



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY  
CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS  
2000 NAVY PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON DC 20350-2000

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MEMORANDUM FOR ALL PROSPECTIVE COMMANDING OFFICERS

Subj: THE CHARGE OF COMMAND

Ref: (a) U.S. Code Title 10 and Title 50  
(b) Navy Regulations Chapters 8 through 11  
(c) Navy Standard Organization and Regulations Manual  
(SORM) Chapter 3

1. Command is the foundation upon which our Navy rests. Authority, responsibility, and accountability are three essential principles which are the heart and soul of Command. Effective command is at risk if any of these principles are lacking or out of balance. Further, a Commanding Officer's authority must be commensurate with his or her responsibility and accountability. This immutable truth has been the very foundation of our Navy since 1775.

2. As a prospective Commanding Officer, you have been identified as worthy of Command. You are to be entrusted with all of the authorities commensurate with your responsibilities. The decision to select you for Command was not made lightly; you were selected based on your demonstrated successful past performance and a determination by Senior Officers who have served in Command that you have the capacity to command, to accomplish the missions assigned and to uphold the standards of our Navy. This selection is an indication of the trust placed in you.

3. Just as Navy purposefully and deliberately selected you for Command, so too must you accept the extraordinary responsibility of Command with full regard for its consequences. It is the duty of every Commanding Officer to understand his or her authorities and responsibilities, prior to assuming Command.

4. While certain authorities and responsibilities will be specific to your command, there are some which are universal to all Commanding Officers; they are rooted in law, regulation,

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doctrine, and Navy tradition. The key laws and regulations that both empower and bind Commanding Officers are detailed in references (a) through (c).

5. Included as a part of your responsibilities is the charge that you will be held accountable to the highest standards of personal and professional conduct. The requirement for exemplary conduct by a Commanding Officer was included in the establishment of our Navy; Article I of the "Rules for the Regulation of the Navy of the United Colonies of North America," from 1775 stated:

"The Commanders of all ships and vessels belonging to the thirteen United Colonies are strictly required to show themselves a good example of honor and virtue to their officers and men..."

Today, the requirement for exemplary conduct of Commanding Officers is mandated by law. Title 10 Section 5947 of US Code states:

"All Commanding Officers and others in authority in the naval service are required to show in themselves a good example of virtue, honor, patriotism, and subordination; to be vigilant in inspecting the conduct of all persons who are placed under their command; to guard against and suppress all dissolute and immoral practices, and to correct, according to the laws and regulations of the Navy, all persons who are guilty of them; and to take all necessary and proper measures, under the laws, regulations, and customs of the naval service, to promote and safeguard the morale, the physical well-being, and the general welfare of the officers and enlisted persons under their command or charge."

It is your responsibility to meet the highest standards of personal and professional conduct at all times. Indeed, meeting these standards of conduct is as critical as meeting our high standards of material, personnel, and operational readiness.

6. There are two accountability standards that we use to measure officers in Command. The first is the standard for measuring criminal behavior. This standard belongs to the

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courts and uses rules of evidence and procedure to determine, beyond a reasonable doubt, whether a violation of a specific criminal code has occurred. The second accountability standard is trust. Our Navy's decentralized command and control structure is built on trust. Without trust, we cannot delegate authority. Without authority, we cannot fulfill our responsibilities. Therefore, without the delegation of authority, we simply cannot effectively operate our Navy. Trust is a fundamental building block of our command and control structure and our ability to achieve mission success.

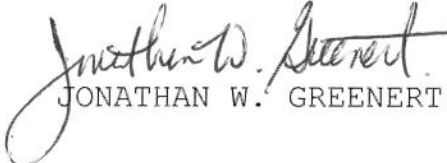
7. As a Commanding Officer, you must build trust with those Officers and Sailors under your command. You build trust through your character and in your actions which demonstrate professional competence, judgment, good sense, and respect for those you lead. This trust can only be built through personal interaction on a daily basis at every level in your chain-of-command. Human interaction remains the dominant factor in leading Sailors; do not fall prey to the belief that a variety of contact through electronic media can substitute in a meaningful way for the direct contact afforded by daily Quarters, Officer's Call or similar "face-to-face" leadership opportunities.

8. Once built, that trust is sustained by personal accountability - accountability to those same standards to which you hold those you lead. When trust and accountability are institutionalized in the routine of a command, the result is long-term success. When accountability is not enforced, the command and control structure, which is held together by trust, falls apart and the command eventually fails. Sustaining trust is what makes accountability critical to command. The Wall Street Journal captured this very well in an editorial column some years ago:

"It is cruel, this accountability of good and well-intentioned men. But the choice is that or an end to responsibility and finally, as the cruel sea has taught, an end to the confidence and trust in the men who lead, for men will no longer trust leaders who feel themselves beyond accountability for what they do. And when men lose confidence and trust in those who lead, order disintegrates into chaos and purposeful ships into uncontrollable derelicts." - Hobson's Choice Wall Street Journal, May 14, 1952

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9. A Commanding Officer must possess professional competence, intelligent good sense, the "nicest sense of personal honor" and meet our high standards of personal conduct and leadership. Our Navy has determined that you possess these attributes, and therefore, has entrusted you with the privilege and immense responsibility of Command. I congratulate you on this singular achievement and charge you to conduct yourself everyday in a manner worthy of the responsibility you have been given.

  
JONATHAN W. GREENERT