi-tasker and gets the job done. The great Chief works a successful balance!

"Work life balance" is not a good bumper sticker because that concept is so different for people. A 22-year-old, single Sailor who signed up because their family is Navy and all they want to do is live, breathe, and dream the ship life all day long is going to have an entirely different concept of "work life balance" than the 40-year-old single parent of two who is in a terminal paygrade. You can favor or argue against either of those two if you want, but facts are facts. Those two Sailors are going to have entirely different and contrasting priorities within their individual decision-making processes.

*Now, as the Chief, your job is not to accommodate either of them disproportionately.* Recognize the situation exists, and do your best to ensure your people are getting the best possible opportunities to affect their own personal balances *while meeting commander's intent*. Because don't forget - the Chief isn't the only member of the chain here trying to balance this priority pie. Your LPO is, your DIVO is, your Skipper is, and your newly reporting Seaman is. Is keeping everyone happy always possible? You absolutely know the answer to that.

But what about those who outwardly prioritize their personal pieces of the pie with very little to spend on work? What about the lazy ones even? Every situation is different and should be respected as such, but the worst thing a Chief can

do is put someone to the side and play the old “shut up and color” game. You take the lazy ones (the leadership challenges) and you find a creative way to make them useful. On multiple occasions, I have taken a page out of the Bill Gates playbook and assigned lazy under-performers to high-profile jobs. Almost every time (and I say this humbly – I have gone wrong here) the lazy Sailor not only did the job but identified quicker ways to accomplish it.

In one specific instance, we had a Sailor who was very good as his specific skill set. He also volunteered to be placed permanently on the command’s most undesirable watch. He was ready to separate, and he did not want an EVAL higher than a P. His offer allowed the command to execute several operations that would have otherwise created substantial human factors and additional risk in other areas, and the Sailor felt like a valuable contributor by holding down that watch to free up others. Now, you can throw mud at that decision and argue from the high and mighty Chief perspective that we’re obligated to challenge every single Sailor regardless of situation. But when a Sailor is carrying that highly visible mindset and game plan, and the Chief decides to be stubborn and press forward throwing countless hours down the tube of trying to change this kid’s mind, your credibility is gone. The entire division sees that “Chief can’t see the bigger picture for the team,” and it becomes all about that Chief’s ego.

“Work life balance” is different for everybody. Again, your goal here isn’t to level the field. Your goal is to exploit it and create a positive, encouraging place to work for your folks. I’m not saying that anytime a Sailor tells you they want a P to accept it and give them a P, but I’m saying it is worth a look.

I got into somewhat of a debate while I was at CMC school. My personal mission statement, which I’ll get into later, closes with the line “On order, be great.” Well, that rubbed one of the instructors the wrong way. That CMC felt Sailors need to be great every minute and every day and if not, they should be held accountable. And that we are tasked to strive for perfection, so giving people any sort of an “out” is potentially cause for trouble. Now, I do 100% appreciate that perspective, especially from a talented CMC, but at the same time ... absolutely not.

*Requiring people to be great every minute of every day is putting pressure on them to the highest degree, and unnecessary pressure at that.* I think what that instructor was trying to convey, is that Sailors need to meet the standard every day. And quite simply, the standard is rarely “great.” Sometimes, in fact, the standard, officially, is “satisfactory.” I think of this in terms of the PFA. Do we really need every Sailor to weigh in at 10% body fat and post an “outstanding high” on their PRT? Because that would meet the mark of “great.” But the answer of course, is “absolutely not.” What we need are Chiefs who are great role models for health around the unit. We need CFLs who are great at motivating and helping people meet their goals. We need a CO to run a great command climate that allows for people to take care of their fitness. None of these things require any single person to operate every single day at a level of “great.”

Again, using myself as an example, it took me easily more than 10 years into the Navy to establish any type of real balance. I work out on my own every morning for 15-30 minutes, depending on muscle group/goal. I do this because my family is still asleep and maybe more important, I show up to work every day feeling like I already accomplished something – I started the day with a win.

Part two, every day when I drive my 25 minutes to work, I talk to my mom on the phone. This is extremely important to my mental balance and well-being. I don't watch cable news or follow pop culture, etc., so hearing from mom on what's going on helps me be more relatable at work. When I'm at work, most of my day (currently) is owned by the CO's calendar. Because my job is to report solely to him and advise him, this is not an area I'm interested in disturbing. That said, every day I identify my “power hours” where I can just slay and get work accomplished. It might be an hour or two from 0700 to 0900 maybe, or it might be 1500-1600, who knows. The rest of my day is open to drive-by visits and walk-ins. I realize a lot of front-line leaders hate surprises and walk-ins, but to me, walling yourself off goes against what we do as Chiefs. We need to be mature and responsible enough to manage our schedules appropriately. When I talk about being here to truly serve, ad-hoc conversations and walk-ins are what that's all about.

Once I'm home, I typically grill dinner or I'm taking my daughter to dance or piano class, something like that. When I'm home it is all about them. It might be homework help, reading, or playing video games. Once they go to sleep, I get in my 20 pages of reading, and I might do something fun for myself like watch a hockey game or go for a walk, play my electronic drum kit, write song lyrics or books about Chiefs, something like that. The point is I am taking time off from being "great" (and if you've ever read my song lyrics, you'd endorse my point wholesale).

But all that said, I'm always *ready* to be great. My feet are always in the starting blocks. My phone is on all hours. There are Chiefs who will argue that this 24/7 availability breaks some sort of work/life balance code or something, and I violently disagree. For one, Navy instruction says very clearly we are all Sailors 24/7. Secondly, I cannot tell you how many late-night calls I've had from Chiefs looking for me to save their bacon either for them or their Sailor. You like it when the Master Chief answers that call, don't you? Problem solved, crisis averted right? Exactly. So how would you like it if you were in a spot and I told you the next day, "Oh, yeah I'm off duty so I don't respond to work calls." Sucks, doesn't it?

*Again, you don't need to be great 24/7, but you need to be ready to (on order) be great, and that comes with balance.* What do I mean when I say, "On order, be great?" It means when your name is called, and it's time to go, you GO. To use an automotive term, you go "balls to the wall." You go 2,000%, LFG, until victory. After, you level your wings, you settle back into your standard, and you make sure you're training and preparing for the next time your name is called.

"On order, be great" absolutely does not mean that once you downshift from a high tempo, you have permission to suck at your job. It means you maintain your version of balance in your mind, body, and soul, so that when it is time to be great, you're ready. You set the example, make balance accessible for everyone you work with, and then, on order, you can apply a little bit of Kanye.

Two great books about Balance: *Lives of the Stoics* (Holiday) and *Make Your Bed* (McRaven).

### Side Note: Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is the core theme of Navy enlisted training. It's why we take personality tests, learn about the Johari Window, and use mid-term counseling sessions as tools. Too often, though, our colleagues will decouple themselves from the self-awareness concept, because they conflate self-awareness with caring about what everyone says, or worse, caring about what *they think* everyone says or thinks about them. These are not the same.

Let's say you are at a gym exercising, and there is dead space in between songs in your headphones. You overhear another gym patron tell their associate they think you are grossly out of shape and the shorts you are wearing were a very poor decision. You getting offended by this and leaving the gym is not self-awareness. It is you caring about the opinion of someone you don't even know. If you don't know them or their credentials, then why would anything they say concern you?

Self-awareness is what got you to the gym. You took a look at yourself, you identified your health as an area for improvement, and you took action. That is being self aware. Remember, if someone has an issue with you, let them call your cell phone. If they don't have your number, they don't know you well enough to have an issue with you.

I have always relied heavily on my fellow Chiefs to ping me when I am "off." I am not bubbly. I have RBF. My face will convey boredom when an XO speaks. My favorite brand of humor is sarcasm, which does not translate well to the masses. In CMC school, the coach told me I can be difficult to work with if my ideas do not receive what I think is the appropriate amount of traction.

Therefore, when a colleague asks me if I'm ok, I value that. The higher up you go in the ranks, the lonelier it becomes. It also becomes harder to find honest feedback. The better we look out for each other, and the more we allow ourselves to be honest and open communicators, the more self-aware we all become.

## Mentorship

*Good Chief: "If you don't take care of yourself, no one will."*

*Great Chief: "I got your back."*

***Mentorship from a Chief's point of view is without a doubt one of the best and most effective ways to get through to a Sailor and make a positive impact on them.*** When we do this, we are bringing these effects not only on behalf of ourselves and as Chiefs, but as a Navy. There is so much power to this!

Personal example: My entire life plan was changed by a CDB. As a very junior Sailor, my Chief scheduled me for a CDB, and he had a few other Chiefs on it as well. I was blown away by how engaging they were, and how much concern they showed for the big decisions I had coming up. Full disclosure: I joined the Navy on a six-year contract for an enlistment bonus and automatic E4. My intent was to finish my final year of college and bounce. What changed my mind was when I saw the "Navy" (not just my Chief and some Chiefs), but the "Navy" wanted me to understand my options, and had a real and vested interest in keeping me on for a bit. And what the follow-on mentorship process ultimately showed me was that I had a lot of real opportunity to contribute to a greater good that I never even realized.

Little did I know back then what the bigger picture looked like - not until I was a Chief, and I was participating in our CMC's retirement ceremony. Our CMC asked me to read "The Watch," and when he asked me, my eyes started to get cloudy. You see, that CMC trained, mentored, and coached the person who became my first Chief (the one who had such an impact on me). So now here I was, as a Chief and the product of my first Chief, ready to "take the watch" from the Master Chief who did such an amazing job mentoring him. Again, I ask you: *can you compare this sequence to anything the corporate world has to offer?*

I realize many of you haven't experienced similar outcomes. That doesn't mean you should carry forward this under-performance, because that makes you

complicit in fostering a lower standard. We all owe the Navy better, and we should be returning every Sailor 100% better off than when we found them. Yes, this is a *challenge!*

Inexplicably, some commands write arcane instructions on mentorship, defining rate/relationship requirements and establishing hard time limits for mentor solicitation. This does not send an appropriate message and it risks diluting the spirit of the program. The CPO Mess owns mentorship because we are the ones who actually DO it. Officers, by and large, do not mentor the way Chiefs do. They are not mentoring a 19-year-old Sailor with a negative bank account, negative leave balance, and a sibling who just went to jail. A Chief has the power and the influence to inspire. They have come from the same places and same challenges, and they leave lasting impacts on Sailors.

Think about a Chief who has inspired you. Who was that Chief that brought allure to the anchors? Who made you think, *“I can do this - I want to be a Chief. I want to be just like that person with my Sailors.”* It might have been an instructor or your CPO or a Master Chief who simply gave you on-point advice. Or maybe they just had that “ism” where they had a magnetic approach to everything and everyone. Maybe it was someone you met at a CDB!

We now owe it to our Sailors and officers alike to be that person. Right? “Be the person your dog thinks you are.” That comes from mentorship. The U.S. Navy CPO Mess is the largest group in the world that routinely takes time out to mentor its subordinates and relief to pass down wisdom, spirit, and grit in an effort to leave the Navy better than we found it and put our juniors in a position to succeed. Think about this: there is no mid-level supervisor at Google who is sitting down their Senior-level manager to say, “Look friend, this is how things work around here.” It isn’t happening. People aren’t meeting in sweater vests and skinny jeans in the Google eco Nespresso lounge and passing down charge books.



Why don't people seek mentors? Probably because when a person reaches a certain status or goal, they simply want to be "done." I once consoled a Chief who had just failed their qualification board. She said to me, "When I made Chief, I had no idea I was expected to learn so much." What I saw in front of me was the classic case of a Chief thinking they had "arrived." They made it. They were now a Chief, so they were now above learning, growing, developing, accountability, or anything of inconvenient nature. The funny thing is the anchor isn't the culmination - it is only the beginning. It's a brand-new start, and you better put some people in your corner if you want to be successful. It's more common than you may think.

When Frank Shamrock trains fighters in his dojo, he requires each have a "plus" mentor to fight above them, an "equal" to compete with, and a "minus" for them to coach. This formula also applies in music. In 1983, Metallica fired Dave Mustaine, and hired Kirk Hammett. They then recorded Kill 'em All and went on to become arguably the most successful metal band ever. But, when Hammett got the job, he studied under Joe Satriani for two years, and now it is Hammett mentoring scores of young guitar players. Same for rap. Dr. Dre/Eminem/50 Cent. Jay-Z/Kanye/Big Sean. Do you have a plus, minus, and an equal?

***One thing every Chief must understand: Your own personal experience can serve you in your job, but your own experiences alone are not enough.*** If you want to be *great* for your people, you must always be the student, and seek out others who can help you improve. In the CPO Mess, people are not only there for you, but they are obligated to help you! Get out there and take advantage! You can't be *in* it unless you take advantage of people who are *about* it!

***There are tons of ways you can raise the entire value of your workspace just by making a few tweaks. For one, let your people know you have mentors.*** This is paramount. If your people think you're successful simply because you have natural gifts or some intangibles they cannot themselves access, they are going to be less motivated to try to reach your level. Make yourself relatable and accessible. Tell them when you're about to get on a phone call with a mentor. Make electronic

introductions between your people and potential mentors, especially when you see that two people would benefit from getting to know one another. Tell stories frequently about things your mentors have helped you with. This is contagious!

***Secondly, mentor people within your own CPO Mess.*** If you see someone missing the point, talk to them about it. How many times have you heard this: “I don’t want my people talking to anyone outside my shop. I’m their Chief and I know what’s best for them so you can get lost with that shit.” What an unfortunate attitude! This is clearly a case of a Chief who would rather “be somebody” than “*do some thing.*” When this approach is taken, you are severely limiting their opportunities, options, and perspectives, as well as their ability to be diverse and enterprising future leaders. Could you even imagine if the MCPON told the CNO, “I don’t need to canvas my people. I know what’s best for them.” Wow.

***Third, never ignore the opportunity for a teachable moment.*** Mentoring should not be limited to a schedule or convenience. I once heard a Senior Chief say, “I shouldn’t have to tell them that – they are a Chief and that’s on them.” Is it? When you put on your khakis for the first time, did you suddenly know *everything*? Especially when I was a new Chief, I sure did appreciate senior people pulling me aside and breaking things down for me.

This goes double for people you are leading who are more talented than you! A rookie mistake for a Chief or any leader is to try to assert dominance over a person who is coming up the ranks to try to hold them back or make them “pay their dues” or whatever self-preservatory, reptilian nonsense you learned from previous bad leaders. When you have a superstar in your ranks, teach them, learn from them, and throw them every helpful opportunity and mentor you can to help them get wins. The more you help these folks, the more we all win!

***Fourth, get outside the box to help people.*** The “FRAGO” era of COVID was a difficult time to lead. People didn’t know what to do with their careers. But you know who can help in these times? The Chiefs. I organized a lot of CDBs for

my folks while we were in quarantine. We put them on Zoom calls with Chiefs who were also in quarantine all over the world. Advice, connections, help. There is no organization better equipped for this type of mentorship than the Chiefs Mess.

One of the most effective things I do is to get my mid-term counseling from at least one subordinate. It's something I learned from another Chief, and it works especially well if you are a Chief getting feedback from your LPO. Because they want to be a Chief, it forces them to go research everything they need to try to help, including learning a Chief EVAL. One of my LPOs gave me some of the most invaluable feedback ever. She quoted from a book I recommended to her (Maxwell's 21 Laws of Leadership) and she told me which laws she felt I exemplified. She also told me to be more direct with tasking, instead of always taking time to explain. "I thought your generation needs to know 'why' all the time," I replied. "Yeah, but not me. Just tell me what to do and let me do it." Alright then!

A caveat to the above - I've met very few Chiefs willing to approach their LPOs to receive feedback on how they're doing. If it makes you uncomfortable, ask yourself why. Do you feel you're not supporting them enough? Are you afraid to see if your leadership style may not be effective? Have you put up an invisible wall where the two of you are not able to be accountable and transparent? There's nothing from the Navy side dictating how you build out your self-awareness, but boy are there some awesome ways to grab the valuable feedback for the long term.

***Finally, be a fan of people!*** Reach out to people often and simply ask how they're doing. When you do this, you will find they are way more inclined to reach out to you when they approach decision points or come into a crisis. When we are our Sailors' biggest fans, they feel supported by the Navy, period, and that goes a long way. The good Chief leads their people and sets them up for success. But a *great Chief* isn't happy just leading. The *great Chief* aims to make a difference!

Two great mentorship books: *Ego is the Enemy* (Holiday) and *The Motive* (Lencioni).

### **Side Note: Self Health**

No doubt the worst charge book advice to a new Chief I ever read went like this, “Put yourself first and above all else. It’s just like the airplane video tells you! When the mask drops, take care of yourself first, and then others! It’s true!”

No, just no! Also, maybe charge books shouldn’t be a thing for you!

There are two major issues with the overall messaging of the airline video. For one, every time this video plays, a parent is going to remark, “Go to hell – I’m taking care of my child first.” Second, in an emergency, you help people. Period. No one wants to be George Costanza knocking all the kids over on his way out of the burning apartment.

The point is this video is often misinterpreted as, “you can’t take care of others until you take care of yourself first,” which is nonsense. No one is telling you to take care of others and ignore yourself. What we all need to do is take care of others and ourselves and the best way possible.

Example: Coolio, not a Navy Chief. But even he said, “You can’t help me if you can’t help yo’ self. (You better make a left).” Do it. Do both. When your Sailors see you taking care of yourself, and they see you supporting their health and care, you’re building trust and climate for everyone.

Don’t allow yourself to fall for leadership clichés. “Well the expert told me look out for myself first so I’m going to drop this right here for all of you to deal with while I go take care of me.”

No. Accept the challenge. Accomplish both, and do it in a graceful way that sets a positive example.

## Motivation

*Good Chief: "Hoo-yah Shipmate, BZ."*

*Great Chief: "I'd deploy with you any day!"*

The U.S. Navy is 100% inarguably, undisputedly, the best Navy in the world. Depending on your metrics, it's also the top combat force anywhere, in history, period, when you consider the ability to dominate all five domains of warfare in the nuclear, conventional, and unconventional fronts. Sadly, some of you just rolled your eyes. This and exactly this, is why Chiefs need reminders about motivation.

"How could this man say the Navy is the best Navy in the world? We can't get somebody a DD-214 on time, I have to conduct sweepers, my ship is still in the yards, we're undermanned, I'm deploying again, I had to wait two hours to get my meds refilled at the pharmacy, we have the ugliest and least functional uniforms in the service, and this guy says we are the best?"

To these critics - none of whom would make my list of teammates I would want to deploy with - I offer the following: The U.S. Navy never lost a war, and we are less than 100 years removed from the last time our Navy led the largest invasion force in history and (literally) saved the world. And we did it on multiple fronts in Europe, the Pacific, and Africa. That counts, and that matters in areas we are chartered to protect, those being our history and heritage. These are very powerful lessons to draw from, and they are lessons other countries *simply do not have*.

Part two and this is a clarification: We can argue all day about wars and conflicts being defined as "wins" or "losses" from an American perspective. When I state the U.S. Navy "never lost a war," I mean just that. Even in wars or conflicts where victories were ill-defined or the objectives were blurry, or the U.S. and allies did not come away with a clearly articulated "win," none of those instances were because our Navy lost or put forth some sort of lackluster showing. There are no

stories, anywhere, of the U.S. Navy getting smoked. Even the worst day ever, Pearl Harbor, ultimately became the catalyst for our winning the war in the Pacific.

You can argue that World War II era examples are exceptions to the rule because our people were motivated to fight for freedom. However, the U.S. Navy has never been far removed from motivating factors. Talk to anyone who was stationed on a ship in the Arabian Gulf during the hours after 9/11 went down. Their motivation was through the roof. Not a decade before them, talk to the folks who carried out DESERT STORM. You'll see the same motivation. And in the late '80s in that same body of water when a U.S. Navy task group completely crushed Iran's navy in its own pond. Motivation: PEAKED.

This is the advantage of being able to draw from your history and being able to roll with an all-volunteer force. Think about this: every person you serve with most likely went to an office on their own volition and signed up. We all have different motivating factors for making that decision, but the fact remains a lot of other navies' sailors - including some of our up-and-coming opponents - are forced (conscripted) into service. Now, ask yourself: "Who would you rather serve with?"

*Motivating your people has nothing to do with the number of times you offer up a "Hoo-yah" or a pat on the back or a "BZ" to your shipmates.* Actually, a lot of this stuff comes off as fake or contrived. I personally have never been a Hoo-yah guy, but I will occasionally interject with a "That's what I'm talkin' about" or "Yasss" when it fits. Motivation comes from being familiar with each of your people's internal drivers for why they do what they do - and - letting them see yours.

Have you ever listened to a Sailor just rail on and on about an award they should have received, or the outcome of a Sailor of the Quarter board, or an EVAL ranking? It is the worst day ever, and "the Navy sucks" and "I'm dropping my papers" and this, that, and the other thing. That is your opportunity, because that Sailor has forgotten or moved on from their internal drivers that aided their decision to take that oath of service. Think about this: when you signed up for the Navy, did you know what a NAM was? Did you know (really) what a Chief or Master Chief

was? Did you know about the importance of being scored above your reporting senior's cumulative average? Probably not.

So why then do these occurrences weigh so heavily on a Sailor's attitude or morale on any given day? One thing I've noticed, and that has always helped me get through to a troubled Sailor, is to sit them down and get right to it when it comes to their reasons for signing up in the first place. When we do this, we uncover some powerful personal factors. And you will find that approximately zero of them signed up to win all the NAMs. The most common reasons I've seen ranged from the common "I want to defend my country," post-9/11 enlistee to the more moving, "I want a better life for my family."

*It is so important you recognize that as a Chief you are in fact working "for" your people.* Don't ever be the "I got 200 people working for me" Chief who is living off in some illusion. People work *for* lots of different reasons. One of your Sailors might work hard to support their family. Or maybe even support their family who they don't even live with anymore. You might have another Sailor working to finish a college degree, and another trying to pay off their car early, or maybe purchase their first house. Another Sailor might be working for pride of service, or love, or God and country. Another Sailor might be a second or third generation Sailor. Other Sailors are working for power, money, or a certain job title or distinction. Some folks (gasp) work hard because they love their job and they are proud to serve in the Navy, and, hey that *is* authorized.

For some, motivations change. It happened to me, in fact. I joined the Navy because I wanted to complete the final year of my four-year degree. I also felt, back in 2008, that it was the honorable thing to do. I felt that both physically and mentally, I had a few good years to offer my country. Even though my father did 20 years in the Army, I felt the Navy was the place for me. I was on a seven-month wait from the time I signed the papers until I went to boot camp. I spent that period reading everything I could about the Navy, and I developed a massive respect and appreciation for the Navy's history. I found the stories to be incredible, and I took

an immense amount of pride and obligation in making it through boot camp. I remain so proud to wear the colors of the incredible Sailors who served before me.

Today, it comes from legacy. I try to make the Navy a better place every day because that is what I owe the legacy of the Chief anchor. I often reflect and ask myself, “What did you do to contribute to the legacy of the Navy Chief today?” Some days that question is tougher to answer than others. While I try to be great every day, there are days where stepping back to reset is the proper move.

But even before my CPO Initiation, I had the same mindset. You will hear a lot of Chiefs talk about, “You need to earn your anchor every day.” That is good advice and that works as a bumper sticker. But since day one, I’ve challenged myself to earn my place in the *U.S. Navy* every day. Again, I fully expect some of you to roll your eyes. But I ask you this: If the U.S. Navy is the best in the world at what it does, then what makes anyone think they would not have to earn their place in it? To use a sports example, would anyone expect to show up at Spring Training and walk onto the New York Yankees’ field and say, “Hey I got shortstop,” and you know, good to go? No. You need to earn your spot.

So, again, why would we tolerate any of our people bringing us down? Giving less than optimal effort? “Welcome to the Navy.” “Because we’ve always done it that way.” “Shut up and row.” Where does this come from? How many people do you know who love the phrase “embrace the suck” but they are completely miserable? That phrase finally matured to what Admiral William McRaven called, “Embrace the circus.” But that doesn’t mean you accept it and you allow your mind and attitude to be dominated by it. It means at any given moment, you might be confronted by some sort of circus. Act like you’ve seen it before, handle it, and don’t ever take it personally.

Remember, good Chiefs are quick to respond to a fire (or circus), put out that fire, and carry on. But the great Chiefs do their absolute best to ensure conditions aren’t ideal for fires, and they spend the bulk of their time proactively leading and mentoring folks instead of reactively, “taking care of Sailors.”



*When you have time to be on the offensive, you get the opportunity to do one of the best things any Chief can possibly do: “unlock” a Sailor.* This is the absolutely pinnacle of motivation. When you start unlocking Sailors, you are dominating as a Chief, and you are helping the Navy win on the biggest scale.

“Unlocking” starts with the two things we as Chiefs owe Sailors every day. Number one is Good Order And Discipline (GOAD). Good Order means Sailors have good orders to carry out through the day. Orders they understand. Orders that make sense. “Good order” is meeting the standard, and not accepting the alternative. When good order is in place, communication flows, trust builds, and along with it your chances for mission success and a positive command climate.

*Discipline is: Doing what must be done, when it has to be done, as well as it can be done, and doing it that way every time.* It means you are instilling in your Sailors the discipline to see the orders to completion, make good decisions, and prioritize appropriately. It is on the Chief to influence the area between forced compliance and willing commitment, and thus setting the conditions for GOAD. GOAD should never be confused with punishment, as it so often is.

The second thing Chiefs owe their people is opportunity. This could be a collateral duty, a chance to lead a working party, or simply any chance to step up and break out and feel extra useful. A good barometer for this is every quarter when you collect all your Sailors’ brag sheets to see who your SOQ nominees should be. If their pages are empty, you will know if you’re providing enough opportunity, and likewise whether their lack of performance is their fault or yours. We can talk about Sailors deserving GOAD and opportunities, but it all starts with every Sailor deserving *a damn good Chief!*

Doing these few simple things will help you toward unlocking Sailors. Remember, we are entrusted with the nation’s youth. We have a lot of Sailors who have no idea what their life goals are or what their talents are. They are learning as much about themselves as they are about the Navy. Anytime you give them a shot at something where they stand to realize their potential, there is a chance you can

unlock a person to be massively successful. I have seen people completely burst out of themselves at all paygrades. Some very junior, and some Chiefs. There's nothing more gratifying than witnessing this, or, being thanked for enabling it!

How do we actually go about this? Well, you have two ears and one mouth for a reason. *Listen* to what people are telling you. Very rarely will a Sailor approach you and demand to run everything. The people who step up and demand to take ownership of the urinalysis program are even more scarce. But you will see hints on Sailor CDB paperwork and in other forums as to who is actively seeking more opportunities and you will also hear Sailors say things like, "Oh I didn't even know that existed" or "Oh I've never been picked for that." It is on you to match up these folks with opportunities and then coach them to success.

Then, there are your Sailors who are living on the Island of Misfit Toys. They've arrived to the command broken, or they're fresh off an NJP, or USS Last Command treated them so badly they're about to put in a Skillbridge package before lunch. How do we even approach unlocking them?

For starters, show them a side of the Navy they have not seen. Nothing proves a person wrong faster than when they are confronted by something that directly blows up what they perceive to be normal. For example, my LPO once asked me to host a CDB for a junior Sailor who they described as, "a leadership challenge." The LPO and his fellow First Class told me, "We are very curious to see how you approach this." Well, hey. Don't threaten me with a good time, you know?

The Sailor (12-year E5) starts the CDB by telling me, "I know you mean well, Chief, but I've only had shitty Chiefs my whole time in, and I'm just saying you shouldn't waste your time on me ... I don't want to make First because I'm just not interested in the responsibility." Jesus, right? So, the Chief has a choice here, right? Are you going to confront this Sailor, take offense to what he said? Are you going to go all high and right and put on a show in front of your FCPOs? Are you going to be the jayvee Chief who loses their shit on an E5?

Are you going to try to convince a 12-year E5 that everything he's seen over 12 years is wrong? You might as well go scream at your toilet seat because that thing is going to give you better results than this Sailor.

How to fix? Confront them with something they've never seen before. Disprove their concept of "the norm." In this case, I made sure he saw that every day, I operated completely different than what he expected from a "shitty" Chief and likewise, my FCPOs also operated beyond reproach. We rocked his world.

What happened? Well, he didn't make First Class, but that wasn't the goal. We don't define ourselves by who gets promoted. We define ourselves by building and developing people as leaders and contributors. But he pulled his weight on a very arduous and challenging deployment. And, when crisis found him when we all knew it would, he came to only one person with it - me. I was able to solve and diffuse the situation and get him the help he needed to take care of his family. That was, after all, his biggest motivator: time with the kid.

Another great motivator? Let them read your EVALs. This technique works like dynamite. I've had multiple LPOs frustrated they weren't on the list for Chief. I gave them my FCPO EVALs. The reaction typically goes like this, "I can do this!" Mind: Unlocked. Motivation: Engaged.

Sharing EVALs isn't "playing a game." It costs you nothing. Why wouldn't you do it? Do you think you have special words in yours? I can tell you that you don't, because your EVALs were influenced by everyone who kept their best EVALs to pass along as well. Your EVALs may be the best tools you're not using.

Like work/life balance, everyone is motivated differently. Everyone "works for" something. Don't hesitate to turn the screws on someone who you sense has lost their motivation. It's one of the most natural ways to show someone you care.

Two great books on motivation: Neptune's Inferno (Hornfischer) and Inside the Danger Zone (Wise).

### Side Note: Recognition

*Good Chiefs take the time to reward their Sailors' hard work. Great Chiefs reward their Sailors as soon as possible, do the heavy lifting on their own, and train their people along the way.* Don't ever "reward" a Sailor's hard work by telling them to submit themselves for an award. Move your ass, and personally write their award. And I do mean *personally* as in it better come across to them just how much their efforts meant to you. Chiefs love to say they made it "on the backs of their Sailors." The least anyone can do, then, is take a few minutes to thank them by writing a unique, heartfelt award.

*If your CO can sign an award, challenge them to get it done quickly, and set the table for them to do a surprise presentation to the crew.* Take the time to perfect the writing and admin to make it impossible for anyone to say "no" or to push back. This shows that you care and spares your chain of command the pain of revision. Additionally, COs like to know when their people have done something above and beyond in support of their mission.

Entire companies exist to help corporations recognize employees. Upward of 40 percent of employees leave jobs because they did not feel valued. Not every Sailor strives for a top-ranked evaluation or a Gucci award, but even informal recognition can go a long way toward their self-worth. Methods include public call-outs, coins, "of the month" incentives, and simple thank-you notes. I've also seen leaders do positive counseling chits and surprise presentations of special liberty at quarters. One thing I did as a CFL was draft a Letter of Appreciation for my command fitness team, so all the CO had to do was sign them once our cycle was in the books. That letter looks much better to a board than a simple designation letter or EVAL bullet. In another instance, I saw a CO who was fond of writing letters to Sailors' parents to tell them what a great job their Sailor was doing.

The good Chief ensures their Sailors are formally recognized for their work. The great Chief finds a way to thank someone for something every single day.

## Conflict Resolution

*Good Chief: "Conflict is inevitable. You gotta have thick skin."*

*Great Chief: "I am the stabilizer in any conflict. A rock is not provoked by the wind."*

Conflict is arguably the most challenging aspect of being a Chief. Trying to achieve "Great Chief" status in this realm can be challenging given the surplus of suck bags in the world, and especially in the military. Personally, even typing the words "conflict resolution" gives me anxiety. So, it doesn't surprise me how when I ask any Chief what they want more training on, the answer is typically "conflict resolution" with a bullet. It's also by far the best-received training I've offered.

President Reagan said, "Peace is not the absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means." Everyone experiences conflict. Doesn't matter if you're a good person or you are an egotistical self-serving energy vampire. Bad and unfair things do happen to good people and that is just life. I don't think any of us were born expecting a fair fight. The difference with a Chief is that a good Chiefs Mess 100% has conflict. A *great* Chiefs Mess ensures the conflict is productive. Remember, we are not here to *be some body* - we are here to *do some things!*

The military simply has a lot of conditions for conflict. Think about all the tactical commands residing under a staff command, and all of the resources they compete for. Or a handful of talented Sailors all competing for the same assignment. There are also aggressive or self-serving personalities who operate without the benefit of self-awareness.

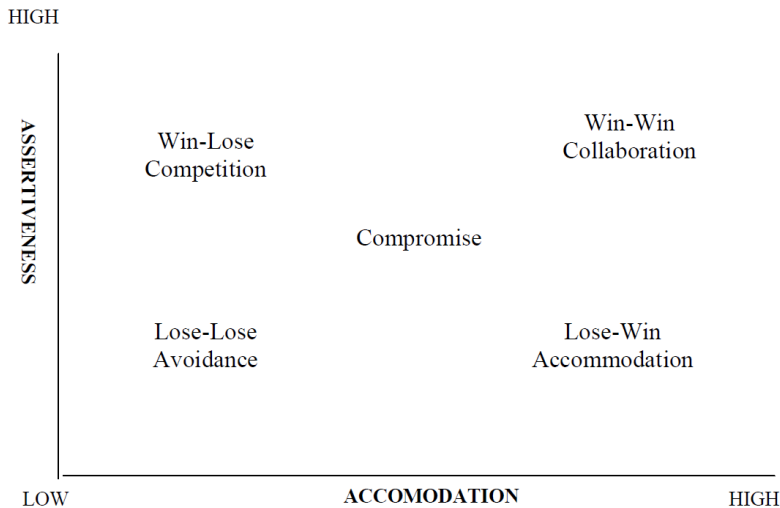
Sometimes, it takes a stronger leader to abstain from conflict than it does to fight. Every hear someone say, "I'm not going to die on that hill?" Usually, it means the juice simply isn't worth the squeeze, and if there are going to be calories put toward a conflict, it had better be worth it. This is another example of purpose winning out over passion.

*Why does conflict permeate across the force, at all levels? In my opinion, the main driver is because Chiefs don't get realistic enough training to handle conflict wherever it manifests.* The Chief needs to be the stabilizer in any conflict, and it is difficult to stabilize a situation when you haven't been trained to do it.

Let's be up front about this: Today's CPO Initiation does not train new Chiefs on how to resolve conflicts, and this is unfortunate, because conflict takes up so many hours of a Chief's day. I've been a part of 12 CPO Initiations, and chaired three. I've done active, reserve, combined, deployed, you name it. PowerPoint slides, scenarios, and CPO Select-invented trainings are not effective. A room full of blowhards screaming about a muster sheet does not land the caliber of brilliance you think it does.

Here is what I found to be effective, and it's what I've applied during the past few seasons. Stop spending six weeks beating up FCPOs for being ignorant. Instead, use CPO Initiation to teach to the entire Mess. Refresh. Recalibrate. Learn. Grow. Why spend six weeks focusing on training the small pool of Selects when you can train the *entire family*? We spend so much time bragging about how we make Chiefs during Initiation. But nobody talks about all the talent we lost because otherwise gifted CPO Selects wanted nothing to do with our shit.

Back to the matter at hand, the Navy's "Conflict Resolution System" or CRS is only a tool, and it is an obscure course of action that rarely shows itself as a go-to answer. When you're in a fight with a peer, advising someone to address the issue point-to-point is a weak answer. That's step one, and you can throw that step in the trash because it almost never works. The rest of the process gets into formalities. No one wants that. No one wants to be a "rat" or "throw someone under the bus" (the worst cliché ever spoken ... did you ever notice that most people who get "thrown under the bus" in fact actually walked out in front of the bus?). And, no one wants to appear so weak that they had to run to an arbiter. Even if you did bring it to a third or neutral party, from what I've seen, it is tough to find a leader who both parties trust to provide a workable solution.



Everything you are trying to achieve in a conflict is seeded in the graphic above. The goal is both sides win (collaboration). You don't want to be a pushover (accommodation) and you don't want to defeat the person and leave scars and unintended consequences (competition). Avoidance is the ultimate loss for all sides. If you are authentic, human (vulnerable), a good listener, and a great partner, conflict has little chance to show itself. But if you are an egotistical, stubborn Chief who thinks it is "my way or the highway," conflict will greet you daily and probably stick around to make sure you feel it as you go to bed.

Remember to show respect, and be curious. Your priority is to support the discussion, not to be "right." Second, focus on listening, not thinking. When witnessing an argument, you can always tell which person is trying to help and which person is zoned out, just waiting to spit out whatever they have to say. "You were supposed to be there by 1630 and you rolled in at 1800!" "What? I didn't come here to argue about clocks!"

Acknowledge and validate what someone is telling you, and this gives you time to consider whether you actually agree with it. Request the person validate your

points. Also, Don't wait. When a talk needs to happen, make it happen. Focus on the long game or end state.

***The key to resolving conflict is to set conditions where conflict can't appear.***

Where does it occur most often? Emails. Never engage in a potential or ongoing conflict via email. Don't. Especially if there are large CC lines involved. One of two things will happen when you do this: 1) You will be right, and you will "win" the argument; however, you will either look like an asshole to others reading the argument or the person who you flame-sprayed will resent you always and probably start prepping to bring you down; or 2) You lose the argument and with it goes your credibility and everything else along with it. Neither of these options should appeal to you if you aspire to be a great Chief.

When you engage someone in an email argument, all you're risking here is someone misinterpreting your words and escalating or inflaming the situation. Then your words get forwarded somewhere, and you are going to eat shit because of it. And a reminder: any and all correspondence can be collected in an investigation. Stay. Away. From. Email arguments. Second, always, always take the high road, or as I call it "disarm" the belligerent. In any conflict, the Chief is supposed to be the stabilizer - not the disrupter. You must remember this!

Get up from behind your desk and take a walk to the person. Pick up the phone and call. No one can be confused by a smile or an encouraging tone of voice. Then you can go back and answer the email and close it out in a tactful way. *This* is the Chief people want more of - not the blowhard who is out there spinning email tornadoes. When you see a situation spiraling out of control, don't be distracted by the storm - seek to understand the wants of the other person as quickly as you can. Go from there. A lot of my peers have asked me why I don't raise my voice and what my triggers are. Triggers don't matter because my top priority - always - is not to "win" an argument. It is to get to whatever the appropriate end state is. And every time you make the attempt to understand and/or learn the other person's interests, perspectives, and facts, you might even find they should definitely "win" because you didn't have all the information going in. I, for one, am completely ok leaving work



having learned something new that day. Remember, Chiefs must always continue to learn!

To understand why so many Chiefs want to learn how to more effectively handle conflict, we need to understand the root cause of the deficiency. From what I've seen, CPO Initiation does not effectively train Chiefs to handle conflict. Conflict is present every day during training sessions, with the focus on tasking. This is not the way. Most instances I've seen do not actually demonstrate to these new Chiefs on how to overcome stress and conflict - they're simply told to "have thick skin," "suck it up," or "you're going to get eaten alive in the Mess."

Especially you new Chiefs, listen up. No parts of the CPO Creed, CPO Pledge, or Sailor's Creed gives a CPO Mess permission to "eat someone alive." If you find yourself in this situation, do not try to "be some body" and create conflict with a CPO Mess of "some bodies." Instead, focus on *doing some things*. I want you to lower your head, dig your heels in, and *be great*. Be the change that Mess needs, and be *so great* that your results force them *to react to you*. It works. I promise you.

Chiefs find themselves in so much conflict because of newfound power and responsibility, ego that comes with rank, maybe a sexy job title in their signature block, and misplaced loyalty. For context, I will tell you that in any of my years as the senior enlisted in any command, task force, department, or division, I spent a disproportionate amount of time arbitrating conflicts between Chiefs. There are personal disputes, SOY or ranking board fights, "my Sailor my Sailor" fights, or what I call EVAL-based conflict where someone feels they were victimized over a collateral duty, deployment opportunity, award, or otherwise. And this isn't even touching the drama that comes from duty section, watch bills, and communication. Too many Chiefs are too quick to play the victim and too slow to find solutions. This is not what it means to be "about it."

After trying to solve probably hundreds of Chief fights, I am here to tell you the most common root cause goes like this, "Someone did or didn't want to do

something because they didn't want everyone to think something." Chiefs are absolutely, 100% the worst at inventing the thoughts of others. Why? Because we claim the central theme of CPO Initiation is self-awareness, but then we don't follow it up with actual development on what self-awareness really is and how it should be used.

*Self-awareness is a tool.* It helps us learn about ourselves so that we can work better with others. The goal is not to change our good or bad traits, but to understand they are present, and they may limit us when dealing with others on the opposite ends of those spectrums. The problem Chiefs have is every time those negative traits arise during Initiation, their peers abuse and destroy them to no end. There's no real progress made.

*People who are legitimately self-aware are good in conflicts.* They understand how their communication comes across, where they might be digressing, and they understand how to work a balance to an end state. They are open to feedback about themselves, and that also makes them great listeners. Most important, they are not at all interested in speculating about what others are thinking about them, or in general. How many times have you heard anyone say, "I did it that way because I didn't want everything to think I..." That is poison. No one is thinking about you nearly as much as you imagine they are. If I walk into a room of 30 people, I promise you all 30 people are in their own little movie doing their thing, and they do not care about me. And I know this because when I am one of those 30 people that is exactly what I'm doing! Someone walks by me and says good morning and I acknowledge it and I put my head down and get back to chopping on an EVAL or trying to find whatever phone number I lost or questioning myself on if I shut off the coffee pot before I left the house. Stop putting thoughts in other people's heads - you're creating something that isn't there and adding conflict where it doesn't belong.

In fact, I challenge you to try this experiment: Get out from your desk and go visit some work centers. Ask the Sailors what they're thinking about. Don't small

talk and don't mess around. Get right to it: "Hey, what are you thinking about right now? Go!" And then listen. *It. Will. Surprise. You.*

Personal conflict is the most challenging. If you feel you have been personally attacked in any forum, stay calm. Don't react. Bullies and shit-starters hang themselves 100% of the time, and they've most likely brought others down with them. Don't fall into the trap of arguing with someone who argues with everyone all day. The great Chief is above that.

***When we remove our egos, and we don't try to invent others' thoughts and motives, we reach the end state much faster.*** Your ego is only going to hurt you. Let's talk about misplaced loyalty, the next ingredient in a lot of military and CPO Mess conflict.

As a Chief, who are you most loyal to? Some will answer the Navy, some would say the CO, some would say their DH or DIVO, and others would say the CPO Mess or their Sailors. Some Sailors unfortunately are more loyal to their community i.e. NSW or a specific program, but which is it, really? Do you see all those choices? No wonder Chiefs get into so much conflict.

***As a Chief, your loyalty should be 100% to the Chiefs Mess and its ability to influence and improve the Navy.*** The Mess is chartered to execute CO's intent, which is the Navy's intent. When the Mess is unified and working toward a vision, it is unstoppable. Chiefs help each other with all their challenges, JOs, problem Sailors, personal issues, training, you name it. But when the Mess is conflicted, divided, or personality-driven, it is just that - a mess. And please, don't confuse the Mess with the CPOA. If you don't want to pay dues to buy into the CPOA for shirts and coins and paddles and the Khaki Ball, then don't. You're still a Chief and you still get a say within the CPO Mess. Your loyalty is there - not to shirts and coins. You do understand nothing in Navy instruction charges you money to be a Chief, correct?

Side note: Being loyal to the CPO Mess *does not mean* condoning improper or unprofessional behavior. Being loyal to the Mess actually means holding each other accountable for that behavior. “What happens in the Chiefs Mess stays in the Chiefs Mess” is for PII and human factors and sensitive issues that warrant protection. It does not mean giving each other “hook-ups” and free passes to fail the BCA or commit ARIs and sweep things under rugs.

Now, conflict via misplaced loyalties. It usually stems from loyalty to Sailor or loyalty to an officer, and it breeds conflict. Let’s take an example. CPO1 has a Sailor leaving the command who is a good Sailor but never won SOQ. The Sailor finishes third on everyone’s score cards and the CPO1 goes nuts and starts arguments because the command is missing the opportunity to recognize this “overlooked” Sailor on their way out. This is a clear-cut case of “my Sailor My Sailor” bias. It is the responsibility of the CPO Mess to get these decisions right - not to appease or satisfy specific people. If this CPO really wanted their Sailor recognized, they should have fed them more opportunity to get them over the top, put them in for an impact award, or something similar.

Misplaced DH/DIVO/CO loyalty is also bad. Chiefs fight constantly over working hours and inter-departmental cultures. One DH always cuts their people out early. Another does not. One lets their people go volunteer. Another does not. One does the Sailor’s Creed at quarters the other does not. All of this becomes a distraction. The Chief knows their supervisor has a say in how their EVALs and awards fall out. And wow those are a few terrible reasons to give someone too much loyalty. A unified and supportive Mess working in concert helps coach and mentor all leadership to be on the same sheet of music. If at any time a Chief is too concerned with their own recognition, it is time for intervention. Everyone clap along with me: *We. Are. Not. Here. To. Be. Some. Body. We are here to do some things!*

Most of what we’ve covered is about electronic or public communication and conflict. But what if the conflict borders an altercation when it is one-on-one and in person? You have many options. *First, when you feel the tension, don’t*

*react.* The Chief is the stabilizer! Find something else to focus on. Some people look at their feet or channel energy elsewhere. For me, I grab my coffee. Coffee always, always centers me. There is no one out there who can ruin coffee for me, ever. *Second, let them get whatever it is out.* If it means you sit there and take it, you sit there and take it. One of my favorite Chiefs knew me well enough to know that I was approaching to vent. He would very quickly greet me with, “How may I help you Sir or Ma’am?” while he took a long, deliberate sip of coffee. It’s a great technique that levels the bubbles and reminds us why we came to work that day in the first place. *Third, you can offer to adjourn to a neutral spot* like a walk or an outside lunch table to relax the situation. And always: breathe. Take your time, be calm and calculated, and focus on addressing each piece of what they said. Say things like, “I totally get where you’re coming from, 100%,” or “Wow this is a first heard for me, ok” or “That sounds like a lot, do you mind if I take a second to write some of this down and give you the best answers I can?”

People laugh when I say “100%” but the fact is, especially in the military, you can diffuse 99 out of 100 potential arguments simply by opening your response with “100%” even if it isn’t really 100%. Again, costs you nothing, and gets you to the end state faster. I’ve had people tell me this approach is lying, but it isn’t. It is saying you 100% acknowledge and understand their point of view, and that is all most people want – that their gripe has been registered. One of my favorite Chiefs says, “I hear you and I see you,” which I also like because it acknowledges the full picture from the words to the non-verbals. Now, you seasoned folks will shoot back that this Chief is telling me professionally to fuck off, and you may be right. But when she does this to me, I’m ok with it. To quote Ron Burgundy, “I’m not even mad.” You’re the stabilizer, or you aren’t.

*Go into any conflict, disagreement, or argument seeking to understand.* You will never look bad for doing this. Use your ears first and your mouth only when you need to. I cannot tell you how many times I’ve said in a discussion these phrases, “Asking because I don’t know,” or “please explain - I’m happy to go home

today having learned something,” or ‘Can you help me understand your perspective,’ or “Ok, so this is what is most important to you?”

I use these a lot specifically when dealing with Millington regarding personnel issues. If you approach a person asking for help, they will remember you as a person they were able to help, thus, something positive. If you approach looking to create conflict, well, they’ll remember that more. The bottom line is your priority is to reach an end state instead of defeating someone in an argument. And remember, these techniques cost you absolutely nothing as a Chief.

*Do everything you can as a leader to leave your conflicts and stressors at work.* You know that old saying with married couples of, “Don’t go to bed angry.” That applies. Address all you can before leaving work. That way, when you are home, and you feel that anxiety twisting itself into a giant garlic knot in your stomach, you can tell yourself, “Look, I’ve done everything I can for that situation until tomorrow. I’m going to enjoy my time between now and then, and not invent stressors that don’t exist, and I’m not going to continue to stress about something I cannot affect.”

Two great reads on conflict resolution: *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (Carnegie) and *Speed of Trust* (Covey).

### **Side Note: Proactive Leadership**

Everything I've captured in this guide has come from a mentor, an author, or a formal course. But Proactive Leadership is where I'm going to divert. There are literally hundreds of books, trainings, and Ted Talks on this subject, and only one piece of it that works for me consistently, and I call it, "becoming traffic."

Did you ever stop and think what is actually happening when you are "stuck in traffic" on the way to work? As you are calling in your excuse? Everyone around you is also calling, and they are identifying *you* as traffic.

This is what I mean by "becoming traffic." You must accept your share of the situation. Only you truly know why you are late. A self-aware person doesn't blame the traffic. They phrase it this way, "Hey I'm late and I'm having a day, and now I just drove into a bottleneck. Cover for me and I'll be there as soon as I can."

The Chief is expected to be the one telling others about the traffic, not the one sitting in it. And this is accomplished by establishing a routine and being disciplined enough to keep the routine.

There is a part two to proactive leadership, and that is on the job. I have so many discussions with Chiefs who are afraid of promotion because of the unknowns, and all of the aspects of the job they think will make them uncomfortable. Ok, so, we're just going to be scared and hang it up? How to be proactive?

Educate yourself. Read and learn the CSEL pub and PQS and complete the Career Counselor training along with it. Look, you can investigate what makes you uncomfortable or you can let it victimize you. Be more valuable for your Sailors, and read.

Good Chiefs are on top of things, but great Chiefs are on top of those and the next ridgeline as well.

## Mentoring Junior Officers

*Good Chief: "Excuse me, I need to fix my JO."*

*Great Chief: "Let me ask my DIVO if they're available - they'd be great for that opportunity."*

The most poignant fact I've learned as a Chief is no matter how high-ranking an enlisted Sailor is, they still don't share in the charge of command. As it was once explained to me at CMC school, "We don't share command, but we share in the *leadership* of it." This can be difficult for especially a new Chief to understand, but facts are facts. When choosing between a 12-year FCPO who just made Chief or a fresh-from-school ensign, who would you consult during a crisis?

Of all the duties executed by Chiefs, mentoring JOs (Junior Officers) is among the most important. It's a glass plate that cannot be dropped, for sure. The Navy defines a junior officer as paygrades O1 to O4. Even as a new Chief, the Chief is expected to guide and provide mentorship to the officer, to include representing and advocating for their Sailors (everything we discussed in the "balance" chapter). Easy enough, right? Never.

Difficult JOs exist, and so do difficult Chiefs. Rarely is it a match made in heaven, and if both sides aren't willing to forge an open and honest relationship and recognize they each have something to offer, the results can be detrimental to the division or the mission.

My last three XOs have been O4/O5s. All have been receptive to my advice. And when my advice is not taken, I do not take offense. Officers make decisions, they give orders, and they assume the risk. We guide, advise, and provide every necessary detail and context to get us all to the right decision. After that decision, you own it, and you move on. If they've ever considered me as a "mentor," then ok. But I always see O4s basically as commanders, so I consider my role to be advisory at best.



I spent years learning – under some very patient and supportive junior officers – how to become a solid mentor and trusted agent. And let’s do some full disclosure: The Navy offers almost nothing formally to Chiefs on how to mentor junior officers. There is a PowerPoint training, yes, but I learned the bulk of my coaching skills on the job from two people: my CTRCM mentor, and a retired Senior Chief who now works as a civilian. The *best* guidance I ever got, actually, came from an O3. He gave me a PDF that told a story of why the Army assigns senior NCOs to their junior officers. It’s called *The Officer/NCO Relationship (1977)* and it is a great read (I found it online). It was very useful as he and I went over our expectations. He challenged me to write the Navy’s version. I still don’t think I’m quite there yet, ha ha.

*The crux of our upward mentorship is “forceful backup.”* In short, if the emperor has no clothes, the Chief better say something about it. If the relationship is strong and the requisite trust between both parties has been achieved, the emperor says, “thank you” and shows appreciation. Life goes on, and trust grows. If there is no trust, and no solid footing for the partnership, this observation will be ignored, and there will likely be consequences within the partnership.

None of this is as easy as it appears. You will find too many instances where mentoring a JO is seen as not comfortable, and not an area where the Chief wants to improve. By and large, many officers don’t care. They know their time in the assignment is very short, and they are more than capable of riding out an annoying Chief. Conflict is simply the price of doing business and waiting out some salty Chief is a challenge easily accepted.

Here’s an example. I checked into a unit, and I am told there is next-to-no relationship between the CPO Mess and the DIVO/DH level leaders, which included civilians and officers. I met with the Mess, and they complained about the DIVOs. I met with the DIVOs, and they complained about the Chiefs. The most important feedback from the DIVOs was, “We’re told Chiefs are great and have all this capability and they are experts and mentors, but we’re not seeing any of this.”

One prior-enlisted civilian pulled me aside and told me the biggest impact I could have on the command would be to “un-fuck your Chiefs Mess.”

Wow, right? Next CPO meeting, I asked for a show of hands of how many of them have ever mentored a junior officer. One hand went up. So, there’s the start point, right? Next meeting: Chief training on mentoring JOs. As we collectively milked this cow, we discovered what we had was the result of a young and fast-growing command. We had young Chiefs who had not mentored DIVOs, and we had DIVOs who never had a Chief to lean on. Blame helps nothing. You own it, and you move out, period. And what we found was we *did* have Chiefs who were experts – they just had not been appropriately employed to that point.

Whatever your circumstances, the techniques to improving your fighting position are going to remain the same. Let’s discuss.

***Step one: Build your relationship by getting together.*** Go to dinner, go to lunch, get a coffee, I don’t care. You are to treat every new JO like the “first 96.” If you open the relationship on the wrong foot, then that officer will carry a negative expectation of the CPO Mess for as long as warranted. This is the time to discuss your goals and visions, your limitations, your expectations, and your drivers. Understanding how each other prefers to communicate here is critical! It’s also a chance to show how well you know your field and your Sailors, without bragging. Every JO wants a warm and fuzzy and a reason to trust you. Do it!

***Second: Be authentic and get to know each other.*** This is your new tag-team partner, and your relationship affects *everything* about your Sailors. This relationship is YOUR responsibility and if you screw this pooch, your people suffer, and the legacy of the CPO Mess takes a hit. Be authentic, and that does not mean be weak. You two will experience challenges and stressors during your time together. Being real now will help down the road.

Conflict is inevitable sometimes. You will occasionally encounter a leader who cannot physically or mentally move forward until they have their blow-up

moment. This happened to me. I was very confident in my skills at that particular assignment, and I did not hesitate to provide that “solicited and unsolicited” feedback Chiefs are known for. Well, my supervisor was *not* going to be happy until they could dress me down to remind me who was an officer, and they insulted nearly everything about my background, from my time in the Navy to my operational and educational experience. I know, right? The *shame* in having college degrees!

What to do? Nod my head, dismiss myself. An argument he could win is what he wanted. Nope, not today, hombre. I’m going to deescalate. After some cooling, the next day, I returned with my two cents. “I understand your observations of me, and I now understand what is important to you. But it is also important *to me* that you understand why I am here and the unique qualities I bring to this program. I’m not asking for you to consider me your peer, but I ask you respect the things I do bring and allow me time to show you.”

Definitely a long story short, but we did arrive at a happy ending. We enjoyed great wins and influenced quite a few changes. I’m not trying to claim that it was my approach that got the relationship on track, because I believe it really helped him initially to get everything off his chest as he was entering a new and challenging (and stressful) position. But ultimately despite our rocky start, we ended up ok, and I still like the guy. From time to time, you will come across folks who depend on conflict because it’s what they’re used to either at work or at home or both, and you will even encounter straight-up bullies. You must maintain awareness and understand that it most likely isn’t personal to you and it is not limited to you. Don’t let yourself sink with the ship.

Oh, and remember our conversation about people who argue and create conflict with everyone? Remember how I said they always slip on their own banana peel? That’s also what happened with that guy. Keeping a cool head and being patient wins, my friends. It’s like Walter said in the *Big Lebowski*, “I’m calmer than you are, dude.” The great Chiefs aren’t interested in checkers – they’re playing chess.

***Be open, understanding, and accepting of your JO.*** When you have the chance to assert your leadership or technical skills, do it strategically and in a way that makes them thankful they asked you. Don't condescend them and don't appear like their asking is inconvenient for you. No matter what you think you were told in your CPO training, we do not order our JOs around, and we don't tell them what to do. Everything you offer should be qualified by, "I would recommend" or "I suggest" and that type of verbiage. Ask them questions. "What's our intent here? What's the end state? How can I help?" Remember, it's tough to create conflict with a person who is clearly trying to make everyone's life easier.

***Finally, don't try to deprive your JO of their opportunity to lead.*** A lot of officers are going to approach a new assignment excited about it, and ready to try out their skills with a group. Support this. Be their partner. If they want to be more visible and approachable with the crew, show them the best ways to do that. But don't put up a wall where a wall isn't needed.

Two great reads on mentoring JOs: *The Officer/NCO Relationship* (1977) and *Team Leadership: An Open Letter to Prospective SEAL Senior Enlisted Advisors* (Gusentine).

### Side Note: “Chief Shit”

If you noticed, this book has nothing to do with writing evaluations. There’s nothing in here about which collateral duties you should chase to look good for a board, there are no pointers for writing awards, and you won’t find anything in here about manning, administration, or specific command programs. There’s nothing about how to hold a quarters or build a 0800 report, and nothing about the dozens of process we employ or technologies we use whose contracts are only going to expire the minute I’ve finished these words.

Likewise, there is no time spent here on CPOA matters, designing coins, or building hollow events like CPO Pride Day or Khaki Ball. No Commanding Officer has ever remarked, “My Chiefs Mess is the best in the Navy. Just look at how dope their Khaki Ball was.”

Now more than ever, we need to keep our focus where it matters most. When we allow ourselves to be distracted or even dominated by these extracurriculars, we are building ourselves instead of building our Navy. Competitive swimmers can’t be concerned with looking to their left or right during a race to see where their competitors are. Why? It slows them down. A Chiefs Mess needs to keep its head straight, and charge forward. The best advertising campaign, and the best way to build pride, comes from organic, word of mouth endorsement from the people we serve.

A Chiefs Mess is a band with a song. If the song is good, people will ask to hear it more. If the song is great, people will hear it more, period. It speaks to people. It is authentic. It is real. Self-promotion, coins, and parties don’t accomplish this. No one is downloading a song because there is a picture of a skull with a combo cover on the album art work. They want it because the song *matters* to them.

When you’re good, you tell people how good you are. When you’re great, people tell you. Which Chiefs Mess do you want to be in?

## Communication

*Good Chief: "Don't be the last person with a secret."*

*Great Chief: "It's not what you say. It's how you say it."*

What is the most common feedback found in any command climate survey? Yup! "Communication." Surprise - it's not just your unit or work center where people are complaining about communication. You can set your watch to it. Why? Because many leaders (and especially Chiefs) simply assume communication is loud, clear, and consistently happening. It is not.

I will offer a soft and humble brag here - I actually received a DEOCS where communication was ranked favorably as a command strong suit, with no actionable complaints attached. How? Simple. The Navy trained me to communicate clearly, honestly, and authentically. That's it - that's the pearl.

Would you like an example of this approach without having to read the many books on the DoD reading list or attending the Resilience-Building Leaders course? Watch Bernie Mac's comedy. Bernie Mac was a unique and exceptional comic who sadly passed away in 2008 at the young age of 50. If you were not familiar with Bernie Mac, and you were to read some of his comedy scripts online, you may find yourself scratching your head. On paper, his comedy reads like many of the other raw comedians from his time, and he doesn't appear to stand out. But to *see* his act is something entirely different. To *see* his non-verbal expressions, to *hear* the tone of his voice, and to *feel* his persistence, passion, and power and the way he absolutely dominated every crowd in every house ... it was truly special.

Successful comedians are the most outstanding communicators one can find. And Bernie Mac offered one simple answer for his success. He said, "It's not what you do, it's *how* you do it. It's not what you say, it's *how* you say it." And this - *this* is exactly where great communication comes from.

I've read more than a dozen books the DoD or Navy has told me to read on communication. I've sat through the Navy-recommended courses and countless

Ted Talks within them and I am telling you the common theme within all of them is authentic communication. For me, it is easier to remember and apply this approach on a daily basis by recalling Bernie Mac rather than the training I've had, and that's why I've shared that with you.

Nearly all leadership success and failure can be traced to strong or weak communication. When you have great comms, you ensure accuracy and safety, and you are able to alleviate potential barriers caused by bias.

*Communication is also the top ingredient when it comes to building rapport.* As a Chief, a lot of your success is going to come from your robust network of Chiefs. It's going to come from how effectively you build relationships by establishing rapport. Before you're going to truly lead (or unlock) a Sailor, rapport has to be established. Rapport is the product of consistent, sincere, meaningful interaction. This is the authentic, sometimes vulnerable, "care personally challenge directly" communication made famous by Brenè Brown. Building rapport is not being a kiss-ass, suck-up, or lap dog. It means paying proper attention and respect to someone, and making them the center of your attention no matter how difficult that may be. Full attention leads to good rapport and good communication. If you don't have one or the other, chances are you have no effective relationship.

Did you ever have someone in your Mess who sends multi-page emails and then gets upset when either no one reads them or no one replies to them? This is a classic identifier of a poor communicator. When addressing a group, the old adage always applies: "Tell them what you're going to say, say it, and then tell them what you said." In other words, "Be brief and be gone."

Is it tempting to digress, allow your passion to take over, and send out a bombastic, email thesis? Sure. But don't do it. I can recall at least a few instances where I sent an email with a one-liner at the bottom, "I would have written a shorter email, but I didn't have time." It takes a lot of time and practice to communicate concisely. Do it. Practice. Try it. Have people read it for you. It's worth it.

*The key to successful and authentic communication is to remember that all communication is two ways.* Yes, we send information expecting effects. But feedback from the intended recipient is equally important. Feedback comes from words, body language, and rapport. When you send email, you deprive yourself or some of that equation. Think about it – this is like reading a Bernie Mac comedy routine without hearing his words or seeing his expressions. It’s not as effective! Sailors are like billboards with their non-verbals. Eye contact, body language, words, breathing, perceiving. Watch those billboards! These are cues to course correct. In an everyday situation where you are face to face with someone, your feedback is coming 55% from body language, 38% from tone, and only 7% from the actual spoken words. Face to face interactions are so valuable! But they require time and effort, and aren’t always feasible especially when dealing with so many people across the world.

Verbal communication must be understandable, credible, relevant, and resonant. And to be effective, you must consider the receiver’s cultural differences, geographic location, and socioeconomic status. Here’s an example: One of my closest Navy colleagues some years ago was native Vietnamese. His English was strong enough to get him to the rank of FCPO, but a person really had to struggle and focus to be able to understand everything he would try to say. He spoke fast, and he appeared fairly lazy with his annunciation in audio and written forms. Where this concerned me was when an EVAL ranking concluded, I was upset with how low he was ranked, despite his success and qualifications, and being an otherwise outstanding Sailor and team player. When I asked about it, I was told, “Oh come on he isn’t professional and no one can even understand him when he talks.”

It turns out, the problem wasn’t on his end. I witnessed a few conversations, and I noticed when the Sailor spoke, the person receiving his communication wasn’t trying hard enough to listen. They were guilty of formulating their response first, and listening ineffectively second. It is no wonder they never understood him. If our first inclination is always to respond, then we aren’t receiving the original communication clearly.



Here is another misnomer: “bad communication” can be fixed simply by multiplying the amount of outgoing communication, starting (of course) with the top. This creates noise, which decreases the flow of information across the medium, whether it is spoken or email or otherwise. And the same holds true whether the comms are coming from the top or the bottom. For example, a Skipper gets terrible feedback on a command climate survey, so they decide to make it a rule to just start forwarding out most of their emails to the command distro. They also decide to piggyback that during their command all-hands quarters, where they spend more than an hour putting out information that most of the crew finds irrelevant to their purposes. Leadership has now swung the rudder too far in the other direction. Sailors will now complain about getting “spammed” by the Triad and how long their quarters lasts while they’re standing in formation in the summer sun, listening to information they don’t feel pertains to them.

The same is true from bottom-up communication. There is an understanding you will see as a leader. Your subordinates will complain all day when they perceive you are not sharing, 100%. But they will withhold whatever they like from you, and as a Chief you shouldn’t take that personally. Remember, you told your people to “handle things at the lowest possible level.” So, don’t be surprised when they try just that! The reality is, if the tactical levels of leadership insisted on “opening communication flow” up to the CO, the CO would then be flooded with countless topics they simply do not need to know to execute command, like how many of your Sailors are out getting a blood draw, whose kid is home sick, and how the most recent CDB went. There absolutely are ways to make communication even worse.

The topic of communication always serves as a subtle reminder that *Sailors hate two things: the way things are, and change!* The great Chief knows how to work that area in the middle to a satisfactory degree.

***There are two ways to authentically improve the effectiveness of communication within your means: 1) Cut through the barriers and 2) demonstrate care and consistency.*** When you prioritize these approaches, you carve out an

effective route for your communications to be received and returned by the recipient, and you are showing the reasoning and motivation behind your communications, which helps to build both understanding and rapport – both of which lead to a more positive climate.

There are several ways to cut into or remove barriers in your communication. But first, let's identify the barriers. When you send an email, you are up against other (probably unorganized) emails in the receiver's inbox. If your subject line does not clearly convey a call for action, it likely will get skimmed over. Your email is also subject to misinterpretation because it does not benefit from tone or non-verbal communication. If your email is too long, some of your points or requests will go unnoticed or unread, and that includes the suspense, if you included one. One of the most common and frustrating points of feedback I hear from Chiefs is, "Well I sent out an email." Ok, so, did you receive acknowledgement? Was the task or call to action understood? After you noticed the non-response, did you follow-up? Did you reach out in chat or by phone or in person? Or were you content to allow them to put you into a spot?

Do you ever wonder why there's always that Chief in every meeting who appears shocked or dumbfounded when you're discussing a Navy message about a program change? It's because that email was forwarded with a truncated subject line that nobody read (or thought applied to them), then they opened it and saw a sea of text. They decided they did not have time to read it. A good Chief forwards relevant information to their colleagues. But the great Chief removes this barrier by taking a minute or so to tailor the presentation of that information specifically to their people, and going through the text and highlighting the most relevant sections. Not only does this remove some barriers, it shows the recipient their Chief cared enough to take the time to do that for them.

A Skipper can remove barriers as well. Instead of blasting the entire command with emails from either them or their assistant, they can hold "Khaki call" where they can deluge the top level of leadership with the info, and put the onus on them to prioritize the flow to their people. This works best when it is nested under

the CO's priorities, because it makes for consistent communication. Other ways to circumvent barriers include the delivery style. If choosing written communication, be brief, and write no higher than the eighth grade level. Long emails are doom. Most times, simply leading with a BLUF (Bottom Line Up Front) and 5 Ws is the most effective way to go. And just a personal note I'd add: Refrain from sending emails that contain rumors, gossip, or speculation. Emails grow wings, and every time you do that, it adds to the noise. In fact, especially as a Chief, expect anything you send in an email or anything you post on social media or text message to be captured and shared with other people if it suits their needs.

You also need to know your people and know their own barriers. The Chief is the "people person" in the chain of command. They need to know the best and most effective ways to communicate with everyone up or down the chain. For example, I had one Chief who, every time I sent out an email, I knew it would not be read for a long time. In fact their inbox was full of hundreds of unread emails on any given day. So I'd have to make it a point to stop by and visit them, knowing that an email to the CPO Mess or even a direct email to that Chief was not going to get me the results I wanted. Did I try to fix it? Yes. Did it cost me extra time to communicate with that Chief? Yes. But I'm not going to sit there and be a victim of their bad habits. I'm going to put in the calories to make it better. As soon as you feel like a victim, you are one, and great Chiefs don't sit around accepting others' bad habits.

Another famous example of cutting through barriers is General Stanley McChrystal's efforts during the early days of the Iraq war. Frustrated by the stove piped nature by which Special Operations Forces operated in theater, he implemented radical changes to communications in his area of responsibility. He held his meetings in the center of the watch floor right in front of everyone so none of the leaders could hide within a protected, conference room environment. He broke down barriers and service-related cultures and got everyone on equal footing. He initiated "flat comms," which meant people used functional accounts to communicate across the joint setting, and this included putting everyone on a first-

name basis. To this day, Naval Special Warfare operates even in garrison using a first-name basis, because it simplifies communications, empowers leaders at every level, and suits the environment and mission. And don't worry, Chiefs. If NSW orders are in your future and you prefer to be called "Chief," that option is always available to you. And it's worth noting; "flat comms" doesn't not supersede rank. Proper military bearing and courtesy is always expected in formal settings.

The second way to improve your communication is by demonstrating care and consistency. This is only a personal observation based on quite a few years of trying to effectively communicate, but Sailors aren't concerned about the volume of communications so much as they want authentic communication that shows a leader's care and concern. And when this approach is executed consistently, you have a winning formula. The most common avenues I've seen from this are showing empathy, speaking from the heart, and being open and transparent. If you consistently communicate this way, you'll find people will be willing to forgive the occasional informative email that didn't make it to them, so long as they trust their command is looking out. It goes back to Bernie Mac when he says it's "*how* you say it."

One of my favorite examples of this can be found in the book *Blink* by Malcolm Gladwell. He describes an experiment where a room of listeners was provided short audio clips of doctors speaking to patients. The listeners were asked to play conversations of doctors having discussions with their patients, and they were asked to guess which doctors were the subjects of medical lawsuits. The listeners, of course, were able to predict the correct answer nearly every time. The reason, they said, was because some of the doctors spoke to the patients like people, and they showed a concern and empathy for them. The ones that got sued, they said, were more robotic, and treated the patients like data. The lesson shows that even when doctors got something wrong, people were less inclined to sue them for it because they felt the doctor had their best interest in mind. This is a lesson anyone in a position of military leadership can apply, but especially the Chief.

I've also seen authentic communication come into play from top leadership. I was talking with a CO in Rhode Island, who expressed how disappointed he was when he got his first DEOCS feedback. He had incorporated all kinds of lessons learned from leadership books and fellow officers, and he felt like communication was one of his strong points. He built in regular touch points with his department heads, met the CPO Mess regularly, held weekly quarters, and sent updates to the ombudsman. He also issued a weekly battle rhythm of every meeting and who was expected to attend. It turns out, despite all of those legit efforts, people in that command gave feedback that he was not personable or approachable, and didn't make time to make connections and get to know people. They said the meetings were too many and they were not beneficial most of the time.

He asked me, "How do I fix this? *I think I am personable!*" I asked him a series of questions, and the replies I got went like this: He never held a Human Factors Council; when he met with Chiefs, they only discussed CO's intent, schedules, and programs; his meetings existed solely for people to report to him, with him not offering anything of substance back to the group; he built his weekly battle rhythm without consulting anyone in leadership for their feedback on its feasibility; and in two years time, he only issued one impact award and did not debrief any Sailors on their EVALs. He also didn't meet with people during their check-in process or participate in command PT, and he traveled a lot.

Now, to be objective, COs run the gamut as far as approaches, and it is definitely a case of "to each their own." I've seen mission-first COs who could not possibly care less about command feedback in any form, and I've seen mission-first COs who cared deeply about any and all feedback. But this particular CO wanted very much to improve his effectiveness. Lucky for him, he has easy avenues to do so. For one, effective communication doesn't mean every single thing needs to be face-to-face or in a meeting. If the intent can be accomplished in an email, make it an email. Two, if you're going to set a battle rhythm regardless, at least ask your people for their inputs, even if you're going to ignore it. That way, at least they feel included in the discussion. Three, you have to get in front of people and show that

you care. Most Skippers I know don't have the availability to show up for command PT, but would it kill you once in a while to get out there? It's a huge motivator for the CFL team and the crew, not to mention hanging out after for some personal get-to-know-you time with a captive audience. The more times a leader spends "in the wild" with their people, the quicker trust and rapport develop.

Command PT is a sensitive subject with many Chiefs and leadership teams in general. But there are absolutely opportunities there if executed well. Team sports are morale builders when the Sailors have the chance to "beat" their Chiefs or win one over the Triad. It builds rapport, and it helps communication. I'll also add one of the coolest things I've seen is when we got a new CO at the SEAL team I was at. One of the first things he did after taking over was to lead the khakis on a three-mile, soft-sand beach run. He spent most of the run floating between runners and chatting, and as you might imagine, it was very effective.

Being yourself, and genuinely talking to people, matters. One of my Skippers was completely open about his intentions and vision for the command and its people. His big buzz phrase was, "the most important thing ... is that the most important thing ... is the most important thing." As you may have guessed, he valued the Sailor and family unit as a whole, and equated that directly to mission success, and, we had a lot of success.

But it's not enough to just carry yourself that way and say what people want to hear. He listened extra hard to what everyone had to say, which is a key component to effective communication. And when he had an audience, it was useful. He held up his end of the deal at meetings and gatherings. When it came to quarters, my god, it was something to see. A casual observer might see a shy speaker who isn't used to public speaking, standing in front of their command with a little notebook open, slowly trying to effectively deliver some dad joke ice breakers before getting into his announcements. And he would read them, one at a time, from his notebook, and at the end, he would include something he was struggling with or trying to learn, and he made it relatable to everyone at the command. It was authentic, heart-felt communication, and people ate up every last word of it.

Afterward, people would hang out and talk to him about the things he brought up, and there were a lot of hand shakes and congratulations for all the award recipients. He gave out a lot of impact awards, and always had a personable story attached to each one. On a side note, he also took the time to sit with each new check-in and learn about them, and he issued tons of letters on his stationary to commemorate birthdays, occasions, and other achievements. I kept one of them, a hand-written note that says, "... I sincerely appreciate everything you have done for this command and for me. I will treasure all our moments through all the challenges. Having you as a teammate has made things so much easier. ..." To me, that meant more than most awards I've received.

*Authentic communication is what Sailors want.* They don't want someone talking *at* them, they want someone talking *with* them. This is where Chiefs have the greatest opportunity to get messages across. With this approach, we show how our unit genuinely cares for people, and the Navy cares for people. As a Chief I used to tell my people that if they got gouge from someone other than me on a topic very important to them, I will personally take that as a hit and an area for me to improve. I should be as hungry for info as they are and no, whatever rumors they heard did not count toward that deal. And that even leads into transparency.

I like to be as transparent as possible with everything I do. I like to show my work, and I like to talk through decisions as a Mess, and let everyone have a say in what we're trying to accomplish. This results in increased buy-in, increased trust, and increased all-around value at work. And maybe more important, it allows everyone in the Mess to be able to walk through a command-level issue or problem and get a taste at what it's like to solve it or make recommendations toward a better outcome. Any time you can do this, with either your FCPOs or your Chiefs, it lets them see that the rank they are striving for is attainable, and they can be value added if they're selected.

I used this approach successfully on a deployment. The Ops desk at the JOC (Joint Operations Center) was undermanned, and their Chief solicited the entire Task Force to request help manning the battle watch. One by one, almost

every Chief laughed in his face. Well, I saw an opportunity. I rounded up the troops, and I explained as transparently as possible that the desk had become undermanned, and there was an opportunity for us to help by simply adjusting our schedules and committing a few extra hours for training and sleep cycles. I said if even one of my Sailors agreed to qualify, I would join them, qualify, and also take some watches. Well, everyone at the table raised their hand. We supplemented that watch and guess what happened? The team benefitted from better integration with the operations department on the whole because it helped us understand the operations points of view, it helped us work seamlessly on logistics and planning, and it built trust and rapport between Sailors. And, of course, everyone involved in that situation got promoted. It's amazing what you can accomplish when egos are put aside and no one cares who gets credit for what. We did what Chiefs are supposed to do, and we turned a tough situation into a win.

While transparency is a great tool to help build trust and rapport, it isn't the panacea, either. There are some things Chiefs deal with where it simply doesn't pay to be transparent. The whole command doesn't need to know each other's family care plans and whose spouse might be in treatment for something FAP related. It's probably best not to publicize exam profile sheets, or discuss a hiring board or the inner workings of CPO Initiation. But almost everything else should be pretty fair game. Is it the worst thing if an EVAL ranking gets out? Probably not. If there is something shady in there? Then probably not good. But why would there be? Good Chiefs advocate for their people, but great Chiefs ensure we are doing the Navy right as a whole.

When it comes to transparency and communication, I offer a simple sanity test for you. When the Mess has to make a clutch decision, like maybe an SOY or a MAP or award, etc., a great litmus test is to ask yourself if it would make sense to a neutral entity, like an external command's FCPO Mess. Now, do you have to do this? Of course not. Make your decision and move out. But let's say you are about to rule on a board, and it is neck and neck between two Sailors, and it gets heated and controversial. It can be beneficial to remove yourself from the situation, and



imagine: If we briefed this decision to the FCPO mess over at the unit across the street, would they buy it? Or would they call bullshit?

Last note on authentic communication and transparency: My favorite thing to do every year is have my FCPOs rank our Chiefs. There is no greater or more entertaining learning atmosphere than to listen to them fight back and forth about not only who the best Chiefs are, but who is actually doing what jobs and what weight those jobs hold. It is 100% awesome feedback, and the Chiefs love getting debriefed on it. This is going to rub a lot of you the wrong way, and I really don't care. The core theme of SAILOR 360 and CPO Initiation is self-awareness. There is no better way to get feedback than sending your LPO to the ranking board with your brag sheet and letting them go to town.

Does the boss make these their rankings, verbatim? Hell no. It's just a teachable opportunity. Their job is to come up with a ranking based on what they know, so they aren't getting all the details about who is getting mandated a P for whatever reason. They don't need to know which Chiefs got written up, or any medical issues. It's just an honest and pure feedback session that helps everyone grow and develop as leaders. And, the Chiefs agree - it keeps them on point.

*Whenever you're in a tough spot and you are trying your best to communicate in the right way, try two things.* For one, if you must send an email, pretend a mentor or someone you highly respect is reading the email over your shoulder. I still do this, today. I pretend my first Master Chief is standing there, judging me, ready to crush me. Second, ask yourself what you really want, and what is most important to you. If it sounds something like, "I heard what you said and I am still confused by it, could you please help me understand?" then that's what you need to say! Be authentic!

Two great communication books: Dare to Lead (Brown) and Team of Teams (McChrystal).

### **Side Note: Authentic Communication**

When you communicate authentically, people will genuinely appreciate what you have to say. If they don't, well, typically they will be hard pressed to save themselves from themselves. But most efforts are met with a positive response.

I worked with a JAG officer who was wearing her uniform out of standards. I know, right? Of all people, the JAG, ha ha. Specifically, she was wearing an unauthorized fleece. I know, I know, I know. Trust, me I realize "fleet" Chiefs are losing their minds while expeditionary Chiefs are rolling their eyes. No matter - what she was doing was affecting my Sailors in a negative way. They all knew the fleece was not authorized, and it bothered them because they felt it showed command favoritism and that officers were above the rules.

So, one afternoon, I approached her. "Ma'am, you might have been on leave when the message came out, but the fleece you wear isn't authorized in garrison. I know this isn't convenient for you to hear, but you're in a very visible role here and the Sailors all look up to you. I'm trying to look out for you because I know you would never do it intentionally."

She thanked me. Then, she JAGGED me, and looked up the information herself. That same day, she explained she had no idea, and thanked me for telling her what her own people in her own shop did not.

And yes, in case you're wondering, we both agreed that specific uniform regulation was stupid, and fortunately it did end up being reversed a year or so later. The point is, this is only one example of many. When you frame things from an authentic perspective and openly communicate your intentions, people will be receptive.

## Leading Sailors

*Good Chief: "I take care of Sailors."*

*Great Chief: "I build leaders."*

When I solicited feedback from Chiefs for what to include in this guide, I was legit surprised by the number of seasoned Chiefs who asked me for something so simple: "Tell me how to best lead Sailors." How basic is that? With that level of question, from very strong Chiefs, it really, again, has me wondering how our Initiation and mentorship processes have gone so far off track.

***Successful leadership of Sailors can be broken into three bins: 1) Be the example and the standard; 2) Intrusive leadership; and 3) Follow up.*** When you're committed to all three areas, you have graduated from the junior varsity Chief mentality of, "taking care of Sailors." We'll start it like this: A good Chief takes care of Sailors. The great Chief leads Sailors. One more, the best Chiefs are building more leaders, and they're showing up to the deck plates to make a difference. Remember, there's a reason the saying exists, "You're not a real Chief until you've made a Chief."

As an FCPO, you already took care of Sailors. You came into work, and you ate whatever shit sandwich came your way. You put out fires. You reacted and you survived until Chief's next tasking. Taking care of Sailors is easy. Leading Sailors, and operating from a proactive point of view, is more difficult, more time-consuming, and requires a lot more purpose and motivation. In other words, you have to truly *serve*. As we go through these three bins, we'll discuss the proactive Chief versus the reactive Chief.

***Being the example, on its own, is a lazy way to lead.*** It is the FCPO who wins the PRT with a nine-minute mile while the rest of their division fails or becomes discouraged. It's the FCPO who wins SOQ while their junior Sailor lost JSOQ because the FCPO never inspected their uniform or prepared them for the board. "I lead by example." Great - how's that working out for you? When you set an example and make the example and the standard attainable for your Sailors as part

of a purpose, it becomes very valuable. They then view you not as the leader who wants to *be some body*, but who wants to *do some things*.

Be the Chief every Sailor needs you to be. You ever see that saying about, “Be the person your dog thinks you are?” Yes. You need to be the Chief your Sailor needs you to be; the Chief that can move mountains. As advertised. And that comes with being the example. Not the poster child, not perfection, not great 24/7, but an example they can strive to meet. Professional, approachable, empathetic, uniform on point, hardly surprised by anything. Always there in the clutch. The Chief that makes the Sailor proud to be in their division.

Whether you like it or not, when you wear that anchor, you are now bound by the expectations of everyone who sees that anchor. Some Sailors hate Chiefs, and they will, by nature, hate you. Others are aspiring to be Chiefs, and they have incredibly high expectations based on how Chiefs have served them. Both are true, and you can take neither view personally. But you absolutely must understand this exists, and make this part of your mission to be appropriately self-aware.

***Set the standard. Don't kill people with the standard.*** For the most part, our standards are easy to meet. But some Chiefs will insist on creating or expecting even higher standards. Not everyone has the same motivations and approaches as you do. Alternatively, if your Sailor is not meeting the standard, get in there early and often. Don't watch it happen and cascade into a crisis. When it's time for correction, care personally and challenge directly. Seek to understand all of the Sailors' challenges, and let them know why you're invested in getting back on track. Did you ever have a Chief tell you the reason they're driving you so hard is because they're training you as their relief? Pretty powerful, isn't it?

The proactive Chief sets the standard and makes sure everyone sees them, as the example, meeting the standard. When the Chief does it, everyone better be doing it. The reactive Chief assumes everyone should know the standard, and then, surprised, cleans up messes when they happen and reactively corrects people. Good

Chiefs are good at putting out fires. Great Chiefs set conditions that discourage fires from popping up.

*Intrusive leadership is the best agent you have to protect against fires.* “Intrusive leadership” means taking the time to ask questions, to know your people, and to have a genuine “finger on the pulse” of what is going on. This topic is far and away one of the least popular and most debated of any Navy leadership training. Why? Because inexperienced Chiefs, and inexperienced leaders in general, confuse intrusive leadership with micromanagement. These are not the same.

To start, let’s talk about why some Chiefs think this way. How many times have you heard, “Well I don’t want to micromanage.” Like micromanaging is the worst thing in the world. Listen, if you’re leading people, and the only complaint anyone provides to you is that “you can be a micromanager sometimes,” then you put a feather in your cap because you’re looking pretty good. That’s easy feedback to take, and then to improve, if you even want to.

True micromanagement is everything your Sailors hate. Coming in and early and staying late to do busy work. Email read receipts. It’s assigning a task, pestering them for a status of the task, telling them exactly how to complete the task, and hounding them to completion so you can ultimately be that big powerhouse Chief who says proudly, “You know I just shoulda done it myself.” Micromanaging is jumping into a discussion or someone’s program and starting out with statements or suggestions before you even ask about how they reached their initial decisions or strategies. Micromanagement is calling a Sailor while they’re at an appointment to ask them what’s taking them so long to get back.

In one of my favorite examples, I once got assigned a project that was well outside my purview by an officer I didn’t report to. That in itself is no big deal, and it happens a lot to Chiefs. But as a new Chief, I was confounded by this. We had some talks, the officer went on her way, and I felt like we had reached a compromise. Later that week, I got a lengthy email dictating to me the project, and this included a daily breakdown of whom I was to consult on it, meetings to host, and periodic

touch points to report back on it. I quickly concluded she had consulted someone higher up, and I had my marching orders. But I was also livid because I was afforded zero freedom to accomplish the task, and I felt like because I had way more experience than her at that command, I was better equipped to work out the tactical side of the project. My ego also appeared, and asked, “What did you ever do to deserve this micromanagement?”

What to do? I skipped a few touch points using some other requirements as cover and concealment, and I handed in the project two weeks early. By the time she reviewed it, roughly a month later, she was massively impressed, and I never had the issue again. I found it much easier to silence my ego and simply *do some thing*.

Are there Sailors who warrant micromanagement? Absolutely, and, the argument can be made that the people who complain most about micromanagement are the ones who deserve it the most! Still, there is a balance, and you can accomplish everything you need by simply being intrusive at a basic level.

“Intrusive” is not intended to have a negative connotation, but people in the military have made it that way. “Intrusive” means “to project inward.” To “intrude” means to cause a disruption, and again, a disruption should not carry a negative connotation. What we are doing is involving ourselves in the lives and daily routines of the Sailors (from the new check-in to the JO). Whether they are comfortable with that is very much a “them” problem, because being intrusive is the duty of every Chief whether the Sailors like it or not. If you think about it, the most intrusive colleagues you have are probably the officers, right? The only way you are going to be effective with that is to be intrusive with your own people to stay on target and help that officer focus on officer things while you lead your people.

***Intrusive leadership is not difficult, but it does require time, caring, and walking the deck plates.*** For example, on a Friday, most commands want to get their people out the door for the weekend, so you see stuff like cleaners, quarters, etc. and rope yarn. Novice leaders don’t want to hold anyone up – they just want to get their people on their way because they think it increases their popularity and

coolness: “Oh Chief so-and-so is just so laid back, always lets us go early,” and the like. But in being proactive, this is an opportunity to be intrusive to keep those fires from starting.

The good Chief makes sure their people get all the time off they can get. The great Chief asks them how they plan to spend their time before they take it. As in, you have a Sailor heading out on a Thursday for a long, three-day weekend. You ask, “Hey have a great weekend – you got any big plans?” “Not really, Chief. Beach day tomorrow and then probably spending some time with the family.”

What did that accomplish? Well, Sailor heads home Thursday, gets a text that night there’s a big party going on across the border in Mexico (in an off limits locale) and now has a decision to make. Go to the party where there is a high probability of something going wrong? Or carry on as planned? That Sailor has to calculate how that emergency phone call with Chief would go if they have to explain their actions, and how their plans now look like a lie to their Chief. You can argue this and take it a million directions if you want, but the fact is most Sailors are going to take that tactical pause to think about it, and that absolutely can be the difference between a safe weekend or a life-changing weekend.

Asking the question, “Got any plans?” is healthy intrusive leadership. It is harmless, it costs the Chief nothing, and it tells the Sailor how the Chief is interested in everyone’s well-being. Another example: “Hey shipmate did you decide if you need time to fly home yet for that event?” “Working it, Chief. Need to see if I have enough balance available on my American Express card to buy the tickets.” Oh, whoa. Not only is there a balance so high it needs checked, but it’s on an American Express which is not the card you want to be rolling high balances on. The Chief needs to be intrusive and ask if there is anything they can do and have the uncomfortable talk about that Sailor’s finances. Where there is smoke there is fire and being intrusive here can help a lot.

Another one: “Hey Chief can I have a day of special lib Thursday?” “Maybe, what’s going on?” “I just have a lot of personal stuff to take care of is all.

Trying to get straight on a few real-life things so I can get back to feeling like myself.” Again, the Chief needs to use those two ears here, and inquire about what human factors this Sailor is dealing with. There are Chiefs who hate these talks because they’re uncomfortable and maybe they’re not good at being empathetic, but any of these challenges should absolutely be seen as opportunities for the Chief to make a positive impact in the Sailor’s life. A good Chief does this to “take care of Sailors.” The great Chief views their work as the *Navy* helping the Sailor and family.

The bottom line is no colleague of yours is ever going to resent you for asking questions of them when it becomes obvious that you are asking because you care. It is that simple. Some Chiefs ask things like they’re afraid of the answer, or they don’t trust the Sailor. No, look the person directly in the eyes, be sincere, and make it the most important conversation you’re going to have that day. You will win. There are way worse feelings a Sailor will have during the day than, “My Chief really cares about me.”

***The third and final bin is follow-up, which, oddly enough is often mangled as some sort of micromanagement.*** When you assign a task, give a suspense. This is not micromanagement – it tells the person when you need it back. Always make the suspense a little bit of time before you drop-dead need it to allow yourself some time for nonsense. Second, if you want to include a request for update and a forum for how you like to receive information, do it. Again, you’re helping the tasked person plan how they are going to complete your task. Finally, when your deadlines are not met, you follow up. This is not micromanagement. They blew through your deadline, and they owe you an answer. What you don’t want to do is go high and right about it. Instead, simply ask something like, “Hey I’m sure you’re busy as we are all spinning right now, but you said I’d have an update by xxx ... do you have anything for me?” Nothing wrong with that. No need to accuse them of malice or put words in their mouth – people have shit going on. And surprise, your task *might not be the most important* to them. Remember how we discussed everyone is in their own movie and not always thinking of only you.



Follow-up is especially important to Chiefs, more than maybe most other paygrades in the Navy. Let's look at the basic year of an FCPO. Starting in November, most FCPOs begin new collateral duties and set out to diversify their jobs so they can have better EVALs for next time. The Chief has to follow up on that EVAL debrief to ensure the Sailors are getting the most opportunities to be successful. Sometimes new LPOs need to be trained. Turnover has to occur. Sailors need to prep for the Chief exam, all the while learning how to take care of their own Sailors for the E-5 EVAL period. The Chief selection eligible list comes out, and they need to be mentored on their packages, and we have to go back and review CDBs, EVALs, and such to keep them on track. Then in May, it is the mid-term counselings. A mid-term counseling is going to include follow-up from the previous EVAL (if applicable) and a thorough mentorship session on how the Sailor is performing and how they can become more successful. A mid-term counseling is where the real money is made, and that session should last about 200% longer than any EVAL debrief.

Mid-term counselings require follow-up. Are we doing what we said we'd do? How is your collateral duty going? Why did you turn in such a terrible JSOQ package for your Sailor? And the like. Then there is Chief results, and this will include non-select CDBs for the names not on the list. True, a non-select CDB is not required, but when you ignore that, think of how you look in the eyes of that Sailor. "Chief doesn't pay attention to me because my name wasn't on the list. I'm not one of the prize Sailors." It is a thing. In fact, every year when Chief results come out, I make it a point to grab those who didn't make it and sit them down privately, first, to let them know we care about them. Most times, we'll send them home early.

Back to the grind, there is the six weeks of season which leads into FCPO EVALs. Most Chiefs famously "disappear" to be involved in Initiation, which is simply a habit we must break. This is tragic, because it puts all the weight on the LPOs and other FCPOs who did not advance, and therefore puts them into about a two-month period lacking the coaching and development they need, and on the

final approach to EVAL season no less. The good Chief coaches and mentors their people and trains their relief. The great Chief trains, coaches, and mentors all Sailors, regardless of the date on the calendar.

Then comes SOY packages, which is another great opportunity for follow-up. After reviewing all your Sailors' brag sheets, you get a great indication of how well you did as a Chief putting opportunities in front of them and helping them get wins. If those brag sheets are lacking, have an honest chat with yourself. Then, you have FCPO EVALs. These should be quick debriefs. "Any questions? No? Great. Sign here." You have done so much mentorship and so much follow-up during the year, including all we discussed plus CDBs, that there should be absolutely nothing of surprise on that EVAL.

Follow-up should be applied everywhere. When someone asks you a question, or tasks you in a meeting, pay the proper courtesy and write it down, and then follow up. If you receive an email from anyone about anything, and it looks like a response from you is warranted, follow up. Even if it is simply to acknowledge the email. This is one of the easiest things you can do to be a solid communicator and be viewed as a person of action who sees things through.

There's one more important trick when it comes to follow up, and it's in the email inbox. Once or twice per week, scroll all the way down to the bottom of your inbox, and work your way back to the top, reading every subject line. I keep between 50-70 emails in my general inbox at any time, while the rest are organized into other folders. Revisiting the entirety of my inbox at least weekly affords me the chance to follow up and close loops. I cannot tell you how many times a person thanked me for following up on something they forgot about. It's very useful!

*How do you know if you're effectively leading your Sailors?* Everyone knows the answer to this, whether you're a Chief or other front-line leader. If your workday is ho-hum and you're cruising along putting out the occasional fire, and you're sending all your Sailors' requirements up the chain because someone above you told you to do it, then you likely are not leading anything. You're holding down

a job. And if everything that catches on fire is a surprise to you, that probably means you are not approachable because people aren't bringing you issues ahead of time. You ever hear that leader say, "Don't bring me problems, bring me solutions?" Well, how about next time I bring you a kick in your pants? A proactive leader, who shows up to work to make a difference, would counter, "I see this is a significant and unique problem if you're coming to me for help, and I'm sure if you all could have solved this at your level, you would have. Let's plan a sit-down to go over this and I'm sure we can find a way." (You know, sometimes I think the "bring me solutions" guy and the "you gotta work me out of a job" guy are the same guy.)

But if your days are exciting and dynamic, and your people frequently bring you problems, then you are winning. If your Sailors are advancing, and showing well, and growing and developing, and good feedback crosses your desk from all kinds of avenues, you're doing great. From there, all you need to do is own that calendar and crush it. We talked about what a year of requirements looks like for a FCPO. It's a lot, right? Sure, but remember - none of these things are ever a surprise! The good Chief knocks these out when they're told. The great Chief is already preparing their people for the next ridgeline!

Remember, you're always going to get the most from your people when they are trying to catch up with you. Most Sailors want to show they can catch the LPO so they can become LPO. Most LPOs who have a goal of becoming a Chief want to keep up with that Chief so they can get those magic words in their EVAL of, "ALREADY OPERATING AS A CPO" or whatever it is this week. That is the key. When we do all of these things, and we show up every day to make a difference and to make our contribution to the legacy of the Navy and the CPO Mess, we are building our future. If you are not continually striving to return every Sailor better than the way you found them, and as such improving the Navy as a whole, than you need to ask yourself *are you really about it? Or are you just trying to be in it?*

Two great reads on proactive leadership: *The First 90 Days* (Watkins) and *The 21 Laws of Leadership* (Maxwell).

### **Side Note: Collateral Duties**

Every year, prior to beginning SAILOR 360, it's good practice to solicit the Sailors to see which topics they are most interested in. I've definitely met my share of Chiefs who "phone in" 360, and they think whatever topics they think are important should be taught, even when they are repeated and rehashed in front of bored Sailors. Even worse, they task FCPOs to lead the training. So, it's no surprise when the Sailors provide feedback that they are in unison when they request, "Please have the Chiefs train us - we don't want to be taught Chief topics by FCPOs." That's solid feedback and a very reasonable expectation. And you do know which topics they always want the most training on? Collateral duties and command programs.

This is no joke. I remember as a First Class, I attended a Navy LPO leadership course on base with about 50 other Sailors. Almost all the questions these Sailors had were about advancement, how to get promoted, and what collateral duties they needed to take. Some leadership course that was! I didn't leave that course any better off than when I arrived and I'm betting none of them did either. But I do have a feeling the Navy got a lot of sign-ups for the CFL course that season.

Every program has its own instruction. Any Sailor can pull any instruction and increase their knowledge and comfort level with it. You get turnover from the previous program executor. The program owner (typically XO or CMC) is available. Your counterpart at the ISIC is available. You get GMTs. With so many mechanisms, what are people so afraid of?

The answer is the first and most important part of running a program: accountability. Therefore, instead of training people to programs, we should train them on accountability. Because what it comes down to is the "grey space" inherent in any program, how to get in trouble from it, and how to exploit it. The bottom line on collateral duties and programs is that typically the person "running" it is not the actual program owner or manager. It is usually CO, XO, or CMC, but you have been assigned to execute the program on their behalf. Therefore, the best advice you could offer about running a program is that the risks involved in your decisions

are not yours to own. Execute the program as best you can, and make sure your leadership has all the information they need to make the right decisions.

While we're here, let's address another misnomer, and that is the counterproductive mindset that collateral duties exist to get folks promoted. This is simply not true, and I would offer this context: A Chief takes a collateral duty to check a box and try to set themselves up for promotion. A good Chief takes a collateral duty because they come to work every day to do their part and serve. The great Chief seeks out collaterals they haven't tried yet, because they are not afraid of new challenges or learning new things. And that's why that Chief becomes successful. Eventually, a promotion board will look at those choices and conclude, "Yup - 100% this person has shown to us they are willing to learn new things, get uncomfortable, and then hit the ball out of the park and this is the person we want to invest in."

Part two of collaterals and programs: Do your absolute best to make everyone's jobs easier. In other words, your collateral duty or program, believe it or not, is not at the forefront of anyone's to-do list, and this is going to include your command's leadership. Your personal goal of getting 100% completion of your "Record Keeping in the DoD" training is competing in someone's email inbox with the 10-Week Notice for the command's PFA. And that's competing with urinalysis sweep which is annoying your admin department's requests for NFAAS accountability. If everything is important, then nothing is important, right? Be a good steward of your program, work closely within your mess, and be realistic with where you and your programs stand on the command's priorities. If a program is reportable to the ISIC, or under inspection, or is a CO priority, well, that's going to take precedence over your NMCRS push.

The good Chief runs a tight ship and a quality program. The great Chief helps everyone and all their programs reach success, because this actually helps build better leaders.

## Effective Decision Making

*Good Chief: "I need to manage my time better."*

*Great Chief: "I need to make better decisions."*

If you're one of the many who have read Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, then you already know the difference between time management and effective decision making. You know, as Covey explains, it is not possible to "manage time." We cannot add an hour to the day when we need it, and we can't speed up the clock while we're in a never-ending executive meeting. We can manage watch bills, budgets, and programs, but "time" is not on the table. What we can do to be more effective is make better decisions within the time we have.

*As Chiefs, our decisions impact lives, careers, and operations, and with that they carry second- and third-order effects.* So in a way, our decision making is done for us. We simply make our decisions based on the balance of your mission and Sailors. For those of you with families, this still holds true. In fact, when contingencies arise and you need the time to take care of "the most important thing," you will have the flexibility built in because you already made the right decisions on the job.

We make hundreds if not thousands of decisions per day. And it's the minor ones that can cause the most trouble. Look at email, for example. You are scrolling through your inbox after a three-day weekend, and you see a bunch of emails labeled "ACTION REQUIRED" and "HOT TASK." You also see an email from your best friend who is underway, titled "Road Trip Ideas." Of course, you jump into that email and you cannot wait to answer every single one of their points, and look up some of your own road trip ideas online as you reply. Just like that, you lost a half hour of your day because you decided that a task that was not urgent and not important was worth prioritizing. At the end of the day, when you're stressed and drowning because "there aren't enough hours in the day," think back to the day's first decision in your inbox.

What's the easiest way to break down which parts of our to-do lists are worth prioritizing and which items are worth throwing in the trash? The Eisenhower Matrix is your universal tool to prioritization. The truth is, we all know, when we are about to *do some things*, which things need to happen right away. Problems arise because a lot of the time, the things we must do are not the things we want to do. And we lack the basic discipline to do the right thing and move out on the inconvenient task.

If the task is urgent and important, do it. Do it now. Ok? *Get to da choppah*. Don't hesitate. If it sucks, even better. Do it, and then you can complain about it later. ***Stop approaching every challenge as a nuisance – view it instead as a future win!*** Start your day with a win. A win for you is a win for the Sailor!

If it's urgent but not important, delegate it to someone. And get out of the mindset that *it has to be* the LPO or the first CPO below you. Stop with that. Give it to a hungry Sailor who is looking for opportunities. Talk to the Mess and see who is doing what and who could benefit from having a bone thrown their way. Especially if it's an easy task. When you throw people work that results in easy wins for them, they are going to be the first to raise their hands next time you need volunteers. Delegation should not be synonymous with dictating. It should be a positive by-product of professional development.

When a requirement is not urgent but it is important and requires your calories, schedule it, and have the discipline to schedule it for a time that makes sense. Allow yourself enough cushion for contingencies. Actually take the time to add it to your Outlook calendar. If it's something outside your routine and happening tomorrow, send a note to your phone. I send a LOT of notes to my phone and I paste sticky notes to the dashboard of my truck. I call this "setting up my future self for a win." It works!

The fact is, being proactive is a form of decision making, and you see people doing this all the time. It's why people keep a small box of spare uniform items in their desk drawer, a pack of cheap underwear in their locker, or a box of Clif bars

on hand. A little prep work today goes a long way to get yourself out of a possible time crunch tomorrow. Personally, I'm not sure I ever use my emergency box of uniform items, but man, the officers do, and it really does help build rapport!

Finally, if it isn't important, and it isn't urgent, delete or disregard it. Make your decision and go with it. My email inbox is organized by rules and folders. Anything I am copied on automatically goes into a folder slugged "FYSA" and I know I can take my time getting to those. Training items go to the "Training" folder, anything CPO related goes to the CPO folder, anything sent to me from Shit Head goes to that corresponding folder, and so on. I have roughly 20 folders. Anything sitting in my actual inbox is going to be some manner of important, so I can generally blaze through my requirements like hot sauce through a duck. For those items I choose to ignore, I drag them into the "Saved" folder and if they come back to haunt me, I'll have a record of them and I can start digging it out from there.

We've discussed general decision making as far as prioritization, but what about decision-making that can help build your teams and build trust? There are four decision-making styles: Authoritative, Consultative, Facilitative, and Delegative, and each can help you build a better working environment of teamwork and trust.

Chiefs make authoritative decisions all the time. This is when only the leader has the necessary experience and information to make the decision while the subordinates do not. You know an authoritative decision has been made when it is prefaced by, "I've decided" or "Here is how we're going to do this."

Consultative decision making is when we solicit our Sailors for their inputs. They know a decision is to be made, and they know the Chief is either making the decision or pitching the decision up the chain, and their inputs into the process are valuable. We generally do this with things like watchbill updates, or fresh ideas for command PT. Again, they know they are not actually making the decision, but they are being consulted as part of the process and they have the chance to buy into the decision.



The facilitative method is the most common and presents the greatest opportunity for empowerment. In this discussion, the whole team works together to hammer out a decision. Especially for decisions that don't have a lot of weight to them, the facilitative method should be used as much as possible.

Chiefs also delegate decisions. In these cases, the Sailors have the most current and relevant information or are more familiar with the issues being discussed. For example, maybe new technology was recently installed or the first batch of Sailors returned from an advanced new pilot program. In this scenario, they are making the decisions and the Chief is advocating their views.

Personally, I solicit the Chiefs as often as it makes sense when it is decision time, even if I already know the way forward. Once I present the challenge, the Mess is immediately interested. Hey - if the outcome could be bad for the swarm, than it's bad for each individual bee, right? The Mess loves - loves - to get a taste of a problem from what they perceive to be a higher level, and they like knowing their opinions on it have value. And 100% of the time, we both leave those meetings as better leaders. They leave having gotten their ideas out (and sometimes providing alternative solutions I missed) and I leave with new ideas and perspectives. Perhaps most important, this type of exchange gives an aspiring room of leaders a crack at the next level of issues, and builds confidence - "CMC is going to use my idea ... I can totally be a CMC someday." Come on, who doesn't want to feel better about that? The same goes for when you ask your LPO to help you with issues as a Chief.

In the end, follow the universal ethical principles when you are making decisions, and you will carry a much greater chance of making effective decisions: Do the best good, do no harm, respect yourself and others, and always be fair with wisdom. The good Chief makes the best decisions *for* their people, but the great Chief makes the best decisions *with* their people.

Two great reads on decision making: The Five Dysfunctions of a Team (Lencioni) and Thinking, Fast and Slow (Kahneman).

### Side Note: Power and Influence

What is the opposite of a leader? The most common response to that question is, “a follower.” How could it not be, right? The answer, though, is a “pessimist.” Crazy, right? The fact is every leader is also a good follower of another leader. That’s how it works. When we label a follower as something derogatory, or someone who is striving to pull the leader back, that’s simply not accurate because it isn’t what a follower is doing. The pessimist, though. That person is making everything more difficult.

Great Chiefs are great leaders and devout followers. And one can only lead if the followers allow the leader’s power to be exerted. You know how “beauty is in the eye of the beholder?” Well power is also in the eyes of the followers.

Chiefs have tons of power: *Reward power* allows you to reward someone for top performance; *Legitimate power* comes from the title or position you hold; *Coercive power* is your ability to withhold things or provide unwanted things; *Referent power* is emotionally based and built on personal approval; and *Expert power is*, well, you having the answers.

Of all these powers, which, again, can only be earned, referent power is the most valuable the Chief has to lead and influence. Referent power is what makes a Sailor feel valued, accepted, and important. It’s your image, charisma, and your “ism.” Use these. Build these.

Listen to your people. Hone your self-awareness. Be the Chief. Remember, the goal of a leader is not to build more followers. It is to build more leaders!

Like Marcus Buckingham said, “Great leaders rally people toward a better future.” Are you?

## Culture and Climate

*Good Chief: "Stormy seas make for better Sailors."*

*Great Chief: "Any storm has to get through me first."*

Our people judge their every day experience by two factors: climate and culture. These two words, of course, are often confused but very different.

***Climate includes the perceptions and attitude among a group.*** Did you ever hear someone comment on, "That ship is the best on the waterfront - and they're proud of it." Or, "those guys are so laid back - I enjoy working with them." Those are examples of climates. ***Culture includes the values and beliefs that govern overall behavior.*** "Chief Smith came to the rescue. She would never allow any of us to fall behind." Or, "Let me know and we'll bring some additional Sailors in. They'll be happy to help the cause."

As the Chief, it is important to understand the extraordinary impact you have on both. We control what we own, right? So, while we can't control or sometimes even affect or influence a lot of the churn, spin, or overall undesirable impacts that come our way, we absolutely do control how those issues affect our climate and culture. While it is true that stormy seas make for better Sailors, it's also on us to prepare our Sailors for those storms and build hardened, resilient climates and cultures that support and empower our people.

***A positive climate means there is faith in the leadership. That starts with us!*** But how do we build it? How does one begin taking steps after they've inherited a team suffering from toxic or non-supportive climates?

Resilience should be your focus. Resilience happens when people realize they can rely on each other to overcome adversity. There are several ways to build a resilient team, but the most important aspect is to build trust.

***There are two types of trust - social and professional - and you need to build both.*** In the NSW community, we know this simply as, "I can trust you with

my life, but can I trust you with my wife?” Simply put, social trust is built upon social interaction. Social trust happens when someone leaves their wallet on their desk and goes to a meeting, and when they return, the wallet is right where they left it. Social trust is that Sailor who volunteers to be a designated driver and actually comes through on the promise. It's the Chief who notices a behavior out of character and shows concern.

Professional, or task-based trust, is what happens on the job. The Sailor who stays a little late to get the critical work done to help the team. The “fire and forget” LPO whose team completes a task before the Chief even assigns it. The intel briefer who can read the enemy's minds.

Authenticity is key to building trust. An authentic Chief is an approachable Chief. Authenticity requires transparency. Remember when we discussed sharing your EVAL and how many Chiefs would roll their eyes at that? You have to be strong and comfortable to be authentic.

Here's a way to not be authentic, not be vulnerable, not be transparent, not have courage, not be trusted, and own a division with a rotten climate: A Sailor I once mentored pulled me aside and told me they were afraid they were in trouble with their Chief. The Sailor (LPO) said that morning, the DIVO came around and asked where the Chief was, and the Sailor said, “Not sure but I think he had a meeting,” and the DIVO ordered the Sailor to call the Chief to make sure he was ok. The Sailor calls, and the Chief gets on the phone and says among other things, “You don't ever ask a Chief where they are or what they're doing. I am a Chief.”

We don't need to unpack the level of nonsense in that one, do we? We discussed previously the Chief/LPO and Chief/DIVO relationship. Both should have been notified by the Chief of either the upcoming appointment or the contingency as it happened. Accountability matters. With this type of attitude, the Chief can't expect either the LPO or DIVO to keep him informed.

The second aspect of building a positive and resilient climate is treating everyone with respect. Every Sailor is a human being, and every Sailor deserves to be treated with grace and respect. If you're ever in doubt, go make the rounds and ask Sailors what they want the most from their leaders. They are going to tell you they want to be treated like adults. Respect.

Now, if you want to add that you will treat Sailors like adults until they prove otherwise, that's on you because it is your climate. I would just encourage that if the Sailor runs afoul, treat them with respect, get them support where they need it, and hold them accountable for their actions.

Respecting people means you approach them with grace instead of skepticism. Don't assume malice when the cause might have been ignorance, stupidity, or an innocent mistake. Just because you might have done something malicious or vengeful to someone does not mean every Sailor operates that way. Showing respect means approaching situations by asking questions and showing empathy and curiosity, not launching accusations and assumptions.

If you're going to assume something, assume everyone has something going on, and be aware. I had a supervisor one time complaining to me about the amount of human factors affecting the Sailors in the department. The question was asked, "How am I supposed to know all these things" and it was stated to me that I needed to do a better job recruiting talent into the department. By "talent" they meant "people with no baggage." My answer, even though I had been insulted, was calm and simple. "You can start by treating *everyone* like they are dealing with something, *because they are.*"

Some old salts will take this advice as too soft, but that's not what we're after here. Building resiliency and trust cannot get beyond step one if you're not willing to be approachable and accessible to your Sailors in a way that they feel comfortable opening up and building trust. The Chief has a simple choice: You can be open and inviting and learn about issues before they can surprise you, or, as we discussed with putting out fires, you can come to work every day and be surprised. Personally,

I prefer the climate where people are comfortable sharing and being open about their issues. The good Chief has an open-door policy. The great Chief doesn't need to advertise the door. Everyone knows.

Showing respect means keeping people engaged and productive. Also, value opinions when they come your way. This concept scares the hell out of a lot of Chiefs, because they tie it to some generational gap where everyone's opinions become important. That's not what this means. To show respect, you show that you appreciate someone cared enough to bring you an idea, knowing even that it could possibly be rejected. It means you entertain the idea, but you definitely don't have to accept it or implement it. Part of valuing opinions, as well, is following up. "Hey I socialized our discussion the other day, and while we agreed it could work, now isn't the best time to try it." Something like that. Aspiring, motivated Sailors love, love, love to know when something they're thinking about might be relevant to the CPO Mess they want to join.

Other ways to show respect include being attentive. My first Chief imparted a habit on me I try my best to repeat at every opportunity. Any time I sat down to speak with him, he would kindly ask me for one moment to finish his thought, emphatically lock his computer, and turn his chair toward me, giving me complete attention. Wow, I so very much appreciated that. Such good form, and I wish I were better at doing it today.

Also, be consistent, and if possible, be fair. We talk about "fairness" a lot, but fairness is subjective. Talk to your two top Sailors about who should be the top EP, or any of the 50 people ranked beneath them, and you will be quickly educated on why fairness is subjective. Consistency, on the other hand, is not subjective. A leader is consistent, or they're not. Consistency is supported by data. If a baseball pitcher strikes out 30 batters on 90 pitches, there is no subjectivity in that. It is data. When a Chief consistently shows respect, they are viewed as respectful, and probably a few other positive traits. Being predictable, as a Chief, is a great quality when you are building a positive climate.

Our third contributor to a great climate and culture is accountability. Again, accountability is another mis-used and unpopular word we have in this otherwise positive chapter about building positive environments. Why? Because too many Sailors confuse “accountability” with “punishment.” They are not the same – let’s walk this dog.

Accountability means, “you can count on me, and I can count on you.” It is built for reciprocation and must be consistently demonstrated to be effective. Accountability is what we owe our people. Meaning, the novice leader sees an infraction, and then “holds them accountable” by punishing them. Sure, the punishment or coaching may help correct a deficiency or punish wrongdoing, but what that is really doing is showing your crew that there is a standard and it will be enforced. This shows your top performers, who are doing everything up to standard, that their work and efforts are valued by their leadership.

In other words, your top performer who witnesses their peer consistently show up late every day and duck out of work ... you could end up killing that person’s motivation if you continue to accept sub-par performance or attitude from the Sailor who is always late. Your top performer views that as a double standard, and letting that slide can contribute to others showing up late or underperforming.

And with that, to hold people accountable, the Chief has to be the ultimate example. If you are not meeting the mark, own it. Talk to your people. God forbid you shared a story or two with your Sailors about the challenges you face that sometimes put you off your game. These opportunities matter!

Climate and culture are shaped by the Chiefs Mess. The Mess can overcome challenging Sailors, and the Mess can overcome a bad wardroom. But if a Chiefs Mess is bad, chances are that command is in the shitter. Show up to work every day to make a difference. Make the decisions that do the most good, and make them quickly and confidently. Earn your spot every day. Be the Chief.

### **Side Note: Commitment**

The Navy's Core Values are Honor, Courage, and Commitment. We teach all three as being equal, but clearly they are not. Courage is the most important, and here is why.

Honor and commitment are not possible without courage. To have honor means to be true to your word. Do you know what you need to be true to your word and keep your promises? You need courage. Because to keep your word and to keep your promises means you are occasionally going to have to break bad news to people. You're going to need uncomfortable conversations. These take courage.

Commitment also takes courage because of how heavy it actually means to be committed. Think ham and eggs. The chicken is dedicated, but the pig ... the pig is committed. Think about marriage. What is the top reason for hesitating to marry? You got it! Fear of commitment. Fear = no courage.

Every topic we discussed in this guide is rooted in the courage you derive from your purpose. The courage to enlist and remain active knowing we are going to war. The courage it takes to sacrifice personal wants in favor of balance. The courage to get uncomfortable when mentoring, and motivating, and resolving conflicts.

It takes courage to be show vulnerability and communicate authentically, and it takes courage to lead, and to make the hard decisions. You will often hear the phrase, "doing the right thing is hard." No, just no.

Doing the right thing is easy, and you always know what the right thing is. Dealing with the possible inconvenient fallout of your doing the right thing is the hard part. And it takes courage, from the Chief, to work it all to the right solution.



## **Acknowledgements and Sources**

In the true spirit of the Chief as the humble servant, the author of this guide wishes to remain anonymous and has published it as a service to the CPO Mess and to the Navy. Questions and inquiries can be directed to: [bethechief@pm.me](mailto:bethechief@pm.me).

Some lessons in this guide gleaned from the following courses: Resilience-Building Leader Program (via Navy COOL), CMC/COB course, SEA, JPME, Command Indoc Training Course, Navy Instructor Training Course, ELD/ALD, Laying the Keel, Five-Vector Model, MILREQ for CPO, the Fleet CPO Training Team, and dozens of books from the past 15 years of DoD Reading Lists. These books can be found in Appendix B.

To my muse. Your wish to remain anonymous will be respected. But, now you see the effects of a butterfly's wings.

## **Appendix: Books that Influenced this Writing**

In no particular order, my favorite books that influenced this guide:

Legacy (Kerr)

Ego is the Enemy (Holiday)

The Lives of the Stoics (Holiday)

Dare to Lead (Brown)

How to Win Friends and Influence People (Carnegie)

Start with Why (Sinek)

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team (Lencioni)

The Motive (Lencioni)

Silos, Politics, and Turf Wars (Lencioni)

Neptune's Inferno (Hornfischer)

The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership (Maxwell)

Blink (Gladwell)

Outliers (Gladwell)

The Bomber Mafia (Gladwell)

Lincoln on Leadership (Phillips)

Thinking, Fast and Slow (Kahneman)

Make Your Bed (McRaven)

Team of Teams (McChrystal)

The First 90 Days (Watkins)

Shackleton's Way (Morrell)

It's Your Ship (Abrashoff)

Decision Points (Bush)

Once an Eagle (Myrer)

Emotional Intelligence (Goleman)

The Savage Wars of Peace (Boot)

Killer Angels (Shaara)

Thinking in Time (May)

You Win in the Locker Room First (Smith)

How Not to be Wrong (Ellenberg)