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Restore Progress Through Mentoring

By Captain Wayne P. Hughes Jr., U.S. Navy (Retired)

If our best officers are not enlightened early in their careers, they will leave the Navy to do something they think is more rewarding, such as making money. The loss of a talented officer is invisible in a system that

can only work with what it has. To restore progress in the U.S. Navy, I believe we should adopt a method of grooming leaders that has worked in the past: Having the best senior officers mentor the best junior officers, quietly and almost invisibly.

When I was a junior officer, two things kept me in the Navy, which at that time did not seem to be preparing me for a career of excitement or even danger. The first was an executive officer of my first ship, who proved to me in many late-night discussions that there was more to being a seagoing line officer than being a good officer of the deck. This Rhodes Scholar also recommended that I take graduate education in the then-new and scarcely known field of operations analysis.

The second thing that kept me in the Navy was early command. This was the result of mentoring by a detailer who believed I had a promising future. Contrary to my own career plan, he ordered me into the mine force as the executive officer of a minesweeper for my second tour of duty. This led to command of a small coastal minesweeper at the very moment I was promoted to lieutenant. I have been told that command today can be a stifling experience. I thought there was some of that during my time in the mine forces, but it didn't take long to feel the rewards, and after my first command as a very junior lieutenant I knew I would not leave the Navy before I had had my own destroyer.

Change Through Mentoring

The best known model of successful mentoring is U.S. Army Major General Fox Conner, who nurtured the careers of George C. Marshall, Dwight Eisenhower, and George Patton in the face of unimaginative Army opposition (see Lieutenant Commander Jason Shell's December 2015 *Proceedings* article, "Leading Outside Command," pp. 52–57). Marshall in turn kept a list of the most promising mid-grade

officers and as Chief of Staff was famous for putting good leaders in positions of authority—not perfectly, but successfully.

I believe that our SEALs are the best current Navy example of selection, training, strong performance, and currency. They are a component of the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), a self-contained command that has close control over its procurement, tactics, and operations. SOCOM has taken the lead in promoting unmanned aerial vehicles, the technologies of silent operations, and stealthy attacks. The U.S. Marine Corps is a close-second example of successful mentoring and training combined with an emphasis on combined-arms combat training.

To foster change through mentoring, Navy leadership must:

- Choose officers with a broad, all-encompassing perspective rather than those who are the most proficient fighter pilot, missile officer, or nuclear submariner. At the same time, it must anticipate our most vital emerging communities and let officers become operational experts by having repeated tours in them. Cyber warfare, unmanned vehicles, and coastal combatants are three such emerging fields that entail unique skills for swift progress.
- Understand that mentoring is a combination of one-on-one tutoring and team development. At the Naval Postgraduate School, for example, one-on-one thesis advising has been the norm, but recently team projects have become appreciated as a strong way to teach officers with different skills how to work together to advance complicated, multifaceted designs of systems and operations.
- Not expect an error-free process. A current weakness of Navy decision making is to promote officers who have never made an obvious mistake rather than look for those with courage and imagination. A young officer who had had an exchange tour in the Norwegian Navy once told me



that it was a fleet of small combatants famous for flitting at high speed among fjords, shoals, and islands to defend a dangerous coast. He said a Norwegian officer who had never run aground was suspected of being too cautious for promotion.

A skeptic might have two objections to the concept of mentoring. The first is that it has been tried before, so it must have been found wanting. Two Chiefs of Naval Operations, Admiral Elmo "Bud" Zumwalt Jr. and Admiral Vern Clark, both promoted specialty development and mentoring. I think both would have succeeded and kept the Navy vibrant if the three rules here had been understood and inculcated. The second objection is that mentoring breeds favoritism and leaders can be blind to manipulation by clever junior officers. This is true: Mistakes will be made. No system is perfect, but if we are going to improve current decision making, which has become too risk-averse, there is probably no correction that is free of mistakes.

Current Programs

The Navy does offer some opportunities for mentoring by assigning aides to flag officers, but aides gain experience in administrative efficiency rather than in improving tactics and technology. A more focused program for senior officers was initiated by Admiral Tom Hayward beginning in 1981, in which the CNO selects promising captains for a year of study and the introduction of new ideas in a



In April 2015, then-Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Admiral Jonathan Greenert meets with fellows of the CNO Strategic Studies Group (SSG) at the U.S. Naval War College. According to the author, the SSG is an example of Navy mentoring programs, but "It is no longer policy to include graduate education as an important stepping-stone for future leaders."

until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Our undersea-warfare curriculum (including mine warfare) was maintained for two decades during a hiatus of interest. It attracted few students until the Navy once again appreciated the value of submarine and mine warfare as well as autonomous unmanned undersea vehicle technologies.

Currently the most valuable curricula are probably computer technology, information science and technology for cyber war, unmanned systems, military tactical and campaign analysis, special operations, and total-ship system engineering. Graduate education is not mentoring, but as I said, my graduate education was shaped by an early mentor. Overseeing the selection of our most promising future leaders will go far toward restoring flexibility and adaptability to all aspects of our Navy.

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Strategic Studies Group (SSG) in Newport. Partly for mentoring and partly to add the energy and free thinking of junior officers, the SSG now invites five or six lieutenants from the Naval Postgraduate School to join the captains for part of the year. However, it is no longer policy to include graduate education as an important stepping-stone for future leaders.

When I was a junior officer, we knew that taking two or even three years away from career development at sea was seen by Navy leadership as valuable—even essential. Now as a professor at the Naval Postgraduate School, I see that quota-

filling rather than career development has become dominant. In the recent past, selection by detailers has also been used as a retention tool. The P-Coding system has become a liability that destroys the concept that education is for career development. It would be better if the Navy only sent officers who were highly likely to rise to senior command and only in curricula specializing in the skills deemed most valuable.

In the past, space technology and astronaut education was a program that served well. An antisubmarine-warfare curriculum was well formulated and attended

More Than a Number

By Lieutenant Commander Cary Godwin, U.S. Coast Guard

The U.S. Coast Guard conducts dangerous missions every day. Whether it's search-and-rescue operations using small boats or helicopters, a cutter servicing an aid to navigation dangerously close to shoal water, or a marine inspection team on a commercial tanker vessel, Coast Guardsmen must assess and manage risk to safely and successfully complete each mission. The unwritten motto of the early Coast Guard was: "You have to go out, but you don't have to come back." Today we say: "You don't have to go out, but if you do, you have to come back and bring all your equipment back so you can do it again tomorrow." It is imperative to

protect your people and assets in order to provide continued service to the country, and this is accomplished through proper risk management.

Managing risk does not mean being risk-averse. Every mission involves inherent risks, and the maritime environment is often unforgiving. Rarely is it a sunny, calm day that the Coast Guard is called to provide assistance to a mariner in need. The service developed the team-coordination training and the Operational Risk Management (ORM) program following several accidents, most notably the sinking of the fishing vessel *Sea King* off the coast of Washington in 1991; a Coast

Guardsman was lost when the vessel capsized as it was being towed. The Coast Guard's ORM program has matured over the years and is entrenched in nearly every aspect of Coast Guard operations and planning.

Current Requirements

The ORM program requires unit commanders to follow a seven-step process for mission planning and execution. The steps are: 1) identify mission tasks, 2) identify hazards, 3) assess risks, 4) identify mitigation options, 5) evaluate risk versus gain, 6) execute decision, and 7) monitor situation. The ORM instruction provides