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ESSENCE OF EXCELLENCE - LESSONS FROM NAVAL EXECUTIVES
ABOUT SUPERIOR PERFORMING TACTICAL AND READINESS STAFFS
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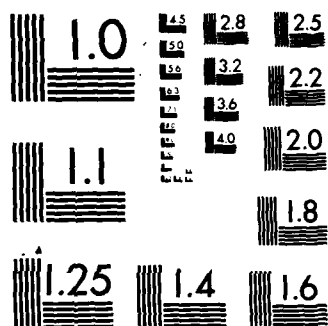
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ESSENCE OF EXCELLENCE
LESSONS FROM NAVAL EXECUTIVES ABOUT SUPERIOR
PERFORMING TACTICAL AND READINESS STAFFS

by

Homer Jay Coffman

June 1985

Co-Advisors

Reuben Harris
Ernest Haag

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Essence of Excellence
Lessons From Naval Executives About Superior Performing
Tactical and Readiness Staffs

by

Homer J. Coffman
Lieutenant, United States Navy
B.S., University of Southern Mississippi, 1979

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN MANAGEMENT

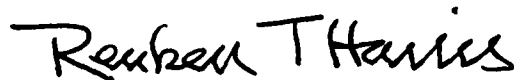
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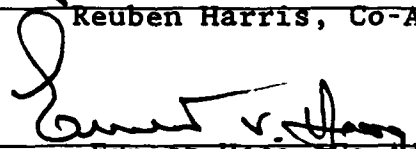
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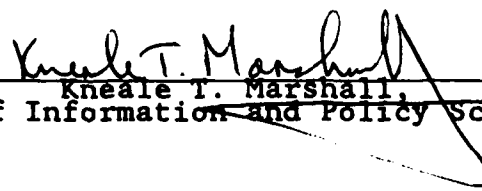

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ABSTRACT

This study identified the conditions and attributes associated with excellent surface tactical and readiness staffs. These attributes were derived from the expressed opinions by more than one hundred flag officers, commodores and their staff members. These attributes, The Seven C's for Staff Success, which comprise the foundations of staff excellence are: communication, climate, consistency, competence, coaching, conceptualization and credibility. Each attribute is discussed and illustrated from the experiences of senior naval officers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	10
	A. THE RENAISSANCE AGE OF EXCELLENCE	10
	B. THE QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE	10
	C. PROFILE OF A STAFF	11
	D. EXCELLENCE IN WHAT TYPES OF STAFFS?	11
	E. SOME HISTORY ABOUT THIS STUDY	12
	F. HOW AND WHY THIS STUDY WAS CONDUCTED	12
	G. A TEST OF TIME	13
	H. A WORD ABOUT THE STUDY	13
II.	THE SEVEN C'S TO SUCCESS	15
	A. IDENTIFYING THE HALLMARKS OF EXCELLENCE IN STAFFS	15
	B. DON'T TALK TO ME ABOUT NUMBERS	19
III.	CONSISTENCY - THE INSTRUMENT OF PERFORMANCE	20
	A. PROVEN PERFORMERS	20
	B. FINGERS ON THE PULSE	20
	C. DOWN ON THE WATERFRONT	21
	D. STRONG LEADERSHIP WITH LEAN MANAGEMENT	22
	E. ANY STYLE IS THE RIGHT STYLE, AS LONG AS YOU ARE CONSISTENT	23
IV.	COMPETENCE - THE WINNING EDGE	25
	A. BRING ME YOUR BEST	25
	B. SELECTION TO A STAFF IS AN INFORMAL NOMINATIVE PROCESS	26
	C. QUALITY PEOPLE IS JOB ONE!	27
	D. TELLING THE ADMIRAL HE'S WRONG	29

V.	CLIMATE - THE VEHICLE FOR SUCCESS	32
A.	A COMMANDER'S MODUS OPERANDI IS TO ESTABLISH COMMAND CLIMATE	32
B.	WHAT HAVE YOU DONE GOOD FOR THE FLEET TODAY?	32
C.	MY PORTHOLE IS OPEN	33
D.	INTRA-STAFF COORDINATION IS THE NAME OF THE GAME	34
E.	PRIDE AND PROFESSIONALISM ARE ALIVE AND WELL	35
F.	LEAN ON ME	36
VI.	COACHING - THE COMMANDING EDGE	38
A.	ENTHUSIASM IS THE DRIVING FORCE TO OBTAINMENT	38
B.	INNOVATION - THE STANDARD FOR EXCELLENCE . . .	39
C.	STROKING THE SYSTEM	40
D.	A DEMANDING TASKMASTER IS THE BEST COACH . . .	41
VII.	COMMUNICATION- THE FOUNDATION FOR EXCELLENCE . . .	43
A.	LET YOUR FINGERS DO THE WALKING	43
B.	ACCESSIBILITY IS THE COMMANDER'S CODE	43
C.	THE PERSONAL TOUCH	44
D.	THE "WRITE" OFFICER	45
VIII.	CONCEPTUALIZATION - ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING PRIORITIES	47
A.	INDIVIDUAL LEADERS, NOT ORGANIZATIONS, CREATE EXCELLENCE	47
B.	PEOPLE ARE THE CORNER STONE OF EXCELLENCE . .	48
C.	SEPARATING THE WHEAT FROM THE CHAFF	48
IX.	CREDIBILITY - THE PERCEPTION OF SUCCESS	51
X.	THE SEARCH FOR EXCELLENCE	53

A.	FINDING "EXCELLENT STAFFS" IS COMPARABLE	
	TO A DOUBLE EDGED SWORD	54
	1. Cloak of Invisibility	54
	2. Staffs, Baa Hum-bug!	56
B.	IN SEARCH OF EXCELLENT STAFFS	56
XI.	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	58
	A. CONCLUSIONS	58
	B. RECOMMENDATIONS	63
	APPENDIX A: OFFICER NOMINATION SHEET	65
	APPENDIX B: LEARN TO SAY "NO" TO THE ADMIRAL	66
	APPENDIX C: ADMIRAL RICKOVER'S THOUGHTS ON	
	EXCELLENCE	85
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	87

LIST OF FIGURES

2.1	The 7 C's to Success Model	18
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I. INTRODUCTION

A. THE RENAISSANCE AGE OF EXCELLENCE

What makes a battle group, tactical squadron or even a readiness squadron clearly superior to all others? What type of individuals would you find on these staffs? Is it the commander that makes an excellent staff or is it a staff that makes an excellent commander? What exactly makes these staffs effective?

It was these questions that I sought answers for while conducting interviews with senior officers and their staffs during my thesis research.

B. THE QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE

Throughout any line officer's journey up the promotion ladder, he is groomed for one thing, "command at sea". He is conditioned and trained to assume the title of "Captain". The quest for knowledge for this position is all encompassing. In the monograph, Excellence in the Surface Navy by Gullickson and Chenette, is a list of the characteristics of high performing or excellent ships. This study is a continuation of that research; it picks up where they leave off.¹ It tells what our flag officers, commodores, and their senior officers feel makes for excellence in operational and readiness Naval staffs. It removes a portion of the veil of

¹Gullickson, G.G. and Chenette, P. D., Excellence In The Surface Navy Navy Postgraduate School, 1984, pp. 1-65. Results from a recently completed study of excellence in Navy surface ships, conducted by thesis students under the direction of Dr. Reuben Harris, indicates that excellent surface commands do indeed possess certain attributes (such as high energy level/bias for action, presence of a common vision and shared values, etc.) which set them apart from the average fleet surface command.

mystique and intrigue which seems to loom over excellent staffs, and provides some insight into how they manage to be "excellent". This study does not provide the reader with a cookbook approach to management. It does provide a unique perspective on a complex and intriguing subject--A perspective gained only by experience and exposure to excellence from those who know it.

C. PROFILE OF A STAFF

A staff is the home of the behind-the-scenes movers and the shakers. They're the one's that have to both see and create the big picture. They make decisions that involve thousands of sailors' and civilians' lives. The staff performs the planning, administrative and political functions that define our material state of readiness. There is really little or no documentation about military staffs; yet, in the modern school of management, thousands of books have been written on leadership and line-staff relationships. I want to be quick to point out that it was the military who gave the business world concepts of discipline, delegation of authority and recognition of line and staff distinctions.² Although the Army initiated the line-staff concept, the Navy has perfected it. It has been perfected by a simplistic technique known as leadership.

D. EXCELLENCE IN WHAT TYPES OF STAFFS?

The Navy has hundreds of tactical and readiness staffs. This report focuses primarily on surface fleet staffs. These staffs included carrier groups, cruiser destroyer

²Hittle, J. D., The Military Staff, Its History and Development (The Stackpole Company, 1944), pp. 1-306. This book walks through the history of the development of military staffs. It indicates that it was the military that invented and perfected the line-staff concept.

IV. COMPETENCE - THE WINNING EDGE

"Remember also that one of the requisite studies for an officer is man. Where your analytical geometry will serve you once, a knowledge of men will serve you daily. As a Commander, to get the right man in the right place is the question of success or defeat."

Farragut

As summarized by one commodore, in defining excellence in staffs, "I think the first component is at the staff level; it's the selection, or at least getting quality people into the key parts of the staff itself." Another description came from a four star admiral who, while analyzing excellent staffs, said, "I think it goes to the people who man the staff themselves. How well they do to respond to the tasking is vital to the accomplishment of the staff's mission. They determine success." It was interesting to find that competence seems to stand out when talking about staff excellence. Excellent staffs have quality people. I heard this point stressed so many times during my interviews that I started to hear it in my sleep, "Quality people is job one."

A. BRING ME YOUR BEST

Where do they come from? These highly sought officers can be found almost anywhere. Excellent staffs always have their ear to the ground looking for Mr. Right. However, they first look within, to subordinate units assigned to the staff. One commodore told me, "I recruit the people who come to this staff. When we go out on our ships for daily

Excellent staffs view leadership as the driving force, or the guiding light, to success. This force tends to have a synergistic affect on the staff. It is fuel for the fire. No matter what individual leadership style a commander may use, from a "Screamer" to "Subordinate Stroker", they can still have an excellent staff. Any particular leadership style is the right style, as long as it is appropriately consistent. Consistency in leadership allows subordinates time to adjust their performance to meet the standards set. Excellent staffs know what the commander wants and how to achieve results. There are no guessing games. When people know what is expected of them they strive to meet those demands and more. Excellent staffs are proven performers because it is what the commander expects, nothing less.

Whatever leadership style commanders on excellent staffs may use, there are commonalities that are found in each style. Consistency is the key factor as mentioned earlier but, there are more. The senior officers I talked to, felt that on an excellent staff, the commander is a macro-manager. He delegates his authority and depends a great deal on his staffs. He knows how to use the staff and not abuse it. The standards that he sets are very high. He lives up to those standards and he expects each member of his staff to do the same.

Another commonality, is the loyalty and respect a commander receives from his staff. Excellent staffs share and believe in their commander no matter what leadership style he uses.

motivate the people that surround him. Some of our senior officers thought some of the best leaders are the sailors on the deck plate, working together to get a job done. These sailors may or may not be on the staff. They do however, support the overall mission. Successful staffs never lose the insight of what leadership is all about. People! When you talk to any staffer about a particular ship, the first thing that comes to their mind is a vision of the people assigned to that command. People are the frame of reference when any staff member talk about capabilities of a particular ship.

I would like to stress that these staffs do not neglect management. In fact, they are scrupulous in handling details on impersonal resources. Management of the resources for Desron or Battle Groups is probably the most complex in the modern world.

Contrary to some theories in the world of management, which state that leadership is a subset of management, excellent staffs see themselves as leaders providing a direction for others to follow.

E. ANY STYLE IS THE RIGHT STYLE, AS LONG AS YOU ARE CONSISTENT

"Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity."

Geroge S. Patton

I realize that each of us is bombarded, throughout out careers, with theories on leadership. There are thousands of books and articles written telling us what style of leadership is best suited to maximize organizational productivity.

It is the philosophy of top performing staffs that, when a staff member goes aboard a ship, he does not go for the purpose of pointing out mistakes. Anyone can show you what you are doing wrong and easily criticize. Their foremost thought is to help a ship if it does have a problem. If he can't help, then he is part of the problem. As one commander put it, "Easy to criticize but hard to find answers." These staffs develop and provide answers to fleet operational problems and they improve overall readiness.

D. STRONG LEADERSHIP WITH LEAN MANAGEMENT

Leadership has received more attention in the Navy than has any other function of a manager. In fact, it is probably accurate to say that until the establishment of the Department of Defense in 1947, the term manager was not part of the military idiom. There were only "leaders".⁶

I was surprised by the reaction I received whenever I mentioned the word "management". One destroyer chief staff officer said it best: "When I talk about management in the Navy, I try to throw away the word 'management' and use leadership." You can hear it throughout the hallowed halls of the best staffs. Men are led, not managed. Our mission is to train and prepare ships for combat. We are not managers, we are leaders.

What exactly is the difference between leadership and management? Excellent staffs seem to have these definitions down to a science. Even the junior enlisted men on these staffs espouse the theory of the commander. What does leadership mean? Leadership is an intangible thing dealing with people; unlike a weapons system or money. It is a person willing and able to articulate ideas, plans and values that

⁶Washbush, J. B., and Sherlock, B. J., To Get The Job Done (Naval Institute Press, 1981), p. 21.

accomplishment. This notion of "Fingers on the Pulse" is a hallmark of excellence. So what is "Fingers on the Pulse"? It is a staff that is well informed and involved. They do preventive maintenance and are always assessing their subordinates' capabilities. They take that next step, always asking the next question. This is fingers on the pulse. At the same time these staffs are very careful not to overburden the ships or demand things that the ship cannot handle. It is apparent that excellent staffs do not obtain information at the expense of the ship. If this happens, it would be "fingers on the throat", slowly choking the ship's effectiveness. They obtain and monitor the task force the old fashioned way, they work at it. They do not work at it by creating and demanding mountainous reports filled with sometimes useful information, but by knowing their subordinate commands. They are there, working hard and caring about those they serve. "Fingers on the Pulse", is monitoring results of decisions. Any commander can have numerous ways to evaluate the health of their organization; the ones mentioned here are the ones that were most prevalent during the interviews.

C. DOWN ON THE WATERFRONT

Back in the offices is where things are planned, but down on the waterfront is where things happen. Excellent staffs spend a large portion of their time down on the waterfront. Whenever a member of a commander's staff goes down to the waterfront he becomes the commander's eyes, nose, and ears. He is always aware that he is not the admiral but he is his representative. It is through contributions of information provided by his staff members that a commander can keep in touch with reality and enhances his effectiveness of control throughout the organization.

III. CONSISTENCY - THE INSTRUMENT OF PERFORMANCE

"Knowledge of our duties is the most essential part of the philosophy of life. If you escape duty you avoid action. The world demands results."

George W. Goethals

A. PROVEN PERFORMERS

It shouldn't be a surprise to anyone, but when talking about excellent staffs one must talk about a proven performer. A proven performer has passed the test of time and successfully completes their mission, time after time. This is a simple criterion placed on every staff; but, not all staffs can carry the ball. So what makes an excellent staff any different? Simple, they monitor their objectives closely; any deviation from them is caught and placed back on track. The key word is "deviation" from the plan. This word strikes fear in every staff member's heart. So, to counteract this phenomenon, excellent staffs have institutionalized the following.

B. FINGERS ON THE PULSE

When you go to a doctor, the first thing done before looking at the symptoms is the taking of your temperature, blood pressure and pulse. The same is true with superior performing staffs. They monitor their forces. Always aware of their internal working conditions and taking actions to eliminate conditions that could arise and prevent mission

This model is based on the interviews I conducted with the Navy's top executive leaders.

B. DON'T TALK TO ME ABOUT NUMBERS

What? No numbers in measuring effectiveness in staffs? I'm as shocked as you are. When I began this project, I was looking for all types of quantitative measurements with which I could do fancy statistical analysis. When I asked about quantitative measures, the general response was, "Don't talk to me about numbers, talk to me about quality of ships that are assigned to a staff. Numbers don't mean a thing, but results do." It is easy to play the numbers game to prove a particular point. The question is: Can staffs ensure the delivery of ordinance to a designated target? This is what really interested the commanders.

I was amazed by how much our admirals, commodores, captains, and virtually every individual, depend on qualitative data when defining excellence in staffs. There is a lot of quantitative analyses done on a staff's subordinate units, but none on staffs. The analyses done on ships can not or have not been directly traced to the effectiveness of a staff. So if you want to talk about staff effectiveness, numbers are not the solution.

Now that I have given you a brief overview of what senior officers consider to be the attributes of an excellent staff, the subsequent chapters will discuss each of the seven C's in greater detail.

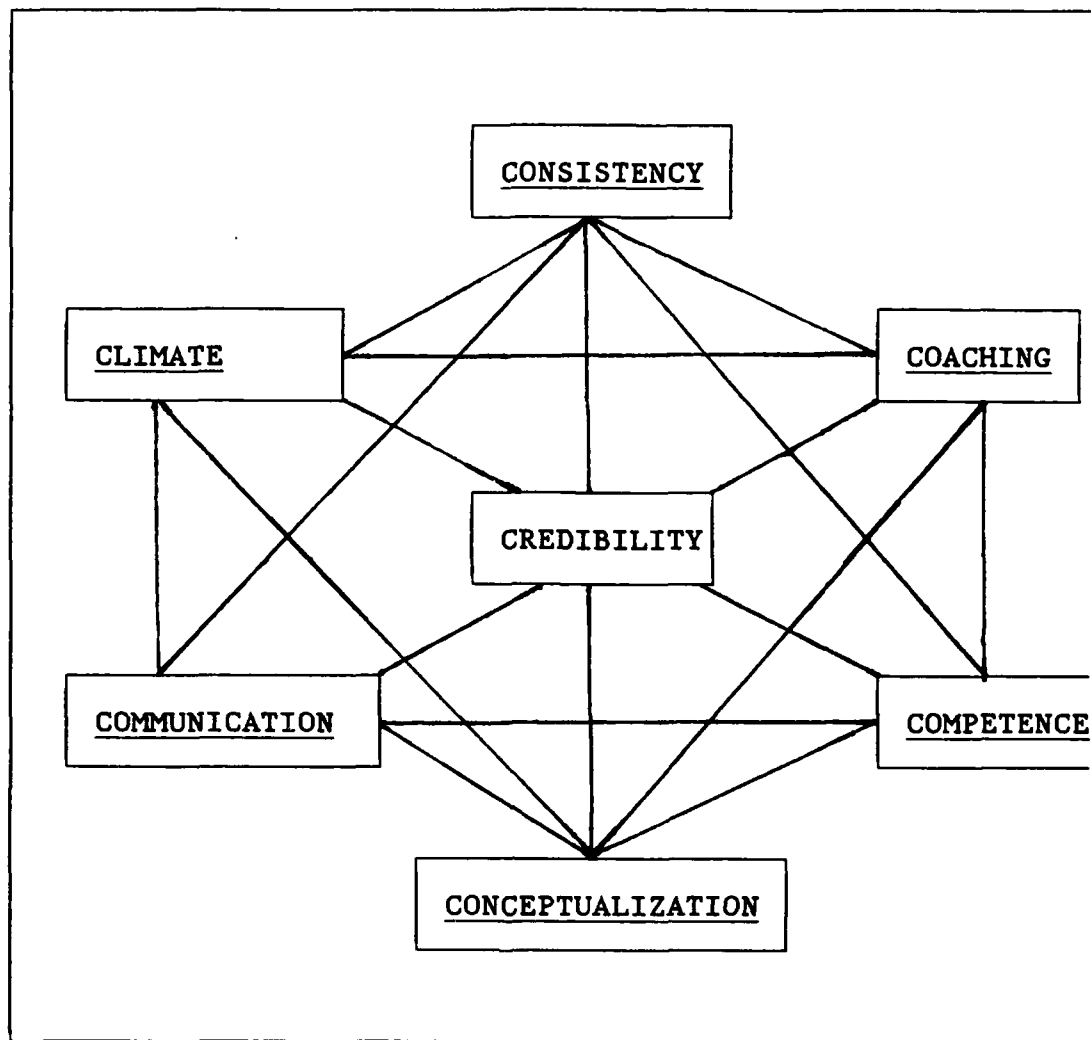


Figure 2.1 The 7 C's to Success Model

5. Communication - Excellent staffs are not waiting for answers. They're out there asking questions. They are out on the waterfront addressing issues, face-to-face. They provide the commander with clear concise, one page point papers and avoid writing unnecessary or ambiguous messages to their seniors and subordinates alike.
6. Conceptualization - Excellent staffs have a clear vision of purpose and priorities. They express explicitly and continually what their goals are and how to accomplish them. This means remaining flexible under the operation of everyday crisis situations. It requires focusing on what is important and delegating the rest. It is excellent staffs integrating new ideas into its operation while never losing sight of the basics.
7. Credibility - This is the only trait that derives its existence external to the staff--it is earned. It is a perceived professional ratification held by others who look upon the staff as being the best. It is a result of the other traits just mentioned. Credibility is the true hallmark of an excellent staff.

These seven variables are the attributes of excellence in a staff. They are each separate variables, yet they interact, with credibility being at the heart. These variables formulate the building blocks of excellence on staffs. These variables are not something that is hard to notice or have to dig to for. Even to the casual observer, these variables are very noticable on excellent staffs. THE SEVEN C's MODEL as depicted in Figure 2.1 on page 18, indicates how senior officers look for excellence in a staff.

delegators and motivators. They always accentuate the positive and are not critical just for the sake of being critical. They consistently find answers to problems--not find problems without answers. Yes, they are good, but they are always striving to be better. Consistency leads up the stairway of excellence.

2. Competence - When you talk about excellence in a staff, you must talk about the quality of people who serve on it. The skills that the excellent staff must possess include: experience, expertise, exceptional drive and motivation. It is understood that competent people are not a luxury, but a necessity in achieving excellence. Excellent staffs perpetrate themselves by vigorously recruiting their personnel rather than depending on the "luck of the draw" process done at NMPC.
3. Climate - It is an atmosphere of trust, loyalty and autonomy that produces positive results. Each staff member on an excellent staff has the perception of benefiting the fleet each and every day. They have an excellent rapport with the subordinate commands that depend on them for support. Climate fuels the fire of innovation within an excellent staff.
4. Coaching - Enthusiasm, innovation and achievement do not come easy in any staff, but excellent staffs have commanders that are teachers, cheerleaders, sounding boards and disciplinarians. The leaders set high standards and push each member of the staff to meet those standards. They hold to the motto; "The more they sweat in peace, the less they bleed in battle".

II. THE SEVEN C'S TO SUCCESS

"In the following pages, I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments and common sense. I have no other preliminaries to settle with the reader other than he will divest himself of prejudice and prepossession and suffer his reason and his feelings to determine for themselves; that he will put on, or rather that he will not put off, the true character of man, and generously enlarge his views beyond the present day.

Thomas Paine, Common Sense

A. IDENTIFYING THE HALLMARKS OF EXCELLENCE IN STAFFS

What did these flag officers, destroyer and amphibious commanders, members of their staffs and other pertinent authorities say about defining excellences in tactical and readiness staffs? I was amazed at the unanimous agreement I received on the hallmarks of excellence. To the casual reader, these concepts may be a blinding flash of the obvious; but, a closer look will reveal the secrets that set top performing staffs above the rest. So what are these hallmarks of excellence that I refer to as "The Seven C's To Success"? The following offers a brief description of the attributes:

1. Consistency - Excellent staffs are consistent in obtaining results; always achieving maximum results. You find the members of this kind of staff onboard ships and down on the waterfront, not behind a desk waiting for work. These staffs practice leadership with lean management as a way of life. All actions are dominated by a common vision or goal shared throughout the staff. These staffs are innovators,

excellent staff. These points were made while defining excellence and not observing it.

and discussions varied around these themes. It was from these interviews that I was able to formulate an operational definition of excellence in staffs.⁵

G. A TEST OF TIME

The only true measure of excellence is time. With this basic precept in mind, what you are about to read reflects over 1,500 years of excellence in naval professionalism. These 1,500 years represent the combined total years of experience of one hundred and nine Naval officers and enlisted men sampled. The sample includes twenty one flag officers and thirty nine captains. With positions that include fleet commanders-in-chief, type commanders, commanders of numbered fleets, carrier groups, amphibious groups, destroyer squadrons, amphibious squadrons and their staffs. These individuals defined the hallmarks of excellence in tactical and readiness staffs which are reflected in this report. Who else is better able to identify the traits that define excellence in naval staffs than those Naval executives who set the standards of excellence? These leaders have stood the test of time. Now it is time for them to provide us with the answers in our search for excellence in tactical and readiness staffs.

H. A WORD ABOUT THE STUDY

Throughout the study I continually point out various attributes of excellence in the staffs that I have visited. I only emphasized traits that senior officers consider important. I want to warn the reader, points emphasized in this study were driven from staffs that may or may not be an

⁵Summaries of all senior officers I interviewed are on file at the Naval Postgraduate School. Names and organizational identifiers are deleted to maintain promised anonymity of interviewees.

groups, amphibious groups, destroyer and amphibious readiness squadrons. It is from these staffs that the attributes of excellence were defined.

E. SOME HISTORY ABOUT THIS STUDY

According to the research work of Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr., published in the recent management bestseller, In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies, there are certain identifiable traits which are common to America's most successful corporations.³ It is postulated that because of these traits, corporations have sustained superior performance and growth. One of these traits is "Simple Form--Lean Staff." Other than being small in size, there are few other specifications of the character and function of staffs that contribute to corporate excellence. In the Navy, even less is documented about managing staffs towards excellence.

F. HOW AND WHY THIS STUDY WAS CONDUCTED

In conducting this study, I interviewed over one hundred flag officers, captains, and other key officers, as well as enlisted personnel. These interviews were structured around such questions as: How do you judge if a staff is excellent?⁴ What characteristics do the top performing staffs display that set them apart from others? Other questions

³Peters, T. J. and Waterman, R. H., In Search of Excellence (Harper and Row, 1982), pp. 1 - 326. This best selling book, describes traits that a successful American business have. These traits include managing ambiguity and paradox, a bias for action, close to the customer, autonomy and entrepreneurship, productivity through people, hands-on/value-driven, stick to the knitting, and simple form/lean staff.

⁴This study is part of an ongoing research effort on "Excellence in the military" headed by Dr. Reuben Harris, Associate Professor of Organizational Behavior and Management at the Naval Postgraduate School.

operations we're always on the lookout for the officer or enlisted man that is really head and shoulders above the rest of the people on the ship. When we see one of those people, we put it away for further reference." These individuals already know the ships, the people, the "connections" and have a rough idea of what are the commander's philosophies. This shortens the time required for indoctrination and enables the new staff officer to function more efficiently, sooner than a counterpart who was not selected from within. The indoctrination period normally takes six months before a new staff officer is up to speed on what is going on. By selecting individuals within the group or squadron, most senior officers feel that it cuts this indoctrination in half, to three months. Considering that the average tour for a staffer is 18 months, reducing indoctrination time effectly increases the fleet's readiness.

B. SELECTION TO A STAFF IS AN INFORMAL NOMINATIVE PROCESS

Being selected to a staff has had negative connotations and perceptions of damaged careers. Excellent staffs are quick to dispute this notion. Selection to a staff may not be formally considered as a nominative process such as executive officer screening. This notion was expressed by one Chief Staff Officer who said, "If you go to the Bureau of Personnel and ask, 'Is the weapons combat system officer on Desron 4 a nominative billet?', he's going to say no it's not. But, you can point to any member on this staff and I will tell you how he was 'selected', not 'assigned'."

As mentioned earlier, excellent staffs hand pick their candidates creating another cut of professionalism from their counterparts. One senior officer told me, "I know guys--Admiral Zumalt used to do it. You know he worked in the bureau for a while as a junior officer, he maintained a

list in his hip pocket--a list of all the superstars. He would get ordered to a job and go back to the bureau and say, 'I want Joe Smith and these five guys and I want them to get this training enroute and I want them here by such and such date so I can get organized.'" This is one example of many on how the foundation of an excellent staff is laid. Another commander told me, "We get the best, the best of the best here. These guys...I've hand picked every one of them." Quality people are not a luxury but a necessity. The excellent staffs work very hard in recruiting the best person for the job. It was expressed quite candidly that NMPC (Navy Manpower Personnel Center) cannot adequately select the quality of personnel needed on staffs. A fleet staff's flag secretary was kind enough to provide me with a nomination sheet they use for selecting prospective personnel. (See appendix A, Officer Nomination Sheet). You can see, being selected to a staff is a cut above the rest. One commodore said, "I treat every billet as a nominative process. That means every billet on the staff, from the chief-of-staff down to the yeoman." Using this method is an example of how excellent staffs are developed and maintain superior competence.

C. QUALITY PEOPLE IS JOB ONE!

"A good staff has the advantage of being more lasting than the genius of a single man."

General Antione Henri Jomini
(1779-1865)

The reason for having a staff is to reduce the need to depend on one man for success in preparing and fighting a war, no matter how brilliant he might be. It is logical to see that the collective efforts of many can supercede individual genius.

In the Nineteenth Century, Prussia perfected the general staff concepts that have prevailed over time. The Great General Staff (Grosser Generalstab) was an elite group within the Prussian Army. They were experts in staff functions and their specialty was staff operations. Each staff member were hand picked in order to achieve excellence in military operations. These individuals were selected for their personal skills and competence as military leaders.⁷

The Prussian Armed Forces institutionalized what is echoed today. As one admiral said, "If you want to talk about excellence in a staff, you must talk about the quality of people on that staff." Just as Prussia realized the importance of utilizing it's best professionally competent people to hold staff billets, it is also realized in today's Navy's most successful staffs.

Excellent staffs know that each individual of that staff impacts directly and indirectly on the commander's or the staff's reputation. The concept of "quality people" provides an excellent setting to establish high standards by example of military conduct, bearing, appearance, dignity and courtesy that can raise the level of performance throughout the fleet. In order to permeate this setting, one staff delineated in its SORM (Staff Organization and Regulation Manual) that a staff officer work from the following basic precepts:⁸

1. Know the commander's policy and act accordingly.
2. Remember that the staff commander and his reputation are affected by your actions. You are the commander's representative.

⁷"Joint Chiefs of Staffs" from Collins, J., op, cit. pp. 54-56. John M. Collins' article refers to JCS's need to follow the example set by the Prussian General Staff.

⁸COMNAVSURPAC INSTRUCTION 5000, 1B Staff Organization Manual 1982, p. 1-3-1. Chapter 1, section three deals with responsibilities of all staff officers.

3. Consult other staff officers to enhance the quality of results.
4. Ensure matters under your cognizance are completed ahead of the deadlines and that the commander and the chief of staff/chief staff officer are informed of your intentions and actions.
5. Study, write, restudy, and rewrite. Submit written reports based on this simple notion:

"The final test of completed staff work is this. If you yourself were the commander, would you be willing to sign the paper you have prepared? Would you stake your professional reputation on its being right? If your answer is NO, take the paper back and rework it, because it is not completed staff work."

unknown staff officer

6. Members of the staff are alert to notice noteworthy performance of duty by an individual or unit and make a report of the fact to the commander and the chief-of-staff.

D. TELLING THE ADMIRAL HE'S WRONG

"A 'no' uttered from deepest conviction is better and greater than a 'yes' merely uttered to please, or what is worse, to avoid trouble."

Mahatma Ghandi

While waiting in the outer office of an admiral that I had scheduled to interview that morning, I struck up a conversation about the staff with the flag secretary. One of the first things he brought up was, "If you're going to work on this staff, you're going to have to learn to say 'no' to the admiral; tell him your opinions and not what you think he wants to hear." This particular admiral makes each

member of this staff read the article "Learning how to say 'no' to the admiral." The flag secretary took the article out of his basket and told me, they all had to read it once a month.

A west coast flag officer strongly emphasized, "The one thing that I do not have and one thing that I would not allow on my staffs, is a guy that would take what I said and just run off, pell-mell, and put his head down and run up against the wall with it. I do not want a yes-man. I want some guy or woman, as we're working out the policies, who has got the intestinal fortitude to stand up and say, 'I don't think that's executable', or, 'I don't think that's a good idea because....' I want somebody that has got the intestinal fortitude and the intellectual capability to sit down and go over the policy issue...enough so they can stand up and say in so many words, 'That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard in my life.' I need to be told that and I reiterate the fact that the perfect man died 2,000 years ago and you need to have somebody to bounce it off of. That's the first thing I look for in a staff officer."

This was the over-all message that came through when discussing excellent staffs. Frank, candid opinions is what the admiral wants, not candy coated "can do" responses. Members of a staff can do no greater disservice to the commander than saying "yes sir" that they don't stop and analyze the issue. Telling an admiral he is wrong is providing him with your opinion when you think he is wrong. It requires giving each issue some real thought.

⁹Vice Admiral Dyer, "Learning How To Say 'NO' To The Admiral" PROCEEDINGS (U.S. Naval Institute, July 1983), pp. 12 - 20. The full article is included in appendix B, because it is apparently viewed as a "classic" and therefore of potential importance to those who might serve on excellent staffs.

Another hallmark of excellent staffs is illustrated when members of the staff may have initially opposed the stand the admiral decided to take on an issue, but, once the admiral has made his decision, there is a united staff to support that decision. They don't waste energy arguing the issue any longer, they pick up and continue with business as usual.

V. CLIMATE - THE VEHICLE FOR SUCCESS

A. A COMMANDER'S MODUS OPERANDI IS TO ESTABLISH COMMAND CLIMATE

The personality of the commander is the greatest influencing factor on how a staff operates. The commander's attitude, policies, and commitments, just to mention a few, are among many traits that formulate the command climate. As expressed by one commodore, "The staff modus operandi and the commodore's personal policy and personality are all one and the same." Command climate is the organizational culture where a staff functions. It is the internal works of the staff and its people. Command climate in excellent staffs fosters an image of being the best, giving purpose and meaning to the day by day functions of a staff member. Ernest Becker, a psychologist, argues that man is driven by an essential "dualism", he needs both to be a part of something and to stick out. He wants to be a conforming member of a team and wants to be a water-walker. He goes on to say that man fears not death, but to die having lived a mediocre or insignificant life.¹⁰ Top performing staffs realize the quality of people assigned to them and work hard to create a command climate conducive to achieving maximum individual involvement.

B. WHAT HAVE YOU DONE GOOD FOR THE FLEET TODAY?

Hanging in the passageway in one of the type commander's headquarters is a huge sign that says, "What have you done good for the fleet today?" This sign reflects a portion of

¹⁰Peters, T. J. and Waterman, R. H., In Search of Excellence. (Harper and Row, 1982), p. 28.

the commander's ideas and values that permeate the command climate of that staff. It just hang's there, challenging all who read it. For this staff and others I encountered, this sign was not there for decoration. It was there because it has a meaningful message. It defines the realities of what a staff is really working for--the fleet. Just this notion seems to prevent docile, apathetic and mediocre performance in its staff. This is an example of a successful staff paying explicit attention to values. Though values are not tangible as established policies, they are ever present throughout the staff.

One tactical destroyer squadron commander has instilled in the hearts of each member of the staff that they are the best ASW (anti-submarine warfare) staff in the Fleet. Pictures of submarines are everywhere. Every staff member I spoke with on the topic of excellence, ASW would surface. If I asked any member of the staff what they did, the first thing out of their mouth would be, "We kill submarines." The staff held the same values the commodore did about ASW. A commodore with a similar point of view stated, "I want to feel that we are at the front edge of our current state of the art in tactics. We are continuously striving to leap slightly beyond that."

C. MY PORTHOLE IS OPEN

"My porthole is open" is a phrase used by commander's and staffers to mean, "I'm willing to listen to what you have to say." To be an effective staff, you have got to be a good information collector. Most of the information that a staff works with does not come from Navy publication or from the morning message traffic--it comes from word of mouth.

A commander informed me that he spends about 85% of his time doing nothing more than listening. This was also true for each member of his staff. One group chief-of-staff expressed how hard listening is by saying, "There is a tendency in the Navy for our officers to lead and not listen. An individual beating his breast is really not receiving any information. He's pouring out in all sorts of directions, much of which could probably be ill-conceived and not be adhered to because he isn't listening. A good staff has to listen. Also, the commander and each staff member have to create, in the command climate, an atmosphere where communication flows easy and there is a freedom of expression. There is an atmosphere that the doors are open, including the admiral's, and he would be willing to entertain any ideas from almost any source." They listen and collect the information.

A carrier group commander told me that one of the toughest things he has to do is listen. That is probably one of the most important things a leader must do. It is important to be able to listen and to be able to get all the good information that is provided. It is with this information a commander depends on to carry out his mission. To quote the admiral, "Without listening, what is a staff good for?"

D. INTRA-STAFF COORDINATION IS THE NAME OF THE GAME

It should not be surprising to find a value of team play deeply instilled into the members of successful staffs. This is not a principle discussed in the plan of the day or during a staff meeting but is a reality. It is an understanding that people are the organization. It is the same people that are going to bring success in mission accomplishment - stressing the collective effort with very little

emphasis on the individual. A flag officer commented, "A commander creates a spirit of teamwork, not only within the staff, but within his entire echelon. He down-plays individualism to the extent that it could tend to degrade the whole organization. Always ensuring that the proper balance between ensuring the success of the team and permitting individuals to reap those rewards from individualistic effort."

As I see it, America's team is not the Dallas Cowboys or the Atlanta Braves; it is its military. This, as any team, requires them to become a well oiled machine. This machine has no place for an individual who does not fit the part. Superior performing staffs work very hard to ensure that their machine is well oiled. They promote individualism thru group initiative, creativity, imagination, sensitivity, common vision and versatility.

These characteristics are nothing more than teamwork. Excellent staffs seem to take this principle even further. One four star admiral said, "It is the cohesiveness of a staff that makes a difference. Highly effective staffs that get things accomplished, Excellent staffs do the same thing, but have fun doing it at the same time. Challenges seem to be things they look forward to taking on. And so, everybody seems to be highly motivated. They hit tasks with a degree of enthusiasm that may be some other staff's don't do."

E. PRIDE AND PROFESSIONALISM ARE ALIVE AND WELL

It might sound corny, but I found that excellent staffs take pride in doing their job. This pride produces a synergistic effect that enhances the quality of the work being performed. It generates a sense of ownership in whatever each staff members are doing and is like a built in reward system. Rewards, as one chief-of-staff indicated, is not a

fitness report or just a pat on the back from the four star saying, "You guys are doing a good job." It's the individuals on the staff working together and doing the best job possible because they feel responsible and proud for making it happen.

These staffs are out to win. They are also quick to accept failure. One commodore said, "We view a failed OPPE (operational propulsion plant examination), or any failure of an inspection from one of our ships as a failure of this staff. It hurts because my staff feels that they are part of the ship." It seems the excellent staffs are directly and feel personally involved with their subordinate commands. "Pride" was not explicitly addressed in the interviews; but, I could see it in action from the staff members and sensed it in their voices, though they never referred to it.

F. LEAN ON ME

There was one commodore who candidly compared tactical and readiness staff to a shepherd's staff. He said, "Either you can lean back on it or you can beat you sheep over the head with it". Out in the fleet there appears to be a tendency to associate staffs as headhunters.¹¹ Today's captain's stress the common practice of shunning away from the staff whenever possible. In an article written by Commander John Byron, indicates to minimize interference caused by a staff, a ship's captain needs to stay ahead of the inspectors and staff members. This is done by forcing inspection standards into the ship's routine way of business

¹¹Byron, J. B., "The Captain", Proceedings, (Naval Institute Press, June 1980), pp.39-43. This article stresses the important role and responsibilities an individual has when he assumes command-at-sea. This article reflects the feelings of captains when interacting with staffs.

and avoiding the sort of dumb or serious errors which invite staff scrutiny. This scrutiny has evolved from what one admiral has observed, "Staffs go onboard the ship and it's like belling the cat." One admiral indicated that most C.O.'s have somebody running around with staff members to make sure they do not go running back to the commodore and whispering ugly things about the ship's trash and garbage.

So, what do top performing staffs do in this situation? An other admiral told me "The hallmark of excellence is a perception within the ships assigned to the squadron and that the squadron staff is there to render total support." These staffs work very hard in generating a relationship with each ship based on mutual trust and respect. The staff members does not depend on the commander's personal support to win respect. Staff members depend on their own professional competence and skills to win the respect of the ships they work with. Excellent staffs ensure that they do not disassociate themselves with their counterparts onboard a ship. They blend in with the other officers in the wardroom, the chief petty officers mess and in the enlisted mess. Each staff member always remembers who the Captain is and who is responsible for everything that happens onboard that ship.

One staff that I visited has a policy of briefing the commanding officer of any discrepancy found before reporting to the commander. Each staff member realizes that not only do they work for the commander directly, but so does every captain assigned to that squadron.

VI. COACHING - THE COMMANDING EDGE

"There is no magic: only people who find and nurture champions, dramatize goals and direction, build skills and teams, spread irresistible enthusiasm. They are cheerleaders, coaches, storytellers and wanderers. They encourage, excite, teach, listen, facilitate. Their actions are consistent. Only brute consistency breeds believability: they say people are special and they treat them that way - always. You know they take their priorities seriously because they live them clearly and visibly: they walk the talk."

Tom Peters and Nancy Austin

The preceding quote is from Tom Peters' and Nancy Austin's latest book entitled A Passion for Excellence.^{1 2} The ideas presented in this book seem to be right on target when looking at excellent staffs. Naval commanders "walk the talk", by paying close attention to detail, communicating unshakable core values, instilling and generating enthusiasm on the staff.

A. ENTHUSIASM IS THE DRIVING FORCE TO OBTAINMENT

"Every great and commanding movement in the annals of the world is the triumph of enthusiasm. Nothing great was ever achieved without it".

Ralph Waldo Emerson

^{1 2}Peters, T. J., and Austin N., Passion for excellence (Random House, 1984), pp. 1 - 419. This book looks not at the excellent organizations but at the leaders that make organizations excellent. This book highlights day to day acts of leadership at every management level that breeds superior performance. One of these acts deals with coaching by managers. Understanding the different climate of business and that of the Navy, the concept seems to be right on target with excellent performing staffs. I suggest to all Naval professionals that they read A Passion for Excellence to aid them in their personal quest for understanding. It is "the leadership difference"

You can feel it, you can smell it and if you are not careful you can get caught up in it. When you walk into an excellent staff you can be swept away by it. What is "it"? Enthusiasm!, plain and simple. Or is it really simple? As I went around talking to various members on a staff, I would frequently encounter this excitement. Everyone demonstrated attitudes of interest and zeal. The enthusiasm seemed to be perpetuated by the commander. Interviewing commanders, I would try to spend at least thirty minutes discussing excellence with them. There were a few times, however, when it would stretch into two hours or more. These interviews demonstrated the commanders enthusiasm about their job, their profession and what going on with their staff. I ended up spending two to three hours of their precious time, being enlightened on their philosophies. Some of these commanders were very charismatic, other's were not; but both types had the same effect on me. Their enthusiasm and interest had me converted. I felt like a member of their staff. As Peter's and Austin book clearly states, "Coaching is face-to-face leadership that pulls together people with diverse backgrounds, talents, experiences and interest, encourages them to step up to responsibility and continued achievement, and treat them as full-scale partners and contributors. Coaching is not about memorizing techniques or devising the perfect game plan, it is about really paying attention to people--really believing in them, really caring about them, really involving them."

B. INNOVATION - THE STANDARD FOR EXCELLENCE

Take chances, be risky, and above all-learn. Playing it safe and not taking risks produces stagnation and mediocrity. One finds excellent staffs out in front, stretching technology, ship and minds beyond what is conceived to be

X. THE SEARCH FOR EXCELLENCE

"No stream rises higher than its source. What ever man might build could never express or reflect more than he was. It was no more than what he felt. He could record neither more nor less than he had learned of life when the buildings are built...His philosophy, true or false, is there."

Frank Lloyd Wright

Up to this point, I have disclosed the consensus opinions of the senior officers on what they felt makes a superior performing tactical or readiness staff. I was really surprised to see such strong uniformity of agreement as that expressed by those interviewes. Be it a four star admiral or a master chief, they were all whistling the same tune when describing staff excellence.

I suspect the seven C's of success will not revolutionize the way people think about staffs; but, I feel sure they will leave their mark on the reader. As with any theory, however, the proof is in the pudding. So in order to substantiate the seven C's as attributes of excellent staffs, it was my intent to observe three or four excellent staffs. But, who and where are they? This is one question, which, unfortunately, I cannot answer. During each interview or discussion about excellence in staffs, I would ask the following question, "Besides this staff, can you name one particular staff (i.e., battle group, DESRON, etc.) that stands out in your mind as being excellent?" The result was unexpected. Roughly 30 per cent of the flag officers and 25 per cent of the other individuals I talked to could not

I find them (subordinate units) willing to approach my staff for assistance, that gives me an indication that my staff has credibility." The key, again, is credibility. Credibility is what excellent staffs are continuously striving for. It is through the building blocks of consistency, climate, communication, coaching, competence and conceptualization that credibility is obtained in excellent staffs. Credibility is the essence of excellence.

IX. CREDIBILITY - THE PERCEPTION OF SUCCESS

We have, thus far, addressed six of the seven c's of successful staffs. Now let us look at the seventh "c" of excellence--credibility. The first six c's dealt with traits that could be demonstrated in the operation of any staff. These traits are the building blocks of credibility. Unlike the other six c's, credibility is based on the perceptions of others (seniors and subordinates outside the staff).

You might ask why credibility is so important in defining excellence in a staff. It was an eye-opener to find that this is viewed as the primary measure of effectiveness; it is effectiveness that is not based on fact or figures, but on reputation. As one commodore phrased it, "I guess I would measure the success of the staff by the reputation that a staff enjoys or fails to enjoy in the ships that are part of that squadron group. To me, this is probably the clearest indication of the success of that staff." I would like to emphasize that this commodore was not alone with his opinion. Almost everyone I interviewed dealt with the perceptions of others when they talked about excellent staffs. One four star admiral said, "I think there are probably two ways a commander can measure staff excellence. One is internally and the other one is from without the command. This involves the perception that others have of the command. Many other senior officers I interviewed added that it also involves looking at the opinion held by subordinate commands. Infact, many felt that the only true measure of success is what the subordinate commands think of the staff. A destroyer squadron commander said it best, "If

a reconfirmation of priorities. The commander is the coach, insuring that every one of his players knows what the game plan is. As any coach realizes, it only takes one player to lose the game. I was amazed by how much effort the commanders continuously made in communicating the staffs' priorities.

I know what you're asking, what about those daily crises? Commanders are faced with the prospect of crisis management every day. I was astonished to see the intensity of the focus on priorities done by excellent staffs. This sharp focus allows staffs to make adjustments in their operations while keeping consistent with their long range goals. This focus on priorities allows flexibility. As one commodore stated, "Flexibility is the damage control drills of staffs." With this notion of flexibility, several senior officers feel that excellent staffs practice flexibility in tactical operations. The challenge being for the staff is not to depart from long range goals when facing every crises situation comes up. Excellent staffs use flexibility to deal with the daily fires generated in unforeseen crises, but never lose sight of the long range goals of the staff. With this notion, excellent staffs avoid the three deadly attitudes: short-term orientation, shallow thinking and quick-fix expectations. They never lose sight of their main priorities, even after running them through the ringer of crisis after crisis.

political events. He said specifically, "Crisis management is our way of life." Even though we live in a very volatile environment where crisis after crisis occurs, excellent staffs never lose focus on their priorities. They manage all their short goals to fit into the long range game plan.

"Separating the wheat from the chaff", is a phrase used by several senior officers meaning how to determine what is truly important. As one commander informed me, "I was skipper of the 6th fleet flagship and we handled 4,000 messages a day when we got into the Libyan crisis and the Beirut incident and all that. You've got to take about 2,000 of those messages and put them in the circular file."

Excellent staffs do separate the wheat from the chaff. The commander receives only the messages pertaining only to the information he wants to hear. This allows the commander to make decisions rather than sit around and read messages all day. Yes, the commander receives filtered information; but, this requires involvement of the staff to realize what the commander needs and wants to see. The staff is very clear on what the commander's priorities are and act accordingly. These priorities are established once the person assumes the role as commander. As one commodore put it, "All of us (commanders) have to sort out our priorities and sit down at the very beginning of our tour and put those goals out to the staff so that they understand the direction that you want the staff to go and the direction that you want the squadron to go."

Excellent staffs establish, through leadership, a clear definition of the priorities that the staff must have and they stay with those priorities even in daily crisis situations. These priorities are promulgated to the staff verbally, in writing and in action. Almost every morning the commander meets with the key players on his staff to review the morning message traffic. Every morning there is

B. PEOPLE ARE THE CORNER STONE OF EXCELLENCE

As VADM Metcalf stated in the Jan/Feb 1985 issue of Surface Warfare, "There is absolutely no doubt we have the best equipment in the world, the best ships, the best fleets, the best navy. People are the cornerstone of this foundation of excellence and unless we recognize that up front and make it a consideration at every possible decision point, we may jeopardize our edge. It's people who achieve operational readiness and our surface warriors, both officer and enlisted, are the most talented and dedicated sailors to ever man a navy."

This is not just a notion that is espoused by our naval executives, but is reality. Excellent staffs are always alert to recognize achievement. They look for potential problems. They always strive to listen to and keep every sailor informed. People power is a concept that excellent staffs commander's use in their decision making process. People seem to come to mind in solving problems not new equipment. As one four star admiral put it, "You get a hell of a lot of good equipment in today's armed forces, but it isn't worth a damn unless you've got the people motivated to use it to the fullest." Excellent staffs focus in great detail on "people". This is one basic principle that is not forgotten on excellent staffs. They recognize that staff work is a people business.

C. SEPARATING THE WHEAT FROM THE CHAFF

Deciding on what is important is a full time job in today's Navy. There are many demands placed on a staff by the system and by day-to-day crises. Crisis management is here to stay. As one type commander's chief-of-staff told his wardroom when he was a captain of a cruiser, that by definition our profession is built around real world and

VIII. CONCEPTUALIZATION - ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING PRIORITIES

"We are apt now in this mechanistic age to forget the simple truths of military history, that man and not machines dominate the battlefields of the world. One cannot chart the frenetic fever of human emotions on a graph or one cannot plumb the depths of the human soul with a calculating machine. Nor can one estimate with certainty how men react in wars and under stress. It is Man, in his infinite variety-stubborn, brave, cowardly, ignorant, brilliant Man-who provides the forever new, as well as the old, frontiers of our world."

Hanson W. Baldwin

A. INDIVIDUAL LEADERS, NOT ORGANIZATIONS, CREATE EXCELLENCE

Naval executives generate superior staff performance through their individual capabilities and skills. These top performing staffs do not miraculously appear, but are derived from insistence on specific levels of personal effectiveness and efficiency.¹⁴ This insistence of perfection seems to be the road map to success. It provides direction for others to follow, but is only part of the commander's conceptualization for excellence. Referring to an excellent staff, the commander's ability conceptualize can be seen through the following precepts:

¹⁴Hickman, C. R., and Silva, M. A., Creating Excellence (New American library, 1984), pp. 21 - 299. This book looks at managing corporate culture, strategy, and change. They focus primarily on executive strategies and skills. They list six skills required for new executives: creative insight, sensitivity, vision, versatility, focus, and patience. This book is what prompted my notion of conceptualization - looking at how naval executives think and the skills they use in changing thoughts to reality.

changes, the action officer is going to lose interest. He walks away wondering, 'Why should I do my job very well, they'll just change everything I do.'"

Excellent staffs take an individual's ability to write in the "navy way" very seriously. One commodore summarized what was expressed throughout my interviews, "I put an awful lot of stock in a man's ability to write; and, in this job you've got to be able to write. They've got to be able to put their ideas, thoughts, feelings, direction and their tactics in writing. They have to put things distinctly and clearly."

A great amount of effort goes into anything a staff member puts on paper. This area seems to be the pitfall of a lot of staffs, but excellent staffs work at writing. One Desron commander actually holds class on how to write point papers. Most junior officers have never heard of a point paper.¹³ I had never heard of one until my last quarter at post graduate school. On excellent staffs it is not only desirable for staffers to be able to write in brief, clear terms, it is a requirement.

¹³Point papers are similar to one page memos. They address only specific problems about issues and includes recommendations. The key thing about point papers is to address the issues clearly and to be brief.

throughout my interviews that the personal touch (direct interface) is felt to be the only truly effective way to communicate. Face-to-face communication is the hallmark of an excellent staff.

D. THE "WRITE" OFFICER

"The best of ideas and the most logical conclusions will have little effect if they cannot be transmitted to their minds. The man who can express himself clearly and forcefully, verbally and with the written word, commands attention."

Admiral Robert Carney

All staff officers are faced with a daily avalanche of paper work. They're required to prepare memorandas, briefs, point papers, directives, operation orders and various other types of written documents. Producing high quality correspondence on a daily basis is not an easy task. No matter how talented an officer is in his writing abilities, he must be able to express himself well in the "navy way". As one admiral stated, "Being a great novelist wouldn't help him much if he can't express himself in terms of how we do it in naval matters, particularly operational matters." Well then, how does an excellent staff produce correspondence of the highest standard? They work at it. The commander's accept nothing less than excellent work. This does not mean that the commander or chief of staff/CSO mark-up or rewrite every piece of correspondence submitted; because if they did, the individual loses ownership of the product. This might result in degrading an individual's incentive. One senior officer told me, "If it's one of those things where the lieutenant proposes in writing and the commander says, 'yea, this is fine, but change this and this, then go back and rework it,' by the fifth submission and the massive

on excellent staffs are not the last to know but generally among the first to know. As noted earlier there is a climate within the staff that allows for a great deal of easy flow of communication.

C. THE PERSONAL TOUCH

This is another hallmark of staff excellence. I believe that there is no message written, nor picture taken, nor phone call made that can be more informative than talking face-to-face. A common practice in superior staffs is for the commander to have a weekly face-to-face chat whenever practical, with each of his commanding officers. The same is true with Chief staff officers, executive officers and staff department heads; they too try to meet face to face with their counter-parts whenever possible. A tactical destroyer squadron commander told me that during a presail, he would get all the CO's together and let them see what their commander looks like. Also, at this meeting he would spell out his objectives and goals on the operation to be conducted. This meeting would clear up any questions that he would have or that the CO's would have and improve the overall accomplishment of the operation. The personal touch - excellent staffs work very hard at this. They are down on the waterfront, riding ship's, eating in the wardrooms, continually staying in touch. These staffs feel it is a necessity to know the people they are dealing with. It is important to associate a message or phone call with a real person not an organizational chart. One DESRON commander best illustrated this point when referring to CO's: "I want to lay my eyeballs on them as long as they're in town, maybe once a week. I like them to come by and tell me what's on their mind." This lets the commander assess what is going on in his command. There was this underlying notion

VII. COMMUNICATION- THE FOUNDATION FOR EXCELLENCE

A. LET YOUR FINGERS DO THE WALKING

There was one commander I interviewed who feels that effectiveness of a staff could be measured by the number of outgoing phone calls versus incoming number of phone calls. He considers a ratio of four-to-one could be found on an excellent staff. Meaning on an excellent staff four calls out of five is calling the staff for assistance or information. The other call is staff looking out for potential problems. This ratio allows the staff to keep track of their subordinates needs and providing guidance when necessary. In another interview, a chief-of-staff on an amphibious group informed me that his phone is ringing constantly - about about every five minutes. Excellent staffs' primary means of communication is the telephone and not through writing messages. The phone is the tool of trade for the staffer. By using the telephone they get details and they answer questions. But most importantly, they maintain close interface with their subordinates.

B. ACCESSIBILITY IS THE COMMANDER'S CODE

"I try to make myself available at all times. If my people are working on a project and I'm available, I'll do it right now. I don't expect people to see me for a ten minute appointment next week sometime," as stated by one commander who best summarized what others have said. This open door policy is another hallmark of excellent staffs. These commanders want to be directly involved in what is going on around them. They want to be informed. They strive to be on the front end of knowledge. The commanders

line near the top of the board. He then said, 'Well, I expect you to work at this level. If you work at this level, great, if you work below this level, you're going to hear about it very quickly.' And we really did. Everyone always knew exactly where they stood."

Senior officers placed a great amount of emphasis on the high standards that the commander ofn excellent staffs establishes. These demanding expectations placed on the staff members by the commander never reduced the effectiveness of the staff. It results in the staff meeting and exceeding the admiral's demands and always striving to improve. This type of atmosphere generated a "bias for action" within the staff. Each member knew what was expected of them by the admiral and acted accordingly. As one numbered fleet chief-of-staff thinks, when people know what is required of them. They perform their mission without a lot of second guessing, without a lot of paperwork, without a lot of rewriting, and without a lot of meetings. This allows the staffer more time to work on things that have a higher priority. It is true that commanders on excellent staffs are demanding taskmasters, but they also allow their staff free rein. They do not micro-manage and over direct from above. They want their officers to be imaginative, free thinking, innovators and candid with his opinions. One admiral put it quite simply, "If you don't red-ass (harass) the people that are working for you, they'll perform as required and more."

So there you have it, excellent staffs have commanders that demand excellence from his people; but, they also avoid pushing from the top. They allow their staff to operate under the guidelines they set.

next space. I overheard the two sailors in the passageway. It sounded like they just received an achievement medal - they had an admiral talk to them like 'real people'! In that one little incident, I've learned the value of getting out and showing your face." It was amazing to see the mileage that the admiral got just saying a few words.

"Stroking the system" is recognition of a job well done. It is a measure which shows that the commanders care. It shows that they are concerned and appreciate the efforts of the staff, subordinate units and most importantly, the individual sailor. This concept has a proven record for improving morale and combat readiness.

The top performing staffs go out of their way to stroke the system. They focus primarily on the individual.

Commanders put acts of recognition for achievement such as, presenting awards and attending reenlistment ceremonies, at the top of their priorities. They appreciate giving these few strokes that will pay dividends for the Navy for years to come.

D. A DEMANDING TASKMASTER IS THE BEST COACH

"A commander must accustom his staff to a high tempo from the outset, and continuously keep them up to it. If he once allows himself to be satisfied with norms, of anything less than an all-out effort, he gives up the race starting post, and will sooner or later be taught a bitter lesson."

Erwin Rommel

The world, our nation, our seniors, and subordinates expect results. Commanders on excellent staffs hand pick each individual on that staff. The people have to live up to the commander's expectation. How did these staff members know what was expected of them? One Lieutenant Commander on a group staff told me about his experience: "On the first day, the commander walked to the chalkboard and pointed to a

their limits. As one commodore put it, "I'm looking for innovation. I'm looking for new ideas in tactics and all those things show up. I have a standing rule in this staff that if an operational message is the same as the one we used the last time, it's automatically rejected." One commodore told me that the ultimate success for him was for member of staff to bring him a message and say, "Commodore, we ought to jump on this and respond with the following..." This message may or may not be directed at the staff for action but, it is clear that they are going to get involved in one-way or another. Excellent staffs are not just standing around waiting for things to happen, they make things happen. They are always looking for a chance to excel. These staffs are continuously striving to grow intellectually. Another commodore said, "I'll never ever accept that there are some things that are going to stay the same."

C. STROKING THE SYSTEM

A flag lieutenant (admiral's aide) told me a story that made an everlasting impression on him. The admiral that this lieutenant worked for would always scout around whatever ship he was visiting. Any time he walked into a space he would want to see the chief petty officer or petty officer in charge of the space. He would ask them how things were going and would tell them that he had a letter for them. He would also stop and say a casual hello to the guys on the deck plates, especially young sailors. As the flag lieutenant put it, "I remember I was walking with the admiral, we stopped where two sailors were cleaning their passageway. The admiral stopped, and told them that they seemed to be doing an excellent job and asked, 'How do you like the Navy?' and stuff like that. He proceeded to the

identify one excellent staff. A typical response to this question, taken from several flag officers and other senior officers was as follows: "There are no excellent staffs." They offered many reasons for this including personnel turnover rate, organizational structure or just simply that they do not know if any do exist.

So what about the 79 per cent of the remaining experts? Couldn't they identify the staffs that embody excellence? To make a long story very short, no particular staff was identified as being excellent. What resulted was 80 staffs that was nominated and out of those 80 none was nominated twice.

A. FINDING "EXCELLENT STAFFS" IS COMPARABLE TO A DOUBLE EDGED SWORD

The responses I received in my search for excellent staffs can be compared to a double edge sword. Both edges are sharp, cutting deep into the problems encountered while trying to identifying excellent staffs. One side of the blade represents the group of senior officers who felt that excellent staffs do exist; yet there is no agreement on any one particular staff that is excellent. The other side of the blade represents those who feel there are no excellent staffs in existence. Let's take a closer look at these two sides of the sword.

1. Cloak of Invisibility

While conducting research for this project, I visited over thirty different tactical and readiness staffs. Based on what I have read and what the experts have told me, as well as, what I have observed, I would have to say that excellent staffs do exist-they are out there. Seventy three percent of the senior officers that I interviewed agree;

however, there was a problem identifying even one staff that several people considered excellent. It is as though excellent staffs are draped with a cloak of invisibility. It is this cloak of invisibility that prevents the average sailor and even the top Naval executives from seeing through it and recognizing a super performing staff.

One likely reason why a superior staff goes unrecognized is that there is a noticeable lack of familiarity in it's performance. It is easy to identify a battle ship and it's functions. It's tangible and easily visualized as a projection of power. But a staff is not tangible and it cannot be visualized like a ship. If you close your eyes and try to visualize a staff; you will probably have an image of an organizational structure chart in the back of your mind. Staffs are not something that most senior officers think about.

Unfamiliarity is not the only reason for this cloak of invisibility. We Americans live by competition. We measure our lives with it. It is felt that through competition, excellence will surface. With competition comes recognition. Ships are continually striving to be number one. They compete with each other to achieve the battle 'E' efficiency award, departmental 'E' awards, the golden anchor award, and other awards for outstanding performance. By just looking on a ship's side where she displays these awards with pride, you can roughly ascertain with some degree of certainty the level of competence onboard. Staffs may be a major contributor to a ship's achieving excellence, but it is the ship's efforts that are recognized and rewarded--as they should be. The efforts of a staff go unnoticed to the casual observer. There are no awards or competition between staffs to focus on superior performance.

Most senior officers identified those staffs with which they were most familiar as being excellent. Familiar

in the sense that they had once been assigned to that staff or had previously worked directly with it. The key point is that each senior officer had a different frame of reference when identifying an excellent staff. Thus, no one particular staff was singled out as being excellent.

The cloak of invisibility is a result of no formal means of recognizing superior performing staffs, lack of familiarity, the inability to generate a visual image of a staff and the list goes on.

2. Staffs, Baa Hum-bug!

"Staffs are impediments to the Fleet," expressed one three star admiral in a raised voice. As he paced around his office, he would fire such comments at me as: "What good are they?" He was not alone in his ideas. Others mentioned that they could not identify an excellent staff based on the attributes found in the beginning of this study. One flag secretary said that he could not identify an excellent staff. His perception of all the staffs he has encountered in his nineteen years of Naval service, is that they tend to be cumbersome, lack continuity, and try to reinvent the wheel with every new leadership that comes in. This is the alternative view - that there are no excellent staffs.

Whatever the case may be, it is a fact that twenty-seven percent of the people I spoke with said they could not identify an excellent staff. Does this mean that there are no excellent staffs? I think we need to look at the other side of the sword, which asks the more positive question, "Which staff is excellent?"

B. IN SEARCH OF EXCELLENT STAFFS

Indeed, I'm convinced that there are excellent staffs. However, they seem to be invisible. We need to ascertain

the fact if and where excellent staffs are. As it stands now, the vail of invisibility is preventing us from doing just that.

XI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. CONCLUSIONS

This study presents the gouge (information) for describing an excellent staff or at least what attributes it possess. In order to develop this image of an excellent staff, I have taken you down the hallowed passageways and into the offices of some of the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets' top executives. This description is a direct reflection of the attitudes and philosophies of over twenty flag officers and over eighty senior officers and enlisted men. What can be concluded from what they said?

Foremost, I want to express how enlightening and professionally motivating it was for me to have the opportunity to sit down and solicit knowledge from these Naval executives. While conducting this study I found that there is a severe lack of documentation on Naval or Military staffs. While experienced senior officers provided a wealth of information on tht subject, there were no quantitative measurements identified for actually determining the effectiveness of a staff. It seems that the only significant data found to identify excellence in a staff were theses subjective opinions of senior naval officers with staff expertise.

While I was in the process of collecting data for this study, I was continually warned that staffs are transitorial things and defining excellence would be too ambiguous a task. I was amazed to find a surprisingly strong consensus of opinion on the characteristics of excellent staffs by everyone I interviewed. I also found that, currently, there is no systematic way of identifying the excellent staffs in the Navy.

The importance of the staff commander cannot unstressed. He instills the vision and the drive. He establishes the standards and demands the results. There seems to be no particular type of leadership style demonstrated by a commander on excellent staffs, but there are commonalities found. Examples of commonalities are; a consistency in demands and standards, as well as, a macro managing approach to delegation of task. But, the most important, is that he solicits straight forward answers and candid opinions from every person on the staff.

It was hard to separate the commander's standards, philosophies, values and motivation from those of the staff members on an excellent staff. It was so hard, I couldn't do it. They seemed to be as one. I discovered that if you can isolate the action between the staff and the commander you have just identified a staff that might not be excellent. Several senior officers indicated that on excellent staffs the commander is directly involved with only about ten to fifteen per cent of what actually gets done. However, his philosophy, values and goals indirectly affect every task that the staff is involved in. He is the staff and the staff is he.

In an old adage it is said, "Behind every great man there is a woman." I would like to modify this and say, "Behind every great commander there is a great staff."

The most crucial issue addressed was the quality of the people assigned to the staff. Tactical and readiness staffs tended to be the stepping stone for individual achievement. Excellent staffs attract excellent sailors.

Even with all the professional quality with which a commander on an excellent staff has surrounded himself, there is a strong unified family atmosphere. Loyalty is what I found to be the glue that holds the staff together. Though each staff member is very open to express his own

ideas and opinions to the commander, the commander's final decision on an issue is supported by the staff one hundred percent. In fact, You could not tell if there were any conflicting opinions by talking to a member of the staff. The staff is very loyal.

The formulation of the seven C's to success is a clear indication that defining excellence in staff is not an ambiguous task but one that is done every day by our naval executives. By reading this report you may not have discovered any earth shaking news that you didn't already know. This study was designed to find out what excellent staffs look like according to our naval executives and is reflected in the seven C's. To emphasize these findings once again, the hallmark of excellent staffs are:

1. Consistency:
 - a) Obtaining results is a daily occurrence
 - b) Superior performance and high standards.
 - c) Leadership style provides stability.
 - d) Being on the waterfront, working hand-to-hand with subordinates units.
2. Competence:
 - a) Finding highly qualified and skilled personnel.
 - b) Staff members with intestinal fortitude and the ability to tell the Admiral he's wrong.
3. Climate:
 - a) Teamwork is not a concept but a reality.
 - b) There is mutual trust and loyalty between the commander and the staff.
 - c) There is mutual trust and support between the staff and subordinates.
 - d) There is an atmosphere of openness of ideas from any source.

4. Coaching:
 - a) Generating the staff to be innovative, enthusiastic and able to create a synergistic effect towards success.
5. Communication:
 - a) The commander is always making himself accessible to his staff.
 - b) Face to face communication is the primary means of communication whenever possible.
 - c) The officer's ability to clearly express himself on paper is required.
6. Conceptualization:
 - a) Focusing on what priorities are important and disregarding what priorities are not.
 - b) Realizing individuals, not organizations create excellence.
7. Credibility:
 - a) Achieving things based on the staff's reputation and perception of others outside the staff alone.

These attributes were defined by the experts. While conducting my research, I visited over thirty staffs, I saw various ones that demonstrated enthusiasm, dedication, innovation, risk taking and had very high quality of personnel assigned to that staff. With what was derived from over 1,500 combined years of naval expertise and my eleven years of military experience, I would say some of the staffs I visited were excellent and embody all the attributes mentioned in this study. It was surprising though, that the experts never reached a consensus on any one staff that embodied excellence as they defined it. In summary, I would

like again stress the several reasons why I think this is so.

1. There are no current established criteria (qualitative or quantitative) in measuring whether a staff is effective or ineffective. Because of this, there is no way to do a comparative analysis of the efficiency of one staff to another.
2. Staffs receive no formal recognition for a job well done. Superior performing staffs exist in a veil of invisibility due to lack of recognition. There are no awards to indicate the level of performance. The only reflection of superior performing staffs are the awards won by subordinate units. Readiness staffs on the Atlantic coast do not have subordinate units assigned to them. How do they substantiate their efforts in striving to be the best? When was the last time you picked up a Navy Times, Proceedings, or even a surface warfare publication and read about what a staff does, did or is going to do. If it was recently you probably read about the commander and not about the staff; again the staff goes unrecognized. Due to the lack of documentation the cloak of invisibility lingers.
3. There is no competition between one staff and another. Unlike subordinates who compete almost on a daily basis. This lack of competition may promote mediocrity and retain the veil of invisibility.
4. There has been a historic tendency to send lower quality personnel for staff assignment. Even though I did not find this evident in staffs I visited. This issue was continuously brought up by the people I interviewed.

5. There are people including a three star admiral, that think staffs are a detriment to the fleet. They feel that staffs accomplish very little, demand a lot, create problems and take up space. With this type of stigma, I find it amazing that any staff can complete anything.

These are but a few reasons why no consensus of opinion exist when pointing to a staff that embodies excellence. I do not think it is because there are no excellent staffs, but that staffs are, as stated, relatively invisible. They are unappreciated, unrecognized, and misunderstood. It seems that one of the biggest problems facing commanders is preventing mediocrity throughout his command. As Admiral Rickover said, "Avoiding mediocrities gives us the chance to discover that success comes in making ourselves into educated individuals, able to recognize that there is a difference between living with excellence and living with mediocrity" (See Appendix C).¹⁵ It seems that we are still a long way from removing mediocrity from staffs for the reasons I mentioned earlier.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

Even though I've been able to define the attributes in an excellent staff, the picture is not complete. We need to find and observe excellent staffs in order to validate the findings of this study. It should be comforting to know that a consensus on the topic of super performing staffs was obtained, but it should also be alarming that thirty per cent of the senior officers I interviewed could not name a single excellent staff. The key point here is that we need

¹⁵Mack, W. P., and Konetzni, A. H., Command At Sea Naval Institute Press, 1982, pp 474-478. Admiral Rickover's thoughts about excellence.

to identify excellent staffs and learn from them.

I think we should continue to increase the quality of the personnel assigned to staffs and insure that these critical positions are in fact career enhancing.

We need to establish a formalized approach in measuring and rewarding superior performing staffs. This report could possibly be used to determine and identify excellence in staffs. If not identify excellent staffs the THE SEVEN C's MODEL could be used to develop analytical paradigm for assessing the level of excellence in a staff.

We need to make the Navy aware of what an operational and readiness staff is and does - working hard to remove any stigmas and increase visibility of the the staff members.

I've learned an incredible amount from every individual I talked to while researching this project. This was truly a learning experience, as well as a growth experience for my professional development. I just hope that this report will enhance or provide additional insight to any sailor in his quest for knowledge and drive towards professionalism. Any analysis in this vital area of leadership can only benefit the Navy and sailors who read it. I encourage the use of this document for various courses at the Naval Academy, OCS, NROTC units, initiation for staff officers assigned to staffs, to commanding officers and department heads, and other various Navy schools.

If only one person benefits from these pages, I can then honestly answer the question, "What have you done good for the fleet today?" I've contributed something the Navy's pursuit for excellence.

APPENDIX A

OFFICER NOMINATION SHEET

DATE NOM RECD:

NAME: _____

SSN/DESIGNATOR:

DATE OF RANK/YG:

RELIEF FOR:

EDUCATION:

SUBSPECIALTIES:

CAREER HISTORY:

AVAILABLE MONTH:

REMARKS:

ACOS	(N_)	RECOMMENDED	NOT RECOMMENDED
COS		YES	NO
flist		APPROVED	DISAPPROVED

APPENDIX B

LEARN TO SAY "NO" TO THE ADMIRAL

"Learn to Say 'No' to the Admiral," by Vice Admiral George C. Dyer, U. S. Navy (Retired), Proceedings (Naval Institute Press), published in the July 1963

It is difficult under the complexities of modern warfare for large naval task forces to be any better than the large staffs which control them. For this reason alone it would be essential that a fair share of the best talent of the Navy be detailed to staff duty, in the Fleets and in the Unified and Specified Commands.

Additionally, those officers destined for high command need to be educated in the use of a staff. The practical way to do this educating is to assign the officer to duty on a staff while he is working his way up the promotion ladder. Each officer on a staff should have the comforting thought that he may be the one whom "Big Brother" is educating for high command.

So staff duty is of vital importance--vital to the Navy, vital to the individual officer. It follows that any naval officer who is capable of first-rate service on a staff is of great value to the Navy. This value can be enhanced when the duty assignment is on a joint or combined staff. Here the understanding of sea power by officer of the armies and air services of the Free World may fall well below the Plimsoll mark. Education of these brother officers is a daily must. As for the staff positions with the fast changing civilian officials in the Pentagon, the availability of effective sea power in the next war can well depend upon the educational job which can be accomplished with these officials in short minutes of short hours of

short days, which rarely run beyond a dog watch in the lifetime of the professional naval officer....

During World War II, it was a generally accepted creed of the hard-steaming and hot-flying line officer of the Navy that only in command billets of ever increasing responsibility could an officer be tried adequately to determine his qualifications for flag rank. Consequently, it was something of a surprise to these officers to discover their contemporaries in the Army being promoted to general officer after careers spent almost wholly in schools and in staff billets.

The background for the naval officer's belief in the efficacy of the command ladder was that, at every rung, the officer had to make hard decisions. Some of these decisions involved the difficult task of saying "No," not only to deserving juniors, but also the demanding seniors. The buck could not be passed up or down. Decision making was a command responsibility. Many of these decisions were reached out in the open, on the bridge, in the cockpit, or on the voice radio, for both juniors and seniors to observe or to hear. The judgment displayed by the officers could not be hidden in a maze of graceful double-talk, either written or vocal.

Quite the contrary, circumstances were believed not to exist for officers serving on staffs. They rarely were confronted with having to make a decision to which their names were publicly attached. At best, they recommended this or that to a senior on the staff, or to the flag officer, who make the decision, took the responsibility, and absorbed any brickbats. Consequently, it was easily believed that long or repeated service in a staff resulted in an erosion of backbone, as well as a lack of training in decision making. Some believed and said that a smart, fast-talking smoothie with the backbone of a jellyfish might well

more attentively next time, without any such jarring reminder to either senior or junior.

(4) Be concerned with details. Napoleon, at Saint Helena, remarked that if he had the opportunity to start fresh again, "I would not bother myself with details." But since some must bother themselves with details, officers serving on staffs must do so. If they do not, and the admiral, as should be, does not, things will go more than awry..

Attention to details minimizes the possibility of error. Attention to the tone of a letter, and to the details of language by which the flag officer personally expresses himself, saves many a rewritten letter. If the flag officer likes a certain language -- and it expresses clearly the idea prescribed -- then learning to use that language is a detail which will facilitate the work of the staff, and improve the standing of the user with the flag officer.

(5) Do not regard questions from lower (or higher) echelons as stupid. Most of the members of a staff, whether afloat, or in headquarters ashore, are junior to the officers heading up the various commands which are united for the accomplishment of one or more missions. The success of their admiral depends upon all the commands contributing effectively towards that mission.

Members of a staff can do no greater disservice to their admiral than by treating as stupid a question from one of the subordinate officers in the command. If the question is stupid, and it is so pointed out, it will lessen the willingness of the stupid one to give his best contribution is only five cents' worth. If by chance the question is not stupid, an opportunity has been missed to provide helpful information to a unit or officer within the admiral's command.

brains in becoming well informed. Visits to individual ships, stations, or other echelons of the staff or command with specific purposes in mind yield much information not always to be gleaned from written reports or cocktail party intelligence. Visits should be brief and to the point. Never become a routine interrupter at higher echelons or a source of harassment at subordinate commands. Your commander can best be served with all the facts. Get them.

Always assume that if you already are well informed, you can be still better informed. Don't close your mind when you close your office desk.

(3) Be objective in advice. Avoid dogmatic advice. Many opinions are not facts. Prejudices for this or that manner of accomplishing the desired purposes are soon apparent and may be quite unreasonable. The missions of the command may be accomplished in no less than a dozen ways. The manner in which they are accomplished may be no more than a matter of taste. In presenting advice, a certain amount of detachment frequently reises the true value of the advice as well as the readiness with which the advice is accepted. One can be sturdily of an opinion without downharding the quality of other opinions, or perversely hamstringing the efforts of others of a contrary opinion. Be firm. Define the opinion clearly.

Staff officers must clearly and concisely present the problem and then, in their advice, present steps towards a solution. A brilliant idea or just a valuable idea should not be lost in its careless presentation by unintelligible jargon or careless writing.

Once the decision is taken by the admiral, it becomes your decision. Support it 100 per cent. Fight no rear guard or delaying actions. If the decision turns sour, you will profit much if you never make a remark to that effect. This will be hard to do, but your advice will be listened to

operation or combat "action dispatches" which do not reflect fully or correctly the admiral's desires.

It is an unfortunate fact that the Bureau of Naval Personnel can issue no extra brains, moral courage, nor good manners, when it promulgates the orders to an officer to duty on a staff. It has not wrapped the mantle of the flag officer in the 8.5 x 11 sheet of paper which carries the details of the duty assignment. The Bureau has issued a challenge to the officer to be at his best, for the good of his flag officer, his Navy, and his country, and in that way to serve his own career the better.

Thus, officers serving on staffs must:

(1) Be imbued with the idea of co-operation and team work.

Every military organization should be imbued with the idea of co-operation and teamwork. Nowhere does observance of this principle pay more "extra dividends" than between staffs and within staffs.

Co-operation of the mutually uninformed is difficult, and teamwork is at low ebb. To overcome this problem there is both an offensive and a defensive huddle in football.

When the "big staff" of headquarters commence to believe or to act as though they have a corner on the brains of the Navy, teamwork is being depreciated. The resources of the "little staffs" are bypassed.....

Staff teamwork requires a minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour, day-by-day effort to ensure co-operation and to keep others adequately informed. It is not a battle where the interests of the commander are furthered by infighting between individuals or staff sections. When such battles are indulged in, they represent a gross personal failure of the individual staff officer to his commander.

(2) Take to time and make the effort to be well informed. Use your feet, as well as your eyes, ears, and

As the Commander walked the long distance from the door to the Admiral's desk, the Admiral sat and looked at him, neither approvingly nor disapprovingly. The Commander came to a military halt in front of the desk and formally reported for duty.

The Admiral did not rise and grasp his hand and say, "Welcome aboard!" He just sat there, and after a ten-second pause, said, "You look unhappy."

The Commander said, "I am unhappy. I was the executive officer of a fine fighting cruiser in the war areas, and now I find myself on shore duty in Washington -- why shouldn't I be unhappy?"

The admiral sat for 30 seconds and said nothing. Then he got to his feet and said, "If I tell you why you are here, you may be just a bit less unhappy. I was told by an officer. for whose judgment I have great respect, that if I wanted an officer on my staff who would spit in my eye, when (with accent) it was necessary to spit, I should send for you." He then smiled warmly and said, "Welcome aboard -- there's much to be done."

Admiral Richardson and Admiral King merely laid emphasis on the fact that moral courage was an essential ingredient of officers they desired for duty on their staffs, and that they, as naval leaders, were broad enough in character and calm enough in disposition to wish to receive honest opinions even when they might be strongly contrary to their own.

A staff officer who is so busy bowing and scraping and "Yes,Sir-ing" his admiral that the problem which the admiral desires to explore with him or the solution which the admiral desires to direct, is not covered fully, is not really serving the admiral at all well.

At best the staff officer will be cluttering up the administrative channels of the staff with directives which have to be rewritten, and, at worst, he will be sending out

That Destroyer Flotilla Commander was Rear Admiral James O.- Richardson, U.S. Navy, who, when he was Commander-in-Chief of the U. S. Fleet in 1940-41, on behalf of the Fleet in Pearl Harbor, gave some frank advice to his boss, the President of the United States and Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy.

Here is another illustrative incident. World War II was three weeks old. The heavy cruiser flying the three-star flag of the Force Commander was being brought alongside the dock at Pearl Harbor by the Executive Officer. As the lines were being shifted along the dock, the Flag Secretary to CinCPac, yelled up to the Executive Officer via a megaphone, "You leave on the PanAm plane at 1330 today." The Exec megaphoned back, "Why didn't CinCPac cancel my orders?" (as he was authorized to do). The Flag Secretary said, "He did, but they were uncanceled by the Department."

The orders detaching the Executive Officer directed him to report to "The Chief of Naval Personnel for Special Duty." No information as to what this "special duty" might be was available in Pearl.

Early in January 1942, the Commander walked into the office of Assistant Chief of Bureau of Naval Personnel in Arlington and reported. He was informed that he was to be on the staff of the new CinCUS, Admiral E. J. King, U. S. Navy.

The Commander had never served with the Admiral. He had observed the Admiral's sharp incisive mind function from the platform at the Fleet critiques held after each war game. The Admiral had a reputation as a hard taskmaster.

As the Commander climbed the stairs to the second deck of the old Navy Department, his spirits were low. The "special duty" was "shore duty in Washington." What could be worse? He reported to Rear Admiral Russell Willson, the Chief of Staff, and soon was told by the Flag Lieutenant that Admiral King would see him.

the seniority line to the Flag Secretary, who was next to junior, were all asked. None were enthusiastic, but none objected, or uttered a word of caution.

The Admiral looked the Flag Secretary in the eye and queried, "Your comment?"

The Flag Secretary looked the Admiral in the eye and said, "It smells to high heaven."

The Admiral startled and stern and questioned, "You mean my order stinks?" and the Flag Secretary said, "It stinks."

The Admiral asked why, and the answer in general was that it represented a drastic curtailment in the general area of leave and liberty. More, no officer in the staff (nor the Admiral) had recently served in the destroyer flotilla command and had thereby gained knowledge that such a curtailment was necessary in order to accomplish the mission of the command, as it existed in the books, or as the Admiral had outlined it that day in his policies.

The Admiral said nothing and the Flag Secretary caught an "Are-you-crazy?" look from some of his fellow staffers. The Flag Lieutenant strung along with the majority opinion of "No cheers, but no bellyaches," and then the conference was ended.

The Flag Secretary had hardly reached his office when the Admiral's buzzer for him rang. He expected the worst.

The Admiral proceeded directly to the point. "This is a new staff, and with the exception of the Chief of Staff, I hadn't served with any of you before. I wanted to find out from whom I could get a fully honest and frank opinion. I wrote out that draft order with care so that it did stink. I got my answers from the staff. If you will look in my wastepaper basket, you will see the remains of the order.

"I won't always agree with you in the future, but continue to give me your honest and frank opinions. I will appreciate them. You will profit by giving them to me."

commander of three years' seniority. Only the Chief of Staff had served directly with the Admiral previously.

The Flag Secretary had just settled down on a bright June morning in San Diego to wade through the usual mountain of destroyer paper work on his desk, when the Admiral's buzzer for him rang.

The Admiral greeted him cheerily and said, "I want you to run off some copies of this draft order which I have just written out. At breakfast, I asked the Chief of Staff to call a staff conference here in my cabin at 1030 this morning, and I want all the staff to give me their comment on this draft order at that time."

The Flag Secretary gave a cheery "Aye Aye," and added that the notice on the staff conference was already out.

It was to be the first staff conference and the Flag Secretary was anxious to see his Admiral in action, and to learn of his plans and policies. As the Flag Secretary handed the draft order to the Admiral's writer and told him to append a not, "Admiral wants comments on this a 1030 conferences," he was surprised to discover that the subject of the draft was "Leave and Liberty."

The conference of the small staff commenced promptly at 1030. The Admiral first discussed a number of policy matters on which he wanted all the staff advised, and then had a number of matters he wanted looked into for possible future action. Then he asked if any of the staff had matters to bring up. Next, the Admiral took up the question of the draft order. "Would each member please give his comment?"

Turning to his friend of many years, the Chief of Staff, he asked, "Chips, what's your comment?" Chips hedged just a bit and thought it "might need a bit of smoothing out, but if that was what the Admiral wanted, that's what would and could be done." The next senior officer and then on down

(1) Planning ability, including writing in grammatically correct and understandable language.

(2) Administrative ability, including a first-rate knowledge of how to get things done in the Pentagon, or on joint or combined staffs.

(3) Wide range of technical knowledge and/or general knowledge, together with the memory to rake it up at the needed moment.

The listing of "strong moral courage" as one of the four basic characteristics required for a first-rate staff officer may raise a few eyebrows, since there exists a frequently expressed opinion that neither the civilian officials in the Pentagon nor flag officers desire to be strongly crossed. Strong moral courage leads to strongly expressed opinions, even though expressed in a well-mannered way and in accurate and simple language.

Any discussion of the willingness of the present civilian officials in the Pentagon to be strongly crossed would neither be tactful nor well-mannered, but it can be stated for the record that two of the Navy's great modern Secretaries, Mr. Forrestal and Mr. Gates, welcomed frank opinions, even when they ran strongly counter to their own, so that the possibility that this happy quality may be present in our civilian officials is a very real one.

The next question to be examined is "Do flag officers value frank and honest opinions, when they may run counter to their own?"

The answer is that "Most of the best ones do." The following incidents illustrate the point.

The rear admiral had been in command of his destroyer flotilla just four days. He had just come from a chief of staff billet. His freshly assembled staff numbered seven. Three had had previous service on staffs. Four had not. One of these four was the Flag Secretary, a lieutenant

(4) Strong moral courage. While the officer serving on the staff may not need to display great physical courage, he must have and display moral courage to a high degree to be first-rate. These two aspects of courage (physical and moral) are not like hen's teeth, never found at all, much less together. But in this era when making friends and influencing people rounds off the strong edges of character, moral courage takes a bit of looking for.

These four are the essentials. Any of the following characteristics additionally available will increase the value of the officer's service to his commander:

(1) A calm mind.

(2) Plenty of imagination

speed in conception, and aptness in perception.

(3) Plenty of determination, boldness, and a willingness to take the calculated risk. Good management, in these days of the electronic computer, receives advice from the mechanical computer and avoids taking risks based on judgment alone, by making the decisions which the mechanical brain suggests. Good leadership in time of war consists in taking risks (as the Japanese did at Pearl Harbor) which surprise, confuse, and dumbfound an enemy. It is only when an officer has learned to take bold risks as he moves up the ladder in peacetime, that he will take the much greater, but more necessary bold risks in war.

(4) Natural discretion. The staff officer must be not only officially discreet with highly classified matters, but also discreet in regard to the internal workings of the staff.

(5) An ability to gain good will with others, through being not only tactful and sincere, but also well mannered.

The frosting on the cake, as far as the flag officer is concerned, comes if the officer has the following skills and capacities in addition to the desired personal characteristics:

extrovert personality, or even a flair for the spectacular. This quality encompasses an interest in and a real knowledge of humanity and the humans who support the leader in his endeavors; and it produces loyal shipmates to admirals of seamen, airmen, and firemen.

All the desirable qualities and characteristics of the leaders are desirable and helpful for an officer on a staff, but the three qualities just discussed are not a sine qua non for the first-rate staff officer, and certainly not for those officers below the chief of staff.

If every young American, once he put on the uniform of a commissioned naval officer, automatically became a leader, all the staffs would be particularly well served by a 100 per cent complement of naval leaders. But this is not so.

Since there are not an unlimited number of senior line officers who possess all the qualifications to grow into future Chiefs of Naval Operations, let us attempt to list the basically essential characteristics for an officer serving on a staff, if its commander is to be well served. These are:

(1) High intelligence. This means a marked mental capacity. It does not mean clever, nor, necessarily, intellectual. It stresses the quality of meeting and solving problems with a high degree of common sense. Common sense, despite the dictionary definition, includes both accurate appraisal and sound knowledge.

(2) Ability to think and speak quickly and accurately. This means that the high degree of intelligence is quickly available for use by others in the staff and its commander.

(3) Ability to work hard. No matter in what area he may operate, or how much may be expected, the indefatigable worker produces much more worthwhile work than is demanded of him.

performance in make-believe war games, and to carrying the flag in the daily, unending battles of paper and words, largely in the Pentagon.

Because of the frequency of the opportunity for testing and assessment, this latter aspect of fighting spirit, as displayed by the willingness with which one risks one's official neck over a piece of paper, an idea, a sound principle, or one's Service, is the more likely to be known to selection boards and detail officers. This is particularly so when the officer's fitness report records cover a minimum of ten years and as much as 17 years of non-combat service.

Consider the second quality of the ladder--physical courage. "Fear makes men forget, and skill which cannot fight is useless." Fighting spirit is measured by the vigor, resolution, and eagerness with which one battles the enemy, and one's opponents, under both favorable and unfavorable conditions. It is also a measure of an officer's ability to live from day to day, while under frequent and heavy attacks of the enemy, or of one's opponents.

Physical courage is all this plus the quality to keep thinking and acting offensively when there is a great element of personal hazard.

Tactical and strategical skill, if united with physical courage in one man, will permit him in moments of great danger to remember, and to play out his talent to the utmost.

The third quality of the naval leader is much more than "loyalty down." It never demands loyalty. It earns loyalty, and gets it.

It is not that aspect of "management ability" or "the management process" which considers that a happy worker, or an "adjusted worker," produces more, and hence all workers should be kept adjusted and happy. It has no particular relationship with a pleasant disposition, an introvert or

On the other hand, being a first-rate staff officer does not automatically guarantee that one will become a flag officer. To support this conclusion, one has only to look over the roster of today's staffs to note that many eligible captains were not on the recent flag selection list. In this area, many are called but few are chosen.

The one essential characteristic of the senior naval officer of the line is "marked leadership." This is so despite the recent accent on "management ability" in the higher echelons of the defense organization. The marked leadership characteristic includes three qualities which, as has been demonstrated, are not absolute requirements of successful "management."

These three qualities are:

- (1) a fighting spirit
- (2) physical courage
- (3) a complete and sympathetic understanding of, and a sholesome respect for, those who serve under and support the leader.

Consider the first quality, fighting spirit. Whether an officer is given to swift and vigorous reaction to the thrusts of the enemy, or whether he has the feel for the enemy, or whether he has the feel for the dangerous fight, can only be truly assessed when missiles or bombs are falling and the enemy appears to be winning. No source of entry into the Navy, no particular form of peacetime fitness report, no method of promotion, no physical size or attractiveness of physical appearance nor prowess on the athletic field will provide the full answer in determining the amount of fighting spirit a naval officer possesses....

The only arena for the true test of fighting spirit--a hot war--is not available. So the nuances of this essential quality must be judged by reactions or lack of reaction to the moves of the Communist enemy in the Cold War, to

he will most assuredly be imposed upon, and the efficient strength and condition of the Army will not be known to the Commander-in-Chief.

At other times, General Washington listed desirable qualities of staff officers as:

- (1) first-rate abilities
- (2) established character
- (3) great activity
- (4) proved integrity
- (5) prudence
- (6) experience

The value of these personal characteristics (is) self-evident. The only question is, are they sufficiently detailed descriptively to be the real measuring rod for the earmarking of first-rate staff officer? The question will be immediately asked: Are not the requisite characteristics for a first-rate senior officer for a staff, the same?

The simple answer to the question is "Yes."

The sensible answer is, however, that there just aren't enough officers with all the required characteristics of the outstanding flag officer to man all the staff billets which the Navy is called upon to fill. The requirement created by this hard fact is the naming of distinctive characteristics which may serve to assist the seaman's eye in solving the problem.

To support the conclusion that first-rate flag officers have within their many definite capabilities all those required for a first-rate staff officer, one has only to recall the staff assignments of...three Chiefs of Naval Operations; Carney served as Chief of Staff to Admiral Halsey, Burke served as Chief of Staff to Admiral Mitscher, and Anderson served as Chief of Staff to Admiral Radford. If they hadn't been fully first-rate staff officers, their careers would not have flowed on to the peak of their profession.

be a successful officer on a staff. Even worse, it was said that the Navy would degenerate into a "yes-man" organization, if a large percentage of its flag officers came up via the staff service ladder.

Despite a general reluctance on the part of flag officers to ask for large staffs, and a somewhat greater reluctance of the Bureau of Naval Personnel to authorize them, naval staffs burgeoned during World War II. The Navy has hardually accustomed itself to these large staffs during the Korean War and the ensuing...years...While perhaps not yet agreeing that the Navy has reached the delicate position indicated by General Hunter Liggett's statement that "without a staff, an army could not peel a potato," there are not many in the Navy now who would disagree with this quote from the "School of the Citizen Sailor."

No military or naval force, in war, can accomplish anything...unless there is back of it the work of an efficient, loyal, and devoted staff.

The Navy finds itself with a large number of its officers serving on staffs, either afloat or ashore.

Hence it seems an appropriate time to look at some of the requisites of an officer for staff duty, and then to add a few hints on the manner of performance of that duty.

John Paul Jones was a flag officer in the Russian Navy, but not in our Navy. So we have no good quote from him in regard to the desired special personal characteristics for officers to serve on his staff.

However, a contemporary of Jones, serving in the Continental Army, George Washington by name, said that a staff officer should be:

Firm and strict in discharging the duties of trust reposed in him. Be he too pliant in his disposition,

Learning to say "no" to the admiral generally means far more than just putting together the sounds of those two simple letters. If time is available, it means giving some real thought to a problem, consulting with others, both senior and junior, and the reviewing of reference material.

If the admiral has indicated the possibility of a course of action which you, at first glance, consider quite undesirable, you must analyze the problem, and come up with positive and workable alternatives. This must be done promptly before the admiral and/or the staff become publicly and/or definitely committed. Occasionally, you may have to tread lightly on the toes of officers from other sections of the staff.

Your analysis of the problem may convince you that the admiral's proposed course of action is quite an acceptable alternative to produce the same results as you desired. If so, that is well. But if, on the other hand, your initial judgment appears to be confirmed, you may be doing your admiral a real favor by flashing a caution light.

Most naval officers are reasonable people. If you marshal your reasons properly, and expound them clearly, other sections of the staff will generally respond. They may even wish to take over your idea and the paper which wraps it up, nitpick it a bit, and proclaim it as their own. Let them do just this.

It is far better to have one paper come up to the admiral for his decision--with united staff support--even though individual staff members may have a 10 to 20 per cent mental reservation to some particular aspect of the matter, than to have a jamboree of suggested alternatives to what the admiral's own desires may be.

If it is an operational matter where a quick decision is the essence of a successful solution, don't speak until you have properly formulated your reasons for believing a given

course undesirable and clearly outlined in your own mind the preferred alternative with supporting reasons. If you can't do this, it is much better to keep quiet.

But you should force yourself to make, in advance, the decision which the admiral or chief of staff will make for the command. Develop your decision-making power in this way. Don't merely second-guess the admiral after the event. Try to pre-decide the decision which creates the event.

If you do this regularly, you will continue to develop your decision-making power. The staff ladder and the command ladder will tend to equate in the development of this aspect of "marked leadership" qualities.

In the July 1961 issue of the Naval Institute PROCEEDINGS, a commander, in discussing "completed staff work," said, "unfortunately executives in the military service sometimes achieve positions of authority because of their good conduct, outstanding combat performance or simply their exemplary time in service".

If, in fact, there are such "executives" in the ... Navy, learning to say "no" to them should be quite easy. Saying "no" to the rugged admirals with steel-trap minds this scribe has known is quite another matter.

If they do this, staff duty will be a real opportunity for an officer to serve and to develop. Definite quantities are needed, but definite advantages accrue. First-rate detailing to staffs by the Bureau of Personnel will produce a greater awareness and a better use of sea power. This will be a real advantage to the Navy and to the other military services of the Free World.

If the Bureau does its job well, will the Navy be in danger of promoting to flag officer a significant number of "yes men"? Will those who perform fast tongue work on staffs have a wider reputation with the senior officers who are detailed to selection boards than have non-staff officers; will these "yes men" obtain a disproportionate share

of the nods from not less than six members of the yearly selection board?

The danger from the yes men" can only become real if one old myth in regard to flag officers changes from myth to fact. That old myth is that flag officers are not sufficiently mentally alert to detect a "yes man" or sufficiently broad in character and calm in disposition to value a sturdy and resolute "no" from their "efficient, loyal, and devoted staff members."

(This) is a good year to bury (that) myth.

APPENDIX C

ADMIRAL RICKOVER'S THOUGHTS ON EXCELLENCE

An important principle of existence which gives purpose and meaning to life is excellence. Because the conviction to strive for excellence is an intensely personal one, the attainment of excellence is personally satisfying. Happiness comes from the full use of one's power to achieving and exercising excellence.

This principle of excellence is one which Americans seem to be losing, and at a time when the Nation stands in need of it. A lack of excellence implies mediocrity; And in a society that is willing to accept a standard of mediocrity, the opportunities for personal failure are boundless. Mediocrity can destroy us just as surely as perils far more famous.

It is important that we distinguish between what it means to fail at a task and what it means to be mediocre. There is all the difference in the world between the life lived with dignity and style which ends in failure, and one which achieves power and glory, yet is dull, unoriginal, unreflective, and mediocre. In a real sense, what matters is not so much whether we make a lot of money or hold a prestigious job; what matters is that we seek out others with knowledge and enthusiasm - that we become people who enjoy our own company.

In the end, avoiding mediocrity gives us the chance to discover that success comes in making ourselves into educated individuals, able to recognize that there is a difference between living with excellence and living with mediocrity. Sherlock Holmes once told Dr. Watson, "Watson, mediocrity knows nothing higher than itself. It takes

talent to recognize." To which he could have added, it takes talent to know that what counts in condemning mediocrity not in others but in ourselves.

We should honor excellence, but not necessarily with material rewards alone. The Japanese have a custom which I believe it would be well for us to emulate. Instead of honoring their artists with peerages and knighthoods, they give the the respectful title, "National Human Treasure."

Admiral Rickover

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