

## **6. Sailing – A Metaphor For Leadership (3:16)**

Hello my name is Sandy Stosz. I came into the Coast Guard Academy in 1978 as a Cadet and retired 40 years later as a vice admiral in 2018. This vignette I'm going to share today isn't a story - it's an experience of my journey from Cadet to Admiral.

The thread that ties across that 40-year journey is leadership that I learned through seamanship starting at the Coast Guard Academy. When I came into the academy, I'd never sailed and the first thing they did for us swabs or first-year Cadets was throw us in sailboats - the dinghies - and they set us out to sea to learn how to sail.

Most of us didn't know how to sail and I was one of them. I'd always wanted to sail. It was a mystery to me. I'd always thought it was going to be so fun to sail because you'd see beautiful sailboats effortlessly going along the rivers and the ocean.

Not for me! When I got in that sailboat I couldn't get that boat to move. I was stuck in irons with the sails just flapping and the little boom hitting my head. I either spent my time in irons or turned upside down flipping the boat. I couldn't control that boat. I couldn't control the wind and it was very frustrating. But there came a time after a few times on the water of frustration where I pulled the line and angled the tiller just right to capture wind in that sail. And once I got the wind in the sail, the boat started to move.

It might sound like the simplest of things but feeling the power of the wind in my sail and being able to harness that power and then use that power to steer my boat - it became a metaphor for my entire life. Leadership through seamanship starts with learning to lead yourself. And you've got to understand yourself - your strengths, your weaknesses. You got to learn how to fail even in small ways like failing to know how to sail then learning how to harness the power of that wind and then being able to steer your boat.

I went from the Academy to my first ship - the Coast Guard Cutter Glacier - an icebreaker. I became a career Cutterman with 12 years at sea. I commanded two ships. All throughout that time as a Cutterman I thought back to when I learned how to harness the power of the wind when I was in irons. I was, you know, without a course in steerage way a lot of times in my career when I faced new and challenging circumstances. The seas were high. The tempests were coming and my sails were flapping and I always would go back to learning how to grab that wind and tune my sheet and tune my tiller just right to capture that wind.

So the lesson I learned through sailing at sea? Sailing is like learning how to be a leader. As a seaman, you have that thread of always coming back to learning how to harness the power of that wind. You're going to find yourself all throughout your career in new circumstances where you struggle and you fail.

But all you need to do is keep on trying until you can finally harness the power of that wind in your sails.

## **Related Primary Leadership Principles**

Drive to Achieve

Mission

Discipline

Training

Ability to Embrace Change

Attitude

Intellectual Abilities

Courage

Continual Learning

Effective Use of Resources