



**Admiral James M. Loy**

**Diversity Summit**

**Remarks**

**Coast Guard Academy**

**April 16, 1999**

Amenities:

I read a reflection on leadership this week that seems to have particular relevance to the work of the Diversity Summit. Dr. Frank Crane observed that "the Golden Rule is of no use to you whatsoever unless you realize that it is your move." I'll come back to that thought.

I am grateful to Admiral Teeson and his staff for hosting the Coast Guard's Diversity Summit and to Admiral Ames and his staff for their leadership in coordinating this week's work. But most of all, I am grateful to you—the conference participants—for investing your energy to make this summit successful. I thank you for giving this important issue your focused attention over the past few days. You're showing that you realize it's your move. If you want a better Coast Guard, you're going to have to help build it.

*[Extemporaneous reflections on Diversity Advisory Council outbrief and other events of the day.]*

Introduction:

When the leadership of a large organization asks three hundred fifty people to share their thoughts on a sensitive issue, I suppose we ought to be prepared for the possibility that some of them will actually do so.

It is a risk. It's the same risk that we willingly accepted a few years ago when we conducted the Workforce Cultural Audit. It's the risk that we will be confronted with evidence that we just might not be perfect and we might not have figured out all the answers yet. However, there was no choice. We wanted to know then—just as we want to know now—what our people are thinking.

Leadership frequently involves taking judiciously chosen risks. And it has been my experience that duty often requires us to risk personal popularity and personal convenience in order to create opportunities to build something positive and something lasting for the Coast Guard.

So it is with diversity management. If we really plan to create a highly competent diverse workforce . . . If we really believe that it's important to create a positive environment based on our core values . . . If we're really serious about removing barriers that hinder progress . . . If we want all of our people to reach their full potential to contribute to Coast Guard missions . . . If we think these things are important to the long-term value and effectiveness of the Coast Guard . . . which I do . . . then it is worth our while to immerse ourselves in activities that are conducive to effecting the improvements we seek. That's why we're here, and I thank you for your interest and dedication to this task.

Knowing that I am the only thing standing between you and a couple hours of liberty before your multi-cultural dinner, I will speak briefly this afternoon on two subjects: the importance of diversity and the role of leadership in promoting effective diversity management.

### Importance of Diversity:

Before I discuss the importance of diversity, it may be helpful for me to explain the term. Diversity and diversity management are both terms that seem to mean many things to many people.

We've spent so much time reassuring people what they don't mean—quotas, race consciousness, and so forth—that we need to remind ourselves what they do mean.

As it is used in the Coast Guard's Diversity Policy Statement, diversity may be understood as the chemical reaction that occurs when we mix together all of the differences and all of the similarities of all of the people in the Coast Guard and subject that mixture to the heat and pressure of our operational tempo.

The amount of energy produced by that reaction can be prodigious. It could easily be a destructive force. We need look no further than Yugoslavia to see what happens when that energy consumes the people whose differences produce it.

But it doesn't have to be that way. That energy could just as well be directed in positive directions. That's what leadership is all about.

That's what the diversity policy statement means when it says we seek to "draw strength from our differences and build on our similarities." Diversity is the mix of differences and similarities. Diversity management is the attempt to harness the energy produced by the combination of those differences and similarities. And our Diversity program is the evidence of our organizational resolve to direct that energy in the direction that will most edify our core values and enhance our public service.

In the nineteenth century, we called this idea pluralism. Today we call it diversity. But the common idea behind these terms—and behind the motto, "E Pluribus Unum"—is the notion that when people from different backgrounds form a "community," that is, when they come together with a common purpose, they can achieve a strength and an eminence that would be otherwise unattainable.

The notion of community is essential to the usefulness of diversity. Left alone, differences can cause chaos, confusion, and conflict. Effectively channeled into the pursuit of common goals, however, they increase our potential effectiveness and productivity.

Our Coast Guard is a community—a community united by our commonly held values, traditions, and the purposes behind our national security, humanitarian, and environmental protection missions.

The essential ingredient in effective diversity management must always be a common purpose that is more important than individual differences. An office worker who hates the Yankees can get along with one who hates the Red Sox because their common love of baseball transcends their local loyalties. An effective football team works well together not because it has the right mix of body types and combinations of size, and strength, but because those differences are subordinated and blended to the larger goal of winning football games.

So it is that effective diversity management involves both recognizing the strength of differences—so that everybody can make the best contribution—and subordinating those differences so that they serve our larger purposes. We're trying to reach that point of equilibrium at which the individuals attach a priority to the organization's development and the organization puts a priority on the individual's development. It's not an easy job.

This explanation may help explain why our diversity policy statement embraces the full range of human diversity, not just the outwardly visible factors of race, sex, and ethnicity. To focus exclusively on these factors would lend credence to stereotypes, would ignore other differences, and would distract us from the things we have in common as a foundation for mutual value.

Hearing these thoughts, you may fairly ask why there persists such a close association between the diversity program and these factors when we so consistently insist that diversity encompasses a much wider range of similarities and differences. Why do we break down accession, assignment, promotion, and retention statistics according to these variables? Why do we have a Gender Policy Advisor and an Ethnic Policy Advisor? We do so not because we believe race, sex, and ethnicity to be the most important differences among us—I don't believe they are—but because our reaction to these differences has more potential to distract us from our common goals than our reactions to other differences. Diversity management calls for us to make sure these differences contribute to our strength even as our other differences do.

#### The Role of Leadership in Promoting Diversity:

When I assumed command of the Coast Guard last May, I affirmed my commitment to diversity. What does it mean to affirm one's commitment?

On the surface it means that diversity and diversity management will remain a priority and that I intend to continue my predecessor's policies and programs.

More importantly, it means I accept the obligation that falls on senior leadership in general, and on me in particular, to help shape the culture of the organization. However much we want to empower our employees to apply their creativity to their jobs, it remains true that cultural change has to come from the top down.

To effect cultural change, we must do four things:

First, we must ascertain whether our policies and practices are consistent with the cultural norms we want to create. And we must implement new policies and practices to hasten the creation of those cultural norms.

Second, we must communicate our priorities clearly and credibly to every level in the organization. This communication must proceed with a confidence that welcomes healthy constructive dialogue. And it must have the goal of convincing individuals at every level of the organization that they have a role in accomplishing our goals. That's why the Diversity Policy Statement concludes with a challenge to make an individual commitment to the policy.

Third, we must have good navigational fixes on our progress. I am as inclined as the next person to grow impatient with repeated studies and surveys and conferences. As a ship driver, my instinct is always to act decisively. However, I recognize that these efforts to take the pulse of the organization are necessary and beneficial so that our actions reflect the Coast Guard that presently exists rather than the Coast Guard we think exists . . . or even wish exists.

Finally, we must remain relentless in our optimism that we can effect positive change. Coast Guard men and women consistently respond to clear direction by delivering superlative results. My faith in the good that occurs when our people work together has seldom been disappointed. And I am sure that this good will extend to diversity just as it does to our operational missions and support functions. Your presence here this week is evidence that this faith is well placed.

#### Conclusion:

An appreciation for Diversity must begin with each of us as individuals.

We are each the products of our personal experiences and the influences of others. I believe deeply in valuing others . . . their cultural backgrounds, their capability to contribute . . . their just and equal status to stand with me and collectively contribute to bettering the lot of our Coast Guard . . . and even the lot of mankind.

Some would say that such yearnings are unrealistic, even naïve. Why do I feel that way? At root, it's the way I was raised. My parents and I learned together.

My dad was a strong, quiet Metropolitan Life insurance agent. He worked what was called a debit, a series of client's homes he visited weekly or monthly to collect the 25 cent or 50 cent premiums for their Life insurance. Needless to say we didn't live near the country club. We were poor but didn't know it! Dad read a chapter of the Bible every

night after dinner and at Christmas time we delivered bags of food and clothes to the six or seven families on that debit that he knew would have no holiday. In my town full of ethnic enclaves, some of those clients were black, some even Italian!!

My mom taught school and made certain we got to church. We were Presbyterians. It was the 1950's. A period of a strong ecumenical movement. I was encouraged to engage and learn from Methodists, even Lutherans ... even Episcopalians and Catholics. I'll never forget the look on her face the day she came home to find me and Jim Curry at our kitchen table studying Algebra and eating chocolate chip cookies. Jim was a black teammate on my high school basketball team. He was the best athlete I ever competed against. Working against him every day in practice enabled me to have a small college career. Eating cookies at our kitchen table helped Jim get into college. I certainly didn't know it at the time, but these were early lessons in diversity management. They helped me learn that the whole could really be greater than the sum of the parts.

Voltaire once observed that a nation with one religion has oppression, and a nation with two religions has civil war. But a nation with a hundred religions has peace. The controlling idea behind this statement is the realization that the reaction to our differences is often more important than the differences themselves. If we expect others to be just like us, we will be disappointed when we find they are not. And this disappointment can quickly degenerate into mistrust and resentment. Again, Kosovo can teach us a lesson.

If however, we accept—no, if we welcome—human differences, the whole range of human differences, as the vehicle that carries the creativity and fresh perspectives we need to solve our problems, then they will be constructive forces that help build an effective Coast Guard for the future.

Allow me to take you back to Dr. Crane's observation. "The Golden Rule is of no use to you whatsoever unless you realize it's your move." Unless you realize it's your move. That's the challenge for each of us ... to make our move. Your presence here is confirmation you each want to be in the vanguard ... making your move. The organizational summation of each of us making our move is the environmental quality of Coast Guard's future. Thanks for being here to help us build it. SEMPER PARATUS.

