



It's Your Ship

Management Techniques from the Best Damn Ship in the Navy



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■ About the Author



Capt. Michael Abrashoff

Captain D. Michael Abrashoff is Former Commanding Officer, USS Benfold, United States Navy Author, Founder and CEO of GrassRoots Leadership, Inc.

As one of the youngest commanding officers in the Navy's Pacific Fleet, following his post as Military Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, Mike took command of his first ship and wasted no time instituting radical changes. Antiquated, do-as-I-say leadership practices literally went overboard when Mike stepped aboard USS Benfold. Mike went to work on one of the lowest retention rates and poorest performing ships, solving core problems with grassroots solutions. Practices that included converting dated command and control with commitment and cohesion to Mike's greatest asset in any situation—People. "You need to recruit your people everyday even though you already have them onboard."

Immediately after leaving the Navy, Mike created GrassRoots Leadership, advising others on how to empower their people while increasing profits and cutting costs. Mike continues to spread his message through his first book, "It's Your Ship," published by Warner Books.

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■ The Big Idea

Companies and businesses share the common challenge of retaining and getting the most out of their employees. When trained employees resign, the company loses a lot of productivity and incurs additional training and recruiting expenses.

Author Captain D. Michael Abrashoff teaches you how to motivate your employees to take responsibility for their actions. Through this book, you will learn how to improve your leadership skills and inspire your employees.

■ 1. Take Command

A challenge for every organization is to attract, retain and motivate employees. If a company succeeds in doing so, employees work with more passion, energy, and enthusiasm. This translates to an increase in productivity and more profit for the company.

Reasons for Leaving

Research indicates that low pay or salary is only the fifth on the list of reasons why employees change jobs.

The top four reasons are:

1. Not being treated with respect or dignity.
2. Prevented from making an impact on the organization.
3. Not being listened to.
4. Not being rewarded with more responsibility.

Encourage and Respect Your Staff

The key to a successful organization is to be able to look through the eyes of the staff and crew.

You must assume that everyone wants to do well. It is then important that you give your employees the space and confidence they need to do their jobs. Do not just bark out orders and expect them to follow. Give everyone the trust and respect they deserve.

Also remember that taking command does not mean shouting out orders. Leadership focuses on encouraging people not only to find better ways to do their jobs, but also to enjoy their work. This is the only way to implement lasting change.

A leader should not only know how to lead, he must also know how to follow. He must be open to suggestions and be ready to listen to new ideas. Furthermore, a leader should make the effort to get to know the people around him. This creates a positive atmosphere that can motivate, encourage and give confidence.

A leader's "job" is to create a climate that enables employees to unleash their potential. If you give your people the right tools and the right environment, they can achieve wonders.

■ 2. Lead by Example

Real leadership must be done by example. Remember that the people below you follow your lead and that you have an enormous influence on your employees. They will look up to you for signals on how to behave and what the organization expects from them.

As a result, the signals that you send are very essential to the organization. If your

staff sees that you failed to implement a policy, they will deduce that they can do the same thing. At the same time, if you are seen doing things that are good for the company (such as being open to new ideas, techniques, etc.), then your employees will follow suit.

Never Forget Your Effect on People

As a leader, you need to understand that you can greatly affect people. In fact, you directly set the tone and spirit at the workplace. You must realize the huge influence you have and use it wisely.

How your employees perceive work is based on the things you do and what you say. The signals you send tell people how important they are to you and how important the company is.

If you are an enthusiastic leader, you will have an enthusiastic work force. Make an extra effort to minimize the danger you impose when you have bad days. Recognize your mood swings and learn to manage them.

Be Accountable for Your Actions

A good leader knows when to stand up and be accountable for his mistakes. If your crew sees that you take responsibility for your actions, they too will follow suit. It is far more beneficial to make sure that a mistake never happens again, than to find someone else to put the blame on.

Listen Aggressively

A great leader is universally loved and admired not only by his peers but also his staff. One of the factors to being a great leader is that he must listen to people. If someone approaches you, give him your full, undivided attention. Doing so tells the person that you respect him and that he is important.

Your tone of voice and choice of words also affect how people perceive you and what you represent. The power of your language affects the morale of your crew.

One of the most important things to remember is that you must learn to back your words with actions. Mean whatever you say, and practice what you preach. Furthermore, repeat positive words and phrases. This will encourage the people around you to believe in themselves.

■ 3. Communicate Purpose and Meaning

The secret to a successful management of any organization is to be able to articulate a common goal that inspires people to work hard together. Proper, effective and open communication of goals, rules, instructions and expectations can spell a difference.

The more people know what your goals are, the better results you can achieve. Silence, lies and arrogance creates an atmosphere that poisons creativity and productivity.

Effective Communication is Key

Understand that no matter how great your message is, if no one is receiving it, you are not communicating. You must have a strong grasp of all manner of communication. Even more important, you must be willing to use. If this is not done, your message will not be conveyed.

Freedom Creates Discipline

Give your people the freedom to speak up. If they fear that you will shoot down their suggestions or that you are not open to criticisms, they will be afraid to give you their suggestions or point out mistakes and problems that can prove to be costly to your organization.

Empower your crew to take action and to think and act on their own. Teach them that they should not be afraid to speak up.

It is equally important that you have a follow-up process after every major decision or event to analyze how things went. Find out if the event was a success or failure. Such feedback is necessary to keep the company moving forward, as well as to assess how the group works together and what can be improved. This way, a mistake is never made twice and everyone involved gets to see the big picture.

■ 4. Create a Climate of Trust

The best way for an organization to succeed is to give the employees all the responsibility they can handle and then stand back. Trusting your employees to do their job well sustains the company.

Trust is also a social contract - you have to earn it. Trust is earned when you give it. When people start trusting each other more and more, they stop questioning motives and start to work as one unit.

Give Second Chances

You should be aware that people are sensitive to your actions and reactions. If they see that you are the type of leader that gives up on someone easily, they will think that there is no room for redemption. If they see you, however, intervene to help someone who is worth the effort, they will be reassured.

If people feel more secure, they are more willing to take risks. After all, they trust that you will support them. Trusting your employees gives them a positive attitude about the organization.

Delegate

Delegating means that your employees are trusted and respected. Create a climate of trust so strong that your employees will not be afraid to deliver bad news. Give them the opportunity to solve the problem early on. This will not only save you and your company time and money, it also gives your employees confidence and a positive attitude about the company.

■ 5. Look for Results not Salutes

Encourage the people in your organization to be more result-oriented by opening their minds to new ideas. Encourage them to use their imagination to find new ways of doing things. Your employees must learn how to take the initiative.

Let Your Crew Feel Free to Speak Up

People who always say “yes” or agree with the higher-ups or top executives all the time are dangerous to the organization. These employees tend to mask problems until it is too late to solve it.

Create a culture where your staff is comfortable enough to say what is wrong or suggest reforms when they feel that something can be improved. A climate to question decisions is one way of double-checking.

Great leaders are not afraid of criticisms and are open to the ideas and opinion of his staff. Make your people feel that they can speak freely and that you respect them. If you do this, you will earn their loyalty, trust and respect.

■ 6. Take Calculated Risks

Below are some risks that you can bet on:

Bet on people who think for themselves. By taking a “leap of faith” and trusting that one person can do the job and do it right, you increase his self-confidence and make him do his job even better.

Take a chance on a promising sailor. Give people second chances especially if you see potential in him. He might just surprise you with outstanding results.

If a rule doesn't make sense, break it carefully. Remember, there is always room for improvement but think ideas thoroughly before implementing it.

■ 7. Go Beyond Standard Procedure

In any business, standard operating procedure (SOP) is the rule. It is safe, proven and effective. However, SOP seldom gets outstanding results and distracts people from what is really important.

Innovation and progress are realized when you go beyond standard operating procedures. Sometimes, you have to look for new ways to handle old tasks and find new approaches to new problems.

“Pushing the envelope” for innovation and originality has the following benefits:

- You keep your priorities in focus.

- You stay ahead of the competition

- You get to see another “point of view”

- You motivate people to do what you want them to do and to do their best.

■ 8. Build Up Your People

Good leaders strengthen their organization by building their people and helping them feel good about themselves and their jobs. When this happens, morale and productivity is improved which translates to increased profit for the company.

Focus on building self-esteem. Show them that you trust and believe in them. Praise them for a job well done.

You can also follow this strategy when dealing with your boss. Never tear them down. Anticipate what they need even before they know that they need it. Remember, if you make them look good, your department looks good too. By boosting their ego, you create a positive atmosphere in the organization.

Meet and Talk to Your People

Walk around. Meet and talk to your staff. Not only will you know more about your organization and the people who run it, you also boost their morale.

Positive and personal reinforcement is the key to an effective and successful leader. Thank your employees for the hard work they put in and you will be surprised that they will work even harder.

Little gestures such as these make a big difference to the employees. They feel appreciated.

Expect the Best from Your Crew and You Will Get It

Leaders should understand and appreciate their crew as individuals. Provide them access to proper training to grow in their chosen field.

Communicate expectations and feedback frequently throughout the year. This way, you will minimize people's surprise when you give them their final evaluation. This also keeps them on their toes throughout the year.

■ 9. Create Unity

Unity is essential to any organization. If you don't support each other, the organization will soon encounter critical problems that may be irreparable.

The job of a leader is to assemble the best team possible, train the unit, and figure out the best way to get the members to work together for the good of the organization.

You can achieve this goal by making people want to belong to the organization. Treat them fairly and with dignity. Show them that you value them as individuals no matter what color, sex or religion they may have.

Respect, Dignity and Fairness

Treating people with respect, dignity and equality leaves little room for jealousy. Jealousy and envy can create serious problems. As a leader, you must watch out for it and try to minimize or totally eradicate it. Make people who work for you feel needed, trusted and highly valued.

Deal out punishment strictly but fairly. Try to listen to all sides of the story. Do not jump to conclusions. Give out punishment that is equal to the mistake or misdeed committed.

To achieve unity, you must recognize common interests. Maximize the individual's uniqueness and focus on their commonality. Channel these values or characters toward the common goal of the organization.

Representation at the Top

The management needs to reflect the makeup of the work force. People in your organization need to know that their interests are being represented at the top.

If they know that management values them and their contribution, they will be loyal and give their best to the organization.

■ 10. Improve Your People's Quality of Life

People who enjoy and look forward to going to work are more productive and happy.

Fun at Work Makes for a Happy Organization

You can create a positive atmosphere at work by letting people have fun and interact with their colleagues. Having fun at work creates more social glue for the organization. This results in productivity and loyalty.

Have a "fun" day at least once a month. Make this a day where top level

management and staff can interact with one another. You can get some positive feedback and ideas from this interaction.