

Chiefs: *Don't Leave Any Sailor Behind*

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When it comes to education, our nation subscribes to a philosophy that states, “No child left behind.” ... I see no reason why we chiefs don’t adopt a similar phrase for those we lead: “No Sailor left behind.”

What am I talking about? As chiefs, we do not have the luxury of choosing the Sailors under our charge. We get the superstars and the underachievers. We get the overachievers and those who don’t want to or can’t perform. We get the perfect ambassadors and the occasional bad apples. Like it or not, the Sailors we lead need our help—each and every one of them.

I recently read an article in *Navy Times* where RAdm. Brooks from the Naval Safety Center discussed intrusive leadership. He talked about the fine line between treating Sailors as adults and getting involved in their lives enough to help them make sound decisions. I liked his rationale. What’s more, I always have been a fan of deck-plate leadership. You need that level of leadership because all our Sailors are not on autopilot. ...

Chiefs, each of us must bear the weight of each Sailor’s successes and failures. The only way we can achieve this is to truly get to know our people—each of them—and tailor the training and guidance we give them to their own exact needs.

Each of us easily can recall the Chief Petty Officer Creed, which says, “More will be expected of you; more will be demanded of you.” This is exactly what I’m getting at. More is expected of you; more is expected of me; more is expected of all our leadership. Every one of us needs to take stock of our people and take a more active role in ensuring every Sailor gets through his or her enlistment or career—successfully. ... It’s not enough just to explain the rules to them. It’s every chief’s responsibility to understand the world our Sailors live in, what motivates them, and what concerns them.

Shipmates, our work is not easy, nor quick. However, if we, as a community, make a more concerted effort to truly take care of each of our Sailors, I’m betting we can reduce the number we lose in drunk-

driving incidents. We also may reduce the number of domestic-abuse cases, anger incidents, and those who find themselves in financial trouble. I’d also bet we’ll see respect and military bearing improve across the board, and the appearance of our bases, ships and squadrons also may improve. ...

As we reduce the number of active-duty Sailors in our ranks, your role as a chief will become that much more important. Many talk about the blurring line between the wardroom and the CPO mess. While that may or may not be true, let me assure you the basic role of the chief is unchanged. Yes, we are capable of doing almost any job in the Navy—traditional or otherwise. However, our No. 1 job is to look after those Sailors we lead. There never can be a more important or pressing job for us.

So, who is on board with this? My sincere hope is every chief truly grasps and accepts our role and will re-focus efforts not to leave any Sailor behind. It isn’t easy, it isn’t quick, there are no shortcuts. Taking leadership to an intrusive level means taking time to learn about your Sailors, each and every one of them. I don’t need to tell you how to do this in great detail; I suspect you already know. The challenge is to break out of your current routine and start making more time for your people—talk to them, counsel them. Don’t delegate everything to your petty officers. You are the chief; set the standard—take this effort to the next level yourself.

Last year, Adm. Mullen told a group of chiefs in Rota, Spain, “To be a leader, you have to behave like one.” What he was saying is our actions speak a lot louder than our words. I’m guessing we all say we take care of our people. My question to you is: To what degree do you do that? If you only sort of take care of your people, or only take care of those Sailors who do everything right and are easy to lead, you’re not quite there yet. The true hallmark of a brilliant chief is the ability to ensure every Sailor is taken care of—no matter their past, no matter their needs, no matter their talent level. ... Thanks, chiefs. Go take care of our most valuable asset—our Sailors. ■

Navy photo by PHAN Travis M. Burns