

As delivered

Admiral Thomas H. Collins
Leadership and Honor
Coast Guard Academy
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Amenities:

Thank you for such a warm welcome and Happy New Year. A special thanks, also, to Admiral Olsen for hosting my visit and providing this opportunity for my first major address of 2004.

I hope everyone's holidays were enjoyable, that none of you got coal in your stockings, and that you're all ready to launch into your spring classes.

It's great to see the entire New London Coast Guard community represented here: the LDC staff, OCS class 1-04, the OCS staff, EAGLE sailors, First District Auxiliarists, the Corps of Cadets and the Academy faculty, staff, and alumni.

Introduction:

Over the past few years we have initiated a new tradition ... the Commandant has visited the Academy at the beginning of the New Year for an annual address on the topic of leadership. Two years ago, Admiral Loy spoke about practicing integrity in leadership, the constant quest for integrity, the importance of integrity to leadership, practicing organizational integrity, and adhering to a code of core values. Last year, I also spoke to you about leadership, focusing on *inspired* leadership, operational excellence, and a commitment to excellence through an emphasis on alignment, accountability, and accomplishment ... and that these leadership capabilities were key to transforming our Coast Guard in a very challenging environment ... I tabbed this "Get Blue".

I am excited to be here with you again this year to extend the discussion of leadership in today's Coast Guard ... with specific focus on individual responsibility and commitment to leadership -- a concept that is so fundamentally important to every aspect of the Coast Guard -- to every mission area and to every billet you will ever fill. What does our collective organizational commitment to leadership mean to you as an individual Coast Guard member?

Leadership is not just a topic of a class you take or a factor that you are marked on in your evaluation report. Leadership is a life-long learning process, an on-going dialogue that, coupled with experiences throughout our careers, encourages us to challenge our values, our attitudes, and our beliefs, to come to a shared understanding with others. This dedicated self-reflection allows us to internalize values and standards, thereby bringing us to a heightened awareness of what is “right” versus what is popular, and allows us to act in ways consistent with those values and standards.

In this vein of shared understanding, my goal today is to ensure you understand with great clarity how I define leadership in the Coast Guard and how you will be measured as a leader. That way, you can internalize and incorporate these standards and values into your personal development plan with the goal that they become permanent and self-perpetuating as you move forward in your careers.

CG Leadership in these turbulent times:

Leadership at every level -- aligned, accountable, and outcome-focused -- and built around a common vision and set of goals, is essential to meeting our stated strategic objectives associated with **READINESS, PEOPLE, AND STEWARDSHIP**.

Our collective organizational leadership skills have seen us through over 213 years of service to our great nation, but there’s no better demonstration of the importance of leadership in the Coast Guard than the past couple years. As a nation, we suffered the horrendous terrorist attacks of September 11, and as a service, that resulted in significant changes for us. We have been witness to large increases in our operations, our watchstanding, and the demands on our people and our assets. Organizationally, we left our “home” of 35 years in the Department of Transportation to become part of the Department of Homeland Security, a new department created by our President to address the unique needs of protecting our homeland. Through these incredibly turbulent times, it has been the strength of our leadership, from top to bottom, that has seen us through – from our President to our new Secretary and throughout the Coast Guard, from the top of our organization, to our COs and OICs, to our small boat coxswains.

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Don't think for a moment that these leadership talents are only recognized and appreciated within the Coast Guard. Our leadership skills have rightfully earned us tremendous credibility within the Department and across government and the private sector. Many of the leaders who have so skillfully guided us through this period of incredible change are graduates of the leadership training offered right here – at the Academy, OCS, and the LDC.

How do we as an organization build upon and sustain this spirit of leadership excellence?? How do we measure good leadership and shape our personnel processes to promote a leadership culture and recognize individuals who practice good leadership?

Leadership development is hard work. First and foremost, it requires the responsibility and commitment of each person and the organization as a whole, both internally and externally.

As an organization, we must be committed to providing for the success of each and every one of our people, so that they are optimally positioned to do their part toward the external success of our service to the Nation.

Organizationally, this responsibility and commitment begins with providing the infrastructure and material resources to our officer and enlisted accession programs, providing them with all that is necessary for the creation and sustainment of adequately resourced training-and-education facilities and a culture and climate that accommodates the diversity that we endeavor to attract into the workforce of our Coast Guard.

This means that we must look at leadership development in a holistic way, across the academic, military, and other socio-cultural aspects of our training and education programs.

As noted earlier, we, as an organization, are recognized as being good at leadership. Part of what makes us good is that we don't rest on our laurels – we are always looking for ways to improve.

One of the ways that we are looking to improve here at the Academy is through the introduction of the GOLD program – the Guide for Officership and Leader Development. As a template for Academy cadet

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development across a 200-week program, it takes a comprehensive view of growing the high school graduates who enters our gates for swab summer into officers and leaders over their four years at the Academy, by formally recognizing four sequential stages of human and military development. Each stage correlates to each cadet year: the first stage, as a 4/c, is Apprentice Follower, then 3/c is Exemplary Follower, 2/c is Supervisory Leader, and finally, 1/c is Organizational Leader. It is an integrated, Academy-wide program that weaves classroom-based theory with real-life applications in the academic, military, and athletic settings that our cadets encounter in their four years here. GOLD integrates every aspect of the Academy experience – academic, military, and athletic – to develop leaders of character.

Another organizational investment in leadership development here at the Academy, comes in the form of the assignment of Chief Petty Officers into Chase Hall as Assistant Company Officers. The introduction of Chiefs into the barracks will provide yet another source of counsel and mentorship to our cadets, as well as a diverse point of view that will allow all concerned to challenge their values, attitudes, and beliefs.

I have great expectations for both of these programs and I am looking forward to receiving feedback from the Academy faculty, staff, cadets, new ensigns, and the new ensigns' first COs as these programs mature. They require the personal investment -- the energy – of all of us to be successful.

Congratulations to Admiral Olsen and all those who have worked so hard on the development and implementation processes. It's this kind of visionary leadership and innovation that has earned us our external reputation as good leaders ... and will sustain our reputation and do good things for the nation going forward.

But it's not just at the Academy that's reaping the benefits of our corporate investment in leadership:

- We now have a basic leadership program built into every “A” school training program we have, providing all “A” school graduates this foundation course before they head to the field with their new rating badges.
- As our young Coast men and women move up through their career, they have additional opportunities for more advanced

training. The Leadership and Management School, or LAMS, is the basic new-supervisor course in the Coast Guard and is ideal for young enlisted, young officers, civilians, and our Auxiliarists. This course has grown by better than 50 percent in each of the last two years, and will train over 3200 Coast men and women in FY04.

- We are working on developing an E-9 Capstone Program by the end of this year.
- Our Chief Petty Officer Academy was consolidated a year ago to harness the synergies of one core full-time staff, and to ensure all Chiefs experience the same learning and leadership development. It has expanded its capacity to be able to train EVERY new Chief we make in the foreseeable future. This will have tremendous impact on the leadership capabilities of our Chief's Mess, and on THEIR ability to lead, influence, and retain our best and brightest young people in the future.
- Our CWO Professional Development program has also been expanded to be able to train all new CWOs in making the transition from the enlisted ranks to the Wardroom. This unique and valuable course hones the skills of some our most accomplished leaders while simultaneously adding a few new and necessary tools to their leadership tool box.
- Command is perhaps the most critical leadership challenge an individual can take on in his or her Coast Guard career, and we're putting much greater emphasis on ensuring our people are ready for the rigors of Command. The Prospective Commanding Officer/Prospective Executive Officer Afloat course is a concentrated program to ensure EVERY new CO, XO, OINC and XPO who is going afloat has the necessary underway skills fresh in their minds before they walk across the gangway and say the magic words "I relieve you." And we're expanding this program to include the Ashore community.
- We are investing in our future OINC's and XPO's by teaching a course to help our younger enlisted people pass the demanding Officer-in-Charge Review Boards necessary for enlisted leaders to be selected for command cadre positions.
- We are currently working on an entirely new enlisted professional military education (E-PME) system. E-PME, which replaces the MRNs, will use both performance and

knowledge factors. The new E-PME system will begin this fiscal year and will incorporate three delivery systems: paper-based, CD ROM, and Internet-based.

- We added an executive orientation course, targeting newly selected flag officers and SES members. This past fall, we hosted not only Coast Guard executives, but also executives from other DHS offices. The focus of the orientation was – not surprisingly -- change management ... specifically, the ideas, behaviors, and thought processes that might have led to success in the past may not lead to the same results in the future.
- Finally, we're investing in our future leadership through a robust and aggressive Performance Excellence Program based on the world-renown Baldrige Criteria. This program is for all levels of Officers, Enlisted, Civilians and Auxiliaries, providing a leadership and management template to help our organization become more effective, efficient, and better stewards of the precious tax- payer dollar. This program is still growing, but has shown huge benefits in the way we do our day-to-day business of running the world's best Coast Guard.

In addition to organizational commitment to good leadership, there must be individual commitment and responsibility to leadership excellence ... and we must hold individuals accountable for that sense of responsibility and commitment. Individuals within our service must be aware of, and develop a sense of, priorities, values, and skills that collectively contribute to organizational leadership excellence. As individuals, we must endeavor to become our “best selves” intellectually, emotionally, and interpersonally. It is by tending to each of these internal or personal domains that one can make the greatest contribution externally, in one's personal contributions to their platoon, company, class, Academy, unit, and ultimately to the Coast Guard and our Nation.

Personal commitment to the team and to the well being and professional growth of Coast Guard men and women is also an indispensable component of individual leadership excellence.

In my experiences here at the Academy, OCS, and the Recruit Training Center in Cape May, I have been impressed with the quality of the people that we bring into our service, with the “fire in the belly” that they

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exhibit in being part of the Coast Guard, and their anticipation of joining their fellow Coasties in the field to continue and contribute to the service's legacy of superior performance.

As individual leaders in this organization, we have a responsibility and must be committed to fostering and growing this enthusiasm in every member of our organization. We take these incredibly motivated and dedicated individuals who joined our service because of the external reputation of our service, and in the indoctrination process, we provide the emphasis and resources to successfully cultivate this attitude. Shame on us if we then somehow dampen this enthusiasm after these new Coasties have reported aboard their first units.

Last year, I extensively rewrote my guidance to the personnel promotion and assignment boards in order to enhance individual accountability to leadership standards, and especially to a commitment to the well being and professional development of our workforce ... to make sure that those officers who sit on promotion, continuation, assignment, and other selection boards know what is important to me as the Commandant, as they assign and promote. I have outlined initial broad guidance and then listed specific areas that I view as important for promotion and assignments for all officer grades. If you haven't seen or read that Guidance, I highly recommend it to you -- you can find it on CGPC's web site. The idea of making it readily available to everyone is so that everyone knows what we, as an organization, value in our people – and so our officer corps uses that information in their own professional development plan.

Overall, my expectation is that all officers will demonstrate their personal commitment to the Core Values and create an environment in their units that accommodates and fosters diversity, that allows for risk taking and risk management, that allows for the development and implementation of innovative ideas, and that remains adaptable and flexible in meeting the challenges resulting from the dynamic environment in which our Coast Guard operates. Furthermore, this is all to be done in alignment with, and serving to promote, my Commandant's Direction of Readiness, People, and Stewardship.

Leadership is not just a matter of personally adhering to our Core Values; it is also a matter of instilling the Core Values in our people, through personal example and holding others accountable. There is no room in our

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organization for an individual who does not conform to our Core Values. Leaders must view it as their personal responsibility to nurture within their units what has been so richly cultivated in New London and Cape May in our leadership development programs.

We can never know if everyone in the organization internalizes the Coast Guard's Core Values, but what everyone must know is, that like their individual responsibility and commitment to their personal and organizational leadership development, our Core Values are a condition of employment!

Anyone entering Chase Hall will see, "Who lives here reveres honor, honors duty." The description of honor in our Core Values says, "Integrity is our standard. We demonstrate uncompromising ethical conduct and moral behavior in all of our personal actions. We are loyal and accountable to the public trust."

Dr. Davida Kellogg, who has sailed aboard Coast Guard icebreakers to the Antarctic and is a Coast Guard Auxiliarist, has written about honor in the military. I find her thoughts quite accurate and in line with my own. There is a special relationship between those in the military and the country we serve. That relationship rests in the civilian control of the military. Under the Constitution, the American military may not act independently, but is responsible to the American people for the actions it takes in the course of serving them. When you raise your right hand and take the oath of office, you are making a solemn promise to all Americans that they can trust you to use America's military might to serve and defend them.

This trust is no small matter; because Americans put "special trust and confidence" in every officer commissioned, to use weapons and information we would never trust in the hands of the ordinary citizen, Americans must have the assurance that those officers are honorable. It is possible to separate the person from the profession in many vocations; for example, it may be possible to be dishonorable and still be a great artist or a famous professional athlete. But only an honorable person is worthy of the "public trust" and worthy of being American military officer.

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It is this personal and organizational philosophy of responsibility and commitment that serves as the catalyst for moving my Commandant's Direction – Readiness, People, and Stewardship -- forward in support of our Coast Guard and in service to our Nation.

By living up to these standards, day by day, we internally make ourselves and externally make our Coast Guard all that our country needs us to be.

Evolving Leadership in the Coast Guard:

So the leadership construct in today's Coast Guard is all about --

1. A commitment to operational excellence through alignment, accountability and an outcome focus ... "GET BLUE";
2. A personal and organizational commitment to leadership development and a culture of leadership;
3. The development and accountability of the leader to clear organizational values and standards;
4. And a strong commitment of the leader to the well being of Coast Guard men and women.

I would also add that in today's world, a fifth and key aspect of leadership must be an ability to anticipate and manage change aggressively. I talked about this last year as a factor in maintaining operational excellence while leading and managing transformational issues relative to our workforce, workplace, technology, modernization, and so forth. It means the successful leader of today must be flexible, adaptable, innovative, and not unnecessarily wedded to the past. An essential attribute of strong leadership is knowing when to stay the course and knowing when a course change is necessary.

While on the topic of transformation and adaptability and flexibility, let me close by focusing on one particular example of transformation that I

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know is of great interest to you ... especially for you soon-to-be ensigns in the audience.

This year we have yet another opportunity to excel, with a fundamental change in how we have made first-tour officer assignments since the inception of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in 1876.

Selectees must see opportunity in change, adapt readily, and lead their units and press forward with a positive attitude.

We have been reviewing the Junior Officer First Tour Assignment Policy for some time now, recognizing that as our officer corps has grown, and the number of JO billets available at sea has decreased, that we would have to revise our policy of assigning all Academy graduates to sea for their first tour. We thoroughly considered all the options, but most involved reducing shipboard quality-of-life for officers or enlisted or both, by overcrowding state rooms – and after years of work to improve the quality of life afloat, I was not going to turn back the clock. And actually, looking at the numbers we're graduating this year and over the next few years, there is just not enough space on board our cutters to assign every Academy graduate afloat, even if we did try to shoehorn everyone on.

Another option was to cut the length of first-tour afloat assignments to one year. I also did not find this option viable as it would create serious readiness issues – our cutters would rarely, if ever, have a qualified JO on board. Just as one JO was ready to qualify, it would be time to transfer and the cycle would start all over again. Also, this option would really only provide “shipboard exposure,” versus real shipboard experience for the JO.

So, we went back to the proverbial square one, and looked at the issue from all points of view. The question really isn't “Do we assign our JOs afloat – or not?” The question really is, “At the end of their first tours, what skill sets do we want our JOs to possess?” In other words, what's the outcome we want?

And the answers to that question were: at the end of their first tours, we want our JOs to have had meaningful leadership and operational opportunities and to have learned the culture of the Coast Guard from a field unit's point of view. We can achieve those goals by assigning our JOs

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afloat, but we can also achieve those goals by assigning them to other operational units.

The result: All Academy graduates will go to operational billets, with the large majority (>75%) going afloat. Those going ashore will go to the larger commands with more senior leadership. OCS and direct commission officers will still have opportunities to go afloat for their first tours; if not going afloat, our goal is to assign all OCS graduates to operational commands, as the needs of the service allow. Assigning OCS graduates to staff positions in Headquarters, Area, or District offices will be the exception. If OCS graduates are assigned initially to staff jobs, they will be afforded the opportunity to be assigned to an operational unit within 18-24 months.

Conclusion:

Whatever your ensign assignment turns out to be, I can assure you that your leadership talents will be needed as never before ... will be tested ... and will be measured. You will be held accountable for operational excellence, our service's standards, our values, and the well being of our workforce. And, by the way, I can think of no other terms of employment that are more appropriate ... and no better time when those with "fire in the belly" would seek to serve. You will have the opportunity to help us continue and extend the Coast Guard's culture of leadership and operational excellence!

When you leave New London, whether it's in 62 days and a wake-up or at the end of this semester or in a year or two or three, you will graduate your course of study, whatever it may be. Many people think of graduation as a ceremony to celebrate the end of that phase of your education. Remember that graduation is actually called *commencement*, a celebration of a beginning, not an end. For those of us in the Coast Guard, it marks the beginning of the next chapter in your leadership learning – and writing that leadership book will be a lifelong process. Paraphrasing Burton Hill, leadership is not a destination; it is a method of life.

Thank you. Semper Paratus!