



Coast Guard Civil Rights Conference

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Introduction:

Mr. Somerville. Admiral Ames. Good morning. I'm delighted to have the opportunity to come down and join the Hurricane Bonnie watch and to speak with the attendees at the Coast Guard Civil Rights Conference.

My purpose this morning is to distract you from your business for a few moments. I know that you have a lot of pressing business before you this week and that Mr. Somerville and his staff have designed an aggressive agenda that ensures that you will work so hard that nobody back home envies your week in Florida. However, I want to take you away from important nuts-and-bolts issues like the G-H Business Plan, the top-to-bottom civil rights review, and field civil rights missions. These very important tasks are in your good hands, but they can wait for a few minutes while I speak from my heart on the overall importance of civil rights to the Coast Guard. Why do we have a civil rights program? Why is it important? The management issues are the "what's" of your business. Every once in a while, we should think about the "why's"

I want to discuss two reasons why civil rights is crucial to the Coast Guard and must remain a highly visible priority for us.

The Military-Civilian Values Gap: Preserve the Gap to Preserve Core Values

The first reason has to do with the Coast Guard's Core Values.

Over the past year or so, there have been a number of military justice cases in other armed services that have called into question the difference between the values of late-twentieth century American society and the values of the Armed Forces. Most of these cases have had to do either with sexual harassment or inappropriate relationships, but the lesson applies to all matters of morality.

The cases have occurred in the Coast Guard as well, but I think we've handled them inside our house and have avoided front page solutions. At least for the moment.

Among the observers who have commented on these cases, many have perceived a gap between the values of the Armed Forces and the values of society at large. Why does the

military prosecute people who do things that would pass in civilian society without comment? Isn't the military out of touch with reality? Isn't it dangerous for the military to be so far removed from civilian society? Shouldn't the military get in step with society? Why should Kelly Flynn get sacked when the President gets to serve on?

For me, it's a matter of standards. Just as my parents taught me to do what is right regardless of what other people choose to do, the military should honor its standards without respect to who else happens to emulate them. Standards are timeless . . . Right is Right. As the Reverend Nathan Baxter said in his sermon Sunday at the National Cathedral, "The Ten Commandments are not a trap. They are a map."

General Walter Kerwin, retired Vice Chief of Staff of the Army in the 1970's said, "The values necessary to defend the society are often at odds with the values of the society itself. To be an effective servant of the people, the Army must concentrate not on the values of our liberal society, but on the hard values of the battlefield."

In fact, the effectiveness of our armed forces depends on the good order that can only come from a values-centric culture. We saw in Vietnam the diminishment of fighting effectiveness in armed forces that were hollowed out by drug use and breakdowns in discipline. We saw in the Gulf War the overwhelming dominance achieved by armed forces that had returned to basic discipline, including core values. We do well to apply these lessons.

Why, why, why do 47' MLB coxswains venture out into the storm? Why do rescue swimmers jump out of perfectly good airplanes? Why are cutters sortied right now and positioning themselves to come in behind Hurricane Bonnie? Because they honor human life, innocently threatened by circumstance. Because they respect the training provided to almost guarantee they'll succeed. And because the discipline of their preparation will equal the performance of their duty. Standards are the key. Values are the source of those standards.

We also do well to apply the scriptural admonition that we should not be conformed to this world, but rather be transformed by the renewing of our minds. If we discover a "values gap," our strongest instinct should not be to conform to the lowest standard of behavior that goes unpunished elsewhere. Instead, we should seek the more earnestly to be worthy of the standards that others have neglected. Just as one unit's CO is not obligated to dismiss an NJP case for an offense similar to one that was dismissed by the CO on a ship across the pier, we are not compelled to accept the erosion of standards elsewhere as an indication that we ought to relax our moral vigilance.

And here is the relevance of this issue to the civil rights program. Every incident of discrimination or sexual harassment in our service is ultimately a breach of our core values of Honor, Respect and Devotion to Duty. If we were to accept the proposition that we should close the values gap by abandoning our standards, we would immediately forfeit the moral imperative behind the civil rights program.

In the final analysis, every civil rights matter is a Core Values matter. In conducting training to prevent sexual harassment, you are promoting Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty.

In facilitating resolutions to complaints at the lowest possible level in the chain of command, you are in fact leading all involved parties to analyze their behavior and their reactions in light of Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty.

In holding people accountable for their conduct, you are affirming the enduring legitimacy of Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty.

The Civil Rights program is in the business of teaching, promoting, applying, and enforcing the core values. In fact, Civil Rights is the pointed end of the "Core Values" Spear. You are in the front lines of defending the Coast Guard's Core Values. Because I treasure the core values of the Coast Guard, because I know that those values are essential to the readiness of our service, I treasure the work of the Civil Rights program. You are the heart and soul of doing the right thing.

Equality Is Essential in Organizations that Cannot Contemplate Losing:

The second reason why civil rights will remain a priority has to do with the reason for the Coast Guard's existence as a military service.

Consider the breadth of institutions and industries in America. Now consider them in light of the goal of our diversity management program, which is basically to allow people to achieve their fullest potential, to let them rise as far as their talent and determination can take them, undeterred by prejudice or unfair treatment or artificial barriers. Which segments of society have done the best job of accomplishing this goal?

Having considered this matter at some length, I submit that the two most successful employers in this regard are, number one, the Armed Forces of the United States, and number two, professional sports.

There is one very simple reason why these two enterprises have succeeded as they have in allowing people to achieve their potential. They can't afford to lose.

The Armed Forces of the United States are organized and operated under the single governing principle that we must win whenever we fight. We simply cannot lose wars. Our stricter personnel regulations, which I discussed earlier, pass judicial and congressional scrutiny because of the absolute imperative that we defend our Constitution. We have higher standards because we believe that they contribute to victory. We have higher standards because the price of failure in our work is too consequential to imagine. Losing is not an option. Higher standards help guarantee the desired result.

Similarly, professional sports organizations, with the possible exception of the Florida Marlins this year, are organized around the principle that the franchises exist for the sole purpose of winning championships.

Almost everybody else in the country—businesses from Microsoft to the corner drug store, government agencies from the federal to the local level, school systems, non-profit organizations, religious institutions—has the luxury of defining success in some terms other than winning or losing.

All the organizations that view success in terms of profits or share price or measures of effectiveness or average test scores can win without anybody else losing.

Compaq and Dell Computer can both succeed for their employees, owners, and customers without either one driving the other one out of business. They are hard-nosed competitors, but ultimately both can be winners. The principal of a school and the pastor of a local church can be pleased with the progress of their students and their parishioners without reference to winning or losing.

Not so with the military and with professional sports. When they take to the field, they emerge either as the clear winner or the clear loser. Alternate measures of success either don't exist or they don't matter. Don't believe me? Ask any Cardinal fan how willing they would be to trade Mark McGwire's home run stats for the Yankees' won-lost record.

And here is the relevance of this point to the civil rights program. When you absolutely, positively have to win, you have to treat your people right, you have to develop them, and you have to give them the opportunity to grow so that they can contribute to the victory.

In sports, you see this trend in the rapid rise of star players and the absolute irrelevance of race to their popularity. The clearest example is Michael Jordan. Millions of kids, boys and girls of all backgrounds, wear replicas of Michael Jordan's jersey and sing that they want to "Be like Mike," completely oblivious to the circumstance that they do not share his gender or race. Why? They want to imitate his excellence, his discipline, his poise, and his clutch performance.

When performance really matters, coaches, fans and teammates can't play favorites based on other factors. It is a promising sign of progress for our society that you don't see a lot of white kids identifying with race instead of talent by walking around town wearing Steve Kerr's jersey number. Nothing against Steve Kerr, mind you. I suppose that it's even a promising sign—in a small way perhaps—for our society that Dennis Rodman jerseys adorn kids of all backgrounds. Similarly, when Larry Bird was winning three championships for the Celtics, his admirers were as diverse as Michael Jordan's are now.

In the military, we face the same urgency of allowing talent to rise. We have to carry out every mission we are given. There is simply no acceptable alternative to fulfilling the trust that the public has extended to us. To accomplish our missions, we have to be sure that all of our people get a full chance to make their best contribution. We do that by

ensuring they can achieve their full potential. We also have to be sure that talented Americans of all groups see us as an organization where they can support noble missions and achieve their potential at the same time. Being an employer of choice equals nobility of mission plus a supportive working environment.

Some of my proudest moments are those when that foolproof system breaks down . . . the helo crew lost, the 44' crew lost, the unexplainable accident. I spoke yesterday to LT Alo Konsen and his mom. (Tell story of phone conn with LT Konsen's mom). Sometimes the supportive working environment triples its intensity to rally around one of us in need.

We have come a long way from President Truman's order to desegregate the military fifty years ago. We have come a long way from President Ford's decision to allow women to attend our service academies twenty two years ago. Where else in America besides the military do you so routinely find blacks and Hispanics and women in positions of authority over large numbers of people including whites and males? Where else in America is the situation so routine as to almost escape our notice? Nowhere.

We're by no means where we want or need to be. I am sometimes impatient at the lack of progress, but I realize that it takes longer to develop military leaders than sports stars. It's a fact of life that you can grow a Tiger Woods faster than you can grow a Coast Guard Captain. But we are seeing the steady rise of women and minorities to high ranks and key positions. And I want and expect that this progress will continue on my watch.

When you absolutely positively have to win, you have to recruit the best players, get them out on the court, and give them the chance to develop and contribute. That's the business of all of us.

The Coast Guard civil rights program is engaged in that important work. Just as you support mission accomplishment by reinforcing core values, you support mission accomplishment by helping to ensure the opportunity for the best performers to make the best contributions.

Your work defines and upholds the standards by which we understand what's expected of us and hold accountable those who violate them. It's noble and important work.

Exhortation:

I hope you have a productive week. You are engaged in serious work that is very important to the health and long-term success of the Coast Guard.

From my discussion of core values, take away an affirmation that the good order and discipline of the Coast Guard depend on our being a value-centric organization. From my discussion of military services and professional sports teams, take away a reminder that the quality of mission accomplishment—both in peacetime and in combat—depends on our allowing all of our people to achieve their potential.

These two fundamentals are part of the Preparation that equals performance.

Be proud of your core values. Be proud to be held to a higher standard. Be proud of the missions you support. Be proud of your job in the Civil Rights program. Be proud of your Coast Guard. In the midst of all that pride, hold your civil rights banner high. Be the Coast Guard's conscience.

Be Semper Paratus.

