

APPRENTICE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM:
MOLDING THE FUTURE LEADERS OF THE COAST GUARD



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The duty of a Coast Guardsmen can range from one extreme to another and vary far and few between. Each day has a different struggle, a different mission and concludes with a different outcome.

However with so many variables that occur each day, one thing remains the same. It's Coast Guardsmen, who are called upon to complete the day's most daunting or mundane tasks regardless of their rank or skill level. It's Coast Guardsmen, who are relied upon to successfully accomplish the mission using teamwork, judgment and leadership day in and day out.

One of the first official training tools the Coast Guard uses to prepare its up and coming leaders is the Apprentice Leadership Program (ALP). This three-day course is designed to provide consistent leadership and supervisory training to apprentice level personnel who are active duty or reservist.

"The ALP course is the first taste of Coast Guard leadership," said Coast Guard Chief Petty Officer Stephen G. Aragon, an ALP instructor and member of the Coast Guard Leadership Development Center. "The goal for ALP graduates is to not only have a better understanding about what it takes to be a good leader, but also to align the continuum so that a Third Class Petty Officer can discuss Coast Guard leadership with a Senior Chief Petty Officer using the same leadership language, theories and tools."

During the three days spent enrolled in an ALP course, students are faced with team building activities, formal classroom training as well as open discussions and debates.

"We began the first day in a classroom, and it seemed like it would be similar to any other Coast Guard training I've received," said Petty Officer Third Class Daniel Dedenghy, a graduate of the ALP course. "But then a Chief walked in with a huge smile on his face and he began the day with telling jokes and introducing himself. The odd thing though, was that he seemed more interested in finding out who we were, as individuals in his class."

Instead of a typical death-by-power-point training style, students are encouraged to share experiences and create open discussions and debates. Students are also placed in team building activities that allowed them to try out some of the tools that they learned during the classroom portion.

"Since this is the first formal leadership training we go through in the Coast Guard, I found it helpful that our class had people from all different rates and backgrounds," said Seaman Ryan Bowman, a graduate of the ALP course. "Although the class was made up of different rates and backgrounds, it was filled with Coast Guardsmen that were very close in rank, if not the same. That allowed the class to swap stories and learn more about leadership in an open and fun learning environment."

"After lunch on the second day the class was gathered up in one of the training center parking lots," said Seaman Francesca Vercellone, a graduate of the ALP course. "We

were put in teams and given exercises that were designed to create confusion, chaos and doubt within one another. However by applying basic techniques of communication, we were able to determine each other's flaws and strengths and complete each task successfully."

Some of the team building activities included having teams split up with separate missions. Some teams were tasked with the same mission while others were not. The result of the exercises showed that if each team communicated to one another they would have realized that they had the same mission, and could have completed the mission faster and more efficiently.

Another exercise that students were faced with was a portion of an obstacle course that featured a 15-foot wall. The objective of the exercise was to have every member go up and over the wall and lend assistance to other members a limited amount of times. Students were given a few minutes to put a plan of action together and conduct their operation. Along the way some students thought up more efficient and proactive ways to complete the task and communicated their ideas to the group. Some ideas were not used but overall all of the ideas were heard. In the end every student made it over the wall completing the mission and showing that trust and communication, two main points in good leadership, goes a long way.

"We aren't here to just go over power point presentations," Aragon said. "With open discussions and team activities we are able to see and talk about different issues that are occurring at various units. It is surprising to hear some of the students stories and issues, because they are the very same stories and issues I saw back when I was a junior member. This is one reason why I am inspired to teach this class to the junior members of the Coast Guard and why the ALP course is so vital."

The Coast Guard also uses ALP course as a building block for the Leadership and Management School, Chief Petty Officer Academy and the Coast Guard's Senior Enlisted Leadership Course.

"Future students that attend this course should come with a few things in mind," said Bowman. "They need to really pay attention and take in the stories they hear from their shipmates, especially the Chiefs that teach the course. They have been around for some time and have witnessed firsthand a lot of good and bad examples of leadership in their careers."

By understanding the lessons of the ALP course, graduates can further develop themselves as well as instill positive values in fellow members. This doesn't just benefit the units of the students who take this course; it benefits the Coast Guard as a whole.