

#### **4. Importance of Chiefs (2:58)**

So, when we talk about leading others, nothing is more important than our relationship with the chief petty officers. I think of it in terms of influence, negotiation and teamwork. I had a chief that I really respected that worked for me when I was CO of a 210 years ago and he used to say there were two rules that he had as the chief. One was the chief is always right and then the second rule - which is a very important corollary to that - is when in doubt refer to rule number one.

And he used to say that everywhere on the ship as he'd run around and people would laugh. He's also the same guy that said you know those famous lines about, you know, some of the scariest things you'll ever hear is a seaman that says, "Hey, I learned this in boot camp!" and then they do it. Or an Ensign that says, "Based on my experience" or even a chief which is even most frightening when a chief says something like, "Watch this." and then they do something

That was my first introduction to a really good chief petty officer. So in all seriousness what do they do? What do Chief Petty Officers do and what's their place in the organization? How do the officers fit in?

Well, most of us know Chiefs really don't have anything to do - right? Except they have to figure out what needs to be done, they have to figure out when it needs to be done, they have to tell someone to do it. They have to follow up to make sure it is done only to find out that it wasn't done right. They have to go back and tell someone to do it again only to find out that then they did it wrong. Then they have to go back and make sure that it's done correctly - all the time they go through this they're thinking it would have been just easier if they had done it themselves.

So besides that Chiefs have nothing to do in this organization. In essence the Chiefs make the Coast Guard run. They make everything happen. The Chief Petty Officers that I've had the best relationships with, I've been able to come to an understanding with them that there's really two things I need out of you.

One is I need you to follow out orders. I need you to make the crew do what they need to do and help me follow through on our responsibilities and our direction to get the job done. But, I also need you to tell me when something can't be done. And that's actually really hard.

Some people think those are completely conflicting and completely different notions but I think they're not. I think you need a Chief Petty Officer that will follow intent and then be able to come back and tell you something can't be done. So, for example, I had a great Chief that would tell me when we would do flight deck operations late at night on the ship and the crew's getting tired and I'd say hey we have to do this because we've got to be ready certified to land the helo and get down range and do the mission. We push hard and we would do it.

Then sometimes he would come to me and say, "Hey sir. The crew's really tired and if you make us do this something bad might happen." So he could do both at the same time. He could go

forward and carry out intent and get things done and he was also not afraid to come tell me when those things could not be done.

So that's what I think of when I think of a good Chief. Thanks very much.

**Related Primary Leadership Principles**

Authority of Position

Decision-Making

Delegation

Mission

Followership

Team-Building

Credibility

Stress

Military Core Values

Political Savvy

Active Listening

Feedback

Field Presence

Expectations

Inspiration