

25. Chief Mentor (3:53)

Well, I had this Chief had just come on the ship and he really knew what he was doing about gunnery. We had to straighten out this department and I said, "You know, that's where you know this better than I do and I'm supposedly an officer from the Coast Guard Academy and I'm supposed to be in charge here but I don't want to be telling you how to take care of this gunnery department when you know what you've been doing for 15 or 20 years." Then he straightened me out and he got the department straightened out.

Then I also was telling him that we've learned lots of things at the Academy - about what officers are supposed to do. Well I wanted to make sure that I was doing what the organization's best officers do. So I just asked this guy to help me become a better officer. So he talked to me about being honest with the people; just keep trusting the people; let the people do things; don't second guess them.

He was just a good role model for me. And then, of course, he made me start to have confidence in myself. The Coast Guard Chiefs, you know. Because they've been around; they've seen a lot of stuff. They've seen a lot of mistakes made - which they learn from. If they will give you that information - we get most of our new information from mistakes we make.

This guy I was only with him for three or four months but he just gave me so many good ideas how to be a good officer.

He did emphasize, of course, you don't become overly friendly with the troops. Smile and talk to them and you can actually relate to them but you don't get buddy-buddy with them because that just doesn't work. The guys, because you get buddy-buddy with them, they think you don't mean half the stuff you say. So if you give him a direct order, he might not think it's a direct order. They think maybe you are kidding them and that's the danger. It's good to have a separation of officer and enlisted from a standpoint of getting the job done well as far as I'm concerned.

The thing is the guy just talked to me. He was almost in the age group where he probably could have been like my dad almost. He was probably 40 something and he knew what he was talking about. He had seen lots of young officers that just didn't have the right attitude. Just because you come from the academy and wear a ring doesn't mean you know everything, right?

We have some of that tendency early on as officers when we've been to the institution. We've got all the latest word. We've been exposed to it but we may not have it all figured out yet and may not know how to use it yet. We've just been exposed to it.

This guy helped me utilize some of the things that we did learn. I just can't remember his name.

Related Primary Leadership Principles

Accountability

Active Listening

Attitude

Character

Continual Learning

Credibility

Effective Use of Resources

Feedback

Followership

Information

Responsibility

Team-Building

Training