

As Prepared for Delivery

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“Get Blue”
Coast Guard Academy
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Amenities:

Thank you for such a warm welcome. A special thanks, also, to Admiral Olsen for hosting my visit with you.

It’s always good to be back here at the Academy. Who says you can’t go home again?

I’ve just returned from a very invigorating visit with the officers and crew of Coast Guard Cutter *Tahoma*, currently on patrol in the Windward Pass.

I had the opportunity to spend an entire day with those exceptional Coast Guard professionals just after New Year’s Day. It is hard to express the pride and pleasure that I felt in meeting them...and having the chance to see them hard at work, sitting down to eat with them, and talking with them about the challenges they face every day.

Nothing serves to reinforce my confidence in the ability of the Coast Guard to carry out its missions day to day than seeing people in action like the outstanding crew of *Tahoma*.

It was a great trip. Even the weather was great. Warm and sunny...just delightful.

One of the chiefs suggested that we should hold swim call to enjoy the warm weather.

I told him that a swim call would be just fine...though to be honest, I wasn’t too keen on having the crew see what a lousy swimmer I am.

He smiled and shrugged his shoulders, as he said, “Admiral, I know exactly what you mean. I’m not too keen on having them see that I can’t walk on water.”

[Pause] Maybe some of our chiefs in the audience know that feeling, too.

Introduction:

I’m sure that those of you who had the opportunity to travel home for the holidays have returned here to this campus with renewed vigor and revitalized interest to apply to your rigorous academic challenges.

Or, then again, maybe for some of you the Z-burgers have already taken their toll!

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I hope that all of you had a wonderful Holiday Season. Of course, the holidays traditionally are a time for exchanging gifts with loved ones. Many Americans, particularly those of us in military service, exchange gifts by sending and receiving packages across the miles.

Many of us may have anxiously awaited the arrival of a special package by mail or parcel post. For some, the anticipation that accompanies the arrival of a brown United Parcel Service truck rumbling through the neighborhood rivals the excitement of a child awaiting the arrival of a “miniature sleigh and eight tiny reindeer.”

Of course, the person who sent the package is just as anxious about its safe arrival. So, a lot depends on the delivery system represented by that ubiquitous brown delivery truck, doesn't it?

It takes a good deal of trust to release an important package containing a carefully chosen gift or something else of value into the care of a perfect stranger, who simply promises to deliver it safely to its destination.

That trust is built on nothing less than the integrity and excellence of the company that delivers the package.

Jim Casey knew that fact very well. He's the man who started UPS back in 1907, then known as the American Messenger Company. It might interest many of you to know that he was only 19 years old when he founded the company in Seattle, Washington. He started the company with a hundred dollars that he borrowed from a friend.

Jim Casey started out delivering packages for merchants on his bicycle. He knew from the first day of work that his success depended on two things: integrity and excellence of service. These have remained the core values of UPS down through the years.

Today, the company delivers over 3 billion packages a year to more than 200 countries and territories around the world.

The company's 360,000 employees serve nearly 8 million customers a day, using a fleet of 88,000 cars, vans, tractors, and motorcycles...and more than 500 aircraft to get the job done.

Over the years, UPS has undergone several necessary transformations to keep up with the growth in business and changes in technology—literally from delivery on a bicycle to a fleet of modern jet aircraft. And I'm sure you can imagine the enormous network of information technology required to keep track of each one of those packages as they move from point of origin to point of destination.

Inspired Leadership:

Why have I chosen to focus your attention on UPS this evening? First of all, I'm not the only one who has noticed the exemplary characteristics of this fine company. They have received numerous industry awards for their excellence of service, and especially for the way they take care of their people. If you visit the Department of Labor in Washington, DC, you will find Jim Casey and UPS featured in their Hall of Fame.

Second, UPS is one of many companies that we must partner with in order to solve the complex problems associated with securing our nation's maritime transportation systems. They understand the importance of the need for transparent cargo tracking systems. So do we.

Third, I think there is much to admire in Jim Casey's philosophy of leadership.

The business of parcel post delivery is an enormously complex undertaking, and it presents tremendous leadership challenges and hazards along the way.

At a national management conference, Jim Casey once was asked to name the one thing—above all others—that would be disastrous if it should happen to UPS. Mr. Casey thought for a moment, and then spoke.

“The one thing UPS could lose that would drive it out of business most readily...is its inspired leadership,” he said.

He wasn't bragging when he spoke about inspired leadership, because he wasn't talking about himself. He was talking about the entire organization. But he did set a personal example for everyone in a position of responsible leadership in his organization.

You see, Jim Casey fostered and nurtured an organization that depended primarily on inspired leadership to be the driving force to greatness.

What did he mean by “inspired leadership?” Quite simply, he meant that each leader must be individually committed to the core values of the organization—integrity and excellence—in everything having to do with the people and service of the organization.

Everyone who aspires to a position of leadership would benefit by that example. Integrity and excellence really are indispensable to any leader and to every organization that seeks the trust of the people whom they serve.

Integrity and excellence are indispensable to the inspired leadership of the Coast Guard. Inspired leadership is just as vital to this organization as it is to any other.

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Last year, when Admiral Loy had his last opportunity as Commandant to speak to this audience on the subject of leadership, he chose to focus on the importance of individual and organizational integrity.

This evening, I'd like to focus on the other element of what Jim Casey called "inspired leadership"... Excellence.

The Importance of Operational Excellence:

It has been my privilege as Commandant to visit many Coast Guard units across the country. I never cease to be impressed by the total dedication of our people to their vitally important work, just as I saw onboard the *Tahoma* last week.

Wherever I go, I am often asked what concerns me most as Commandant of the Coast Guard. If you want to know what is foremost in my mind, it can be expressed in one simple phrase: Operational Excellence.

We must maintain our operational excellence in everything we do.

That may seem an obvious statement to you...almost a given. We have enjoyed a reputation for excellence in our missions for so long that it may seem unnecessary to say that we must maintain it.

We have a long heritage of excellence in service on which that reputation was built. It continues even today.

Just last month, the Cutter *Reliance* rescued a Rhode Island man from a disabled sailboat more than 400 miles east of Cape Cod. He had set sail from Jamestown, headed for Bermuda, when he encountered severe winds and 20-foot seas. His boat was blown off course, but he was able to pass his position by radio in a desperate call for help.

A Coast Guard HU-25 Falcon located his position, dropped him an emergency radio beacon, a marine radio, and a survival suit, which helped keep him alive until the *Reliance* arrived on scene. Even then, it was two more days until the seas were calm enough to permit a safe rescue.

Events like this one illustrate clearly why there will always be a need for operational excellence in the Coast Guard.

I remain firmly convinced that we can maintain and even improve our operational excellence by focusing on the three elements of the Direction that I laid out when I took the helm as Commandant last summer.

We must continue to take affirmative steps to improve future readiness. We must continue to renew our commitment to the well-being of our people. And we must continue to strengthen our stewardship of the public trust.

But we are now in the midst of a historic transformation. This new year of 2003 will stand as one of the most significant in our history. The future students of Coast Guard history will be studying this transformation in years to come.

On the first of March, we will become part of the new Department of Homeland Security. This date will mark the largest reorganization of the federal government since the end of World War II. And you will be part of that history.

This is a time of real transformation. We've talked about transformation in the Coast Guard before, but the transformation that I'm talking about will be broader and deeper and faster than you might have imagined before.

Any transition is difficult. Think about the transition from childhood to adulthood, for a moment. What if that enormous change happened overnight? If you remember, that's exactly what happened to Tom Hanks' character in the movie "BIG."

Hanks played a young teenage boy, by the name of Josh, who gets what he wishes for—to become an adult. But it all comes too quickly for him, and the results are the stuff of real comedy.

That's fiction. Our situation is fact, and there's nothing humorous about it: the transformation that we are now undergoing is really BIG, and is happening now. And it won't be done by magic on the first of March.

To achieve real transformation in the Coast Guard of the 21st century, we must attend to four things:

- Transform the culture. We will need to embrace and develop new core competencies related to homeland security to add to those we now have. And, when we move to the new department, we will be the only military service among the other agencies there. That is one of our real strengths, and we should capitalize on it.
- Transform the work. We will be accomplishing this largely through the Integrated Deepwater System and Rescue 21, which I know you have heard a great deal about already.
- Transform the workforce. We will need a fully diversified workforce, capable of meeting the demands of new technology.
- Transform the workplace. We need to realize the benefits of a fully modernized E-Coast Guard.

I'm sure that the prospect of so much change raises many questions in your minds. I'm also sure that I don't have answers to all of them today. But I will say this:

The question for us is not whether we should acknowledge the need for this transformation, or even whether we can actually achieve it, but whether we will choose to accomplish it on our terms to the best of our ability.

We have a lot of work to do to shape the events of the next few years. I believe that the demands of providing security to our homeland will continue to grow. It will take more than hard work to answer the bell. It will take additional resources to build the capacity we need. But it will take more than additional resources, too.

I believe that above all it will take inspired leadership—and by that I mean a real commitment to excellence—to get the big job of transformation done. You will become some of the inspired leaders who will help ensure that we are ready and able to meet the enormous scope of challenges before us.

The Elements of Excellence in Leadership:

How can we be successful in this transformation? How can we achieve this commitment to excellence? I'm sure we can all think of many avenues that can be taken in the pursuit of excellence. Let me suggest three to you that I think are very direct and most important.

The first is Alignment.

George Labovitz and Peter Rosansky have written a well-known book called *The Power of Alignment*. The central thesis of the book is that in order for an organization to perform consistently with excellence, the foremost consideration for its leadership is to ensure its alignment. As the authors wrote,

“The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.”

The book illustrates the importance of alignment by talking about how pilots learn to survive turbulent weather. In order to keep the plane aloft, they must focus intently and simultaneously on three things: attitude, altitude, and airspeed. If you forget any single one of these things, you will crash. Everything else is secondary.

In many ways, the attitude, altitude and airspeed of an airplane in flight correspond to the three elements of my Direction: Readiness, People, and Stewardship. If we forget to attend to any one of these elements, we will crash—especially as we embark on this difficult period of transformation.

It is vital that every person in leadership must understand and act on these three basic elements. Effective action depends on continuous adjustment to change...constant, clear communication...and distributed leadership.

By distributed leadership, I mean that we must recognize the value and potential of every single member of team Coast Guard to make significant contributions to improve our performance—even beyond their specific job assignments. The very best leaders in government and private industry have long understood the concept of distributed leadership. They also understand that alignment is absolutely necessary to achieving productive distributed leadership.

The Cutter *Tahoma* typically doesn't patrol with an Admiral onboard. An Admiral was not onboard the *Reliance* when she rescued that man from a raging sea.

They don't need one, because the excellence of their distributed leadership is in perfect alignment with the goals and missions of the Coast Guard, and the Direction that I have established as Commandant. That's not to say they don't make mistakes. Everyone does. But their alignment clearly keeps them on course.

If we remain aligned as an organization, the benefit is that every individual leader is empowered to do the right things.

That is crucial to inspired, transformational leadership.

The second avenue to excellence is Accountability.

You can't really achieve alignment without accountability. And both are necessary to achieve excellence.

We live in an age of finger pointing and blame used to place the fault for what happens on anyone other than ourselves. That's not what I am talking about when I assert the importance of accountability. I'm talking about taking responsibility for your own actions, and willingly making yourself accountable to others.

The Academy has long embraced what we call the "Honor Concept." The idea behind the Honor Concept is not that others will hold you accountable to a certain code for your actions, but that you will hold yourself accountable to others.

It doesn't just apply here. This concept must apply in your lives beyond the grounds of this institution—whether you are in uniform, or not—if you are to achieve excellence in leadership.

And, holding yourself accountable goes beyond deciding whether to sneak over the wall after curfew on a moonless night, in case you're wondering about that! The importance of accountability exceeds the questions of whether you might get caught cheating on an exam, or even whether you should report a classmate for doing something wrong.

It involves applying yourself to contribute to this organization the very best of your ability and talents...and requiring the same thing of other people around you.

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That is why you are here. That is why we are all part of this great service. We are here not merely to pass a test of character...or knowledge...or skill, nor are we here to earn a paycheck twice a month. Rather, we are here to contribute the very best of who we are, each according to his or her ability. That is the standard of accountability.

I recall a story about a car dealer in Dallas, who enjoyed a glowing reputation for customer service in his community. His customers were extremely well satisfied. It turns out that he received very few complaints from his customers because he gave them the home telephone numbers of the mechanics who worked on their cars.

That's accountability.

Do you see something going on in your own life or in the lives of those around you that does not meet the standard? Then I urge you to do something to change it. You have a personal obligation to do so.

The third avenue to excellence is Accomplishment.

At the end of the day, we must have something to show for our hard work. That's called Results-Based Performance.

We must provide an indispensable service that will improve the safety and security of life in America today. Our commitment is no less than to be the best led and best managed agency in the federal government. This is part of our commitment to good stewardship.

And...we must measure our success in doing so. The President's Performance Management Agenda requires it. Improving programs by focusing on results is an integral component of the President's budget and performance integration initiative. That means our budget is tied to how well we perform our missions, as it should be.

Our missions have grown substantially in the past year. So has our budget. If we are going to grow further, we must first do our very best with what we have.

This transformation will require that we focus the energy of our organization towards effectively executing our critical day-to-day missions for the American public AND moving the Coast Guard into the future. This is not an either/or proposition. We must do both. That means we must be successful in our so-called "traditional missions," as some might refer to them, while we provide the best possible maritime security to our nation.

That's a tall order.

It will take real innovation and ingenuity to accomplish it successfully. Real innovation involves new thinking—not just new technology.

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We do not have the luxury of saying we will do this OR that.

In his book *Built to Last*, James Collins writes about avoiding “the tyranny of the OR.” He writes:

“The ‘Tyranny of the OR’ pushes people to believe that things must be either A OR B, but *not both*. It makes such proclamations as:

- You can have change OR stability.
- You can be conservative OR bold.
- You can have low cost OR high quality.
- You can have creative autonomy OR consistency and control.
- You can invest for the future OR do well in the short-term.
- You can be idealistic OR pragmatic.”

He goes on to say that a visionary organization must be able to do both.

I believe that we in the Coast Guard must be able to maintain continuity AND embrace change. That will allow us to accomplish the extremes of what we must do.

By the way, you can’t accomplish anything of excellence without risk. We must be willing to embrace an acceptable degree of risk to accomplish great things, without unduly punishing those who are willing to take those risks.

We recently conducted an organizational climate assessment that involved more than 23,000 of our members. One of the questions in that assessment referred to what Coast Guard members thought of the organization’s support for innovation and risk-taking. There was good news and bad news, as you might expect.

Overall, the Coast Guard was among the very top of the federal organizations that have taken this survey. But the bad news is that the responses as to how people feel about their ability to take responsible risks rated third lowest of all the questions answered, in terms of approval.

We must create an environment in which risk-taking and innovation are not only valued, but encouraged. That’s why I decided to alter the precepts of officer promotion boards this year to overlook occasional errors in favor of great accomplishments in the careers of our officer corps.

We must do more, and we will.

Conclusion:

Triple A: Alignment...Accountability...Accomplishment. These three are avenues to excellence in leadership. They are central to our efforts to transform the

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culture, work, workforce and workplace. I encourage each one of you to do your best to seek them in your own professional lives.

You might ask yourselves, “What difference will it make? Who will really notice? Besides, I’m pretty much a 2.0-and-go kind of person.”

The late Joe DiMaggio of the New York Yankees had a fierce pride about always doing his best, no matter who was watching.

The story goes that the Yankees were on the road for a doubleheader against the St. Louis Browns [later the Baltimore Orioles]. The day was not only boiling hot, the Browns were last place in the league. Despite this, DiMaggio made an off-hand comment that he was looking forward to playing that day.

"In this heat?!" exclaimed an amazed sportswriter. "How can you enjoy playing a doubleheader in stifling weather like this?"

Glancing toward the grandstand, DiMaggio said, "Maybe somebody out there has never seen me play before."

That’s the attitude of excellence.

Now, I am not a fan of the New York Yankees. But I am a fan of excellence wherever I might find it.

I also find it in the professional life of Jim Casey, the founder of UPS. The company that he founded and that continues its strong tradition of excellence today—even though Jim Casey is no longer alive—has an advertising slogan that simply says, “Get Brown.” By that, they mean: “Get integrity...Get excellence.”

I suggest to you tonight that each of us should aspire to such leadership that when the people of America look to find integrity and excellence in the federal government, especially when it comes to safety and security on the nation’s waterways, they’ll always say of us:

“Get Blue—Get Coast Guard Blue.”

Thank you. Semper Paratus.