# â€œInspectmanshipâ€• vs. â€œGetting Itâ€•

## Description

I had the occasion to work with a recent high school grad a few weeks back. We got to talking about having to rewire a specialized convection heater in the business after a problem, and I mentioned I just went back to my basic electricity education from junior high school shop (I guess we call that Ã¢â‚¬Å“middle schoolÃ¢â‚¬Â• now) to realize one of the wire grounded out one of the two heating coils. I just sat down and diagrammed the wiring, and traced it around functionally, only to find out when I had replaced the wires, I caused the problem myself.

He said â€œThey donÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t teach that.â€• That initiated a conversation about â€œshop.â€• He told me when he took shop, it was taught by a teacher who had a different main subject assignment, and he didnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t even care if the kids showed up in class, since it was just an add on to his normal teaching. Freddy amplified this to say â€œthey only teach us what we have to know for the FCATs.â€• FCAT stands for â€œFlorida Comprehensive Academic Test.â€• FCATs have grown out of the â€œNo Child Left Behindâ€• initiative of George BushÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s presidency. The very concept is a powerful one, but itÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s how the states reacted to this is interesting. I see parallels in how the attitude presented above may have come about. If performance of the students allows access to Federal funding, then the outcome of the testing cane take on a life of itÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s own, leaving basic learning in the ditch of the academic process. ThatÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s what I will attempt to analyze below.

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FreddyÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s one line about FCATs stood out, and for the past week, kept cropping back up in things I read, heard or recalled of my past experiences. A few Saturday back, I was scanning the letters to the editor in the St Petersburg Times and came across a letter from a mother indicating she was considering pulling her children out of public schools, because all they were being taught was what they needed to pass the FCATs. Two â€œhitsâ€• in my scan of life in a weekÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s time. It took me back to thinking about all my years in the Navy, where inspections are a way of life, and most particularly, three years being assigned as the lead inspector for the surface ships in combat systems readiness.

â€œGougeâ€• was a valued commodity in schools and around the waterfront. A regularly heard statement was: â€œIf the minimum wasnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t good enough, it wouldnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t be the minimum.â€• Plans of Action and Milestones (POA&Ms) for various readiness exams and training work were passed between ships. You found time to walk the piers and meet your counterparts on other ships, in order to â€œget the gouge.â€• The rumors went around and it was common knowledge which ships did well and which tubed the inspections. Hint: DonÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t use their â€œgouge.â€•

The culture was easily lulled into doing enough to get by sometimes, with the focus being that one and only inspection, the wolf closest to the sled. When times were hectic with deployment and training schedules, it seemed the next avalanche of work for the next big event kept coming. Sometimes the best you could do was to figure out the path of least resistance to the passing grade. Striving for excellence was an entirely different ball game.

The FCAT issue reminds me very much of the situations I saw in the Fleet. My department had scrubbed check sheets for the areas in Combat Systems to be inspected to make sure we could tie a written requirement to every single thing we checked on. We listed the references and the mailed out copies of the check sheets to every ship. In other words, they had the complete list of things to be passed in their hands. The corollary to this is knowing the FCATs are coming and having knowledge of what areas they will test. No surprises here.

Next comes: What will be your view of how to approach the â€œinspection?â€• You do have to get through it, so the â€œmatrixâ€• is satisfied for the paper pushers at higher headquarters. I saw two basic attitudes on the ships regarding receiving inspections:

1) Get the list, do all of these things. Make sure these things are ready/done right. Anything else is merely wasted effort and;
2) This inspection is a stepping stone to the future success of the ship, and here are many things we need to understand and make sure they are done.

The difference is the focus on what to do, versus knowing your job, with the check points being an essential part of that knowledge.

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I think the educators here in the local area, based on FreddyÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s comments regarding teachers who could care less about teaching shop and the letter to the editor claiming teaching is specifically targeted at only FCAT knowledge requirements, have adopted attitude #1. IÃ¢â‚¬â„¢d recommend they try approach #2. HereÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s my argument:

Situation #1 discounts â€œperipheral learningâ€• as wasted energy. Since there is a list of what to know, go for that, and that alone. Peripheral learning is where you learn things that will compliment your understanding of the main topics of concern, as well as just adding knowledge for later essential use. The ships I saw that took this approach, which actually was the majority, were the very ones who were inflexible in their thinking on most all other areas, which generally, at the least, kept their grades down, and at the worst, failed them. Life, and combat, are full of the need to be flexible, and practicing rigidity is counter productive to success. In attempting to attain the highest grades possible, it actually appeared they were their own worst enemy. I see the schools doing the same thing, based on my understanding that our schools are to develop young minds to come out and do excellent things in the economy.

Approach #1 is the short sighted view. It is a selfish attitude in that it becomes an exercise in maintaining educational funding, which translates into job security for the administrators and teachers. Yes, some of the funding will go to school programs and equipment, which will be used by the children, but how does that do the children any good if they are unequipped for entering the workforce? I will admit I havenÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t used calculus in detail since I took it, but the understanding of this form of math has helped me make sense out of some things IÃ¢â‚¬â„¢ve dealt with.

Approach #2 demonstrates an understanding that all the preparation/study effort is to clear a hurdle, enabling you to grow to new levels of knowledge, and that the inspection criteria are representative of the areas of study, but not the only things to know. ItÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s the maturity of the professional attitude. In the case of the educators, it would be to understand the skill sets tested in the FCAT are essential elements of knowledge, but no guarantee that the exact question will face each of the students later in life. It also demonstrates an understanding that the real success of the students will be shown in later

years, when they are in the economy, fully participating for the betterment of the society as a whole, while being able to care for themselves. I submit to take this method to heart will achieve the very goals of showing improvement in the FCAT scores. It facilitates learning, and better yet, understanding.

Here is my supporting â€œsea story:â€•

I met a prospective Commanding Officer (PCO) in one of the offices on the CINCLANTFLT compound. He was then a Commander and the prospective commanding officer of a OLIVER HAZARD PERRY Class Guided Missile Frigate (FFG) . My Officer in Charge and I had just dropped the final draft of the revised Combat Systems Assessment (CSA) procedures off with the COMNAVSURFLANT Chief of Staff for signature by Admiral Reason. I had a copy of the final draft in my brief case. As my OIC was giving this PCO and another one their briefing as to the services our training unit provided, he mentioned the CSA was just revised and would be â€œall newâ€• and designed to test the shipÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s ability to retain itÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s performance via use of an on board training team of the shipÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s company. The CSA would evaluate the our confidence in the ship to carry out and critique training effectively, and that would determine passing or failure of the CSA. I quietly reminded the OIC I had a copy of the new instruction with me. He told them we would give them the final draft to get familiar with. I went and found a Xerox machine and made two copies. When my OIC was done, I spoke with the PCO and told him I welcomed riders on our inspections, so they could see how we worked, but more importantly, to get a good idea of how to handle the mass of information on the check sheets.

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The FFG for this PCO was homeported in Newport, RI. One â€œO-Dark-Thirtyâ€• morning on a tug boat in Charleston Harbor, my team and I were heading out to one of the Charleston based ships, that had been out at sea the day before, practicing their teams. In Charleston, this was a standard practice for DESRON SIX ships, and we got a nice ride to the sea bouy as the sun rose. As I drank my coffee in the pre-dawn twilight, I noticed a chief petty officer nearby. I assumed he was shipÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s company, who was headed back to the ship. I asked what his division on the destroyer. He told me he wasnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t assigned to the ship, but had come from the the FFG, because his CO said we were welcome come along. I grinned. He told me the â€œnewâ€• CO had said that before they had their CSA, he would have every man wearing khaki (officers and chief petty officers) ride along on one of our CSAs as observers. ThatÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s what happened. An attentive rider from the FFG became our companions on subsequent CSA the length of the east coast.

The procedures back then were to conduct a â€œbasicâ€• CSA (CSA-B), where we ran all the check sheets, but would assist the crews as needed. We graded things as close to as we found them during those 36 hours, so the ship might see where it stood. The results were between us and their squadron, but were not provided to the type commander. A few weeks later, we would return and redo the CSA, but this time, it was for the grade to be reported up the chain of command. This was the â€œadvancedâ€• CSA (CSA-A).

The FFG had briefings by the returning crew that had watched over our shoulders. The worked on their check sheets, and gamed out ways to do the work better, and to make sure all who needed to understand the material were trained and Ã¢â‚¬Å“plugged in.Ã¢â‚¬Â• I remember getting calls from the Combat Systems Officer of the FFG, asking if they could use some testing equipment from the SONAR system to generate a target track for the operational drills. I discussed this with my system experts, many of whom had been instructors at the school for that piece of equipment, and they had never

thought of doing it that way, but agreed that would be a little manpower intensive, but provide very realistic training for the operators. That illuminated the attitude of the crew of the FFG

One time, we had scheduled a CSA out of Newport, RI. A few days before we flew up, now CO called me and said â€œI understand you arenÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t flying out until the next afternoon following the CSA. I wondered if your and your team might have some time to come aboard and sit down with my crew that morning?â€• He had had his crew thinking ahead of the game, looking for opportunities to get more instruction and training and they had researched our schedule to find out when they could see us. That morning, we arrived aboard and the leadership was ready to talk business. They had cleared the schedule for our impromptu visit. My men, as usual, rolled up their sleeves and went to work. The FFG crew picked their brains, asking questions that certainly indicated they had read the references well, and then some more material. They had the focus of preparing the ship and crew for deployment, not just how to get the best grade for this one inspection.

A few months later, it was time for the FFG CSA-B. As we walked down the pier, I saw CO at the foot of the brow. As I approached, he called me aside and asked that I ask my team to not interfere with his crew, unless a safety issue arose, going through the CSA (this was the basic, and interaction was routine), so they could tell where they stood. He thought they were ready, but he wanted an assessment of his crew alone. I passed this to my men. The result was they scored as high as most ships were on their CSA-A. Not one time did my men have to step in for anything the entire 36 hours. Yes, there were flaws, but then they got right on them.

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A few weeks later, the CSA-A was held. The crew was unflappable, the execution almost flawless, the ship clean, and the equipment was in working order. Record keeping, across the areas of maintenance, training, certification were all in order, and it was obvious it had not been â€œconstructedâ€• the few days before from scratch. The CO allowed his chain of command to make decisions at their level, and he watched, but never interrupted so long as they were making good decisions. The one time the Tactical Action Officer made a less than optimum choice, he waited until there was a lull in the action, took him aside, corrected him, then sent him back to keep going. The 189 man crew of a guided missile frigate scored the highest grade to date. Until I left my inspector job, about a year after this had happened, the FFG retained the highest score for Combat Systems Assessment for the Atlantic Fleet surface ships. I believe they may have even held that record until the CSAs were dropped, two years later.

I heard they passed their Operational Propulsion Plant Exam (OPPE) with similar outstanding results. Later, during weekly briefings for COMNAVSURFLANT, it wasnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t unusual for briefer in some area to mention some outstanding report of the FFG performance while deployed to the Mediterranean with COMSIXTHFLT. Reports like this were uncommon, so there had to be something special going on aboard the FFG.

There were many ships that tried to preemptively up their score by â€œsmoozingâ€• my team. I do recall sitting down for the inbrief at the wardroom table and a can of cold Coke and a bag of peanut M&Ms was next to the folder with my name on it. They had called the ships before them and asked â€œwhat did I like.â€• They did OK, but I would have preferred they would have called to ask how to make sure their crew training was done well, so they would be ready to show my team how proficient they were.

This CO of the FFG not only â€œgot it,â€• he communicated it clearly to his crew. If he was in charge of FCATs, I think the Florida children would be pretty close to the top of the nation in scores, but not because he would have educators focus on getting a good score each year, but to ready the children to perform on a â€œforward deploymentâ€• in the real world after school, as productive members of the economy. He didnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t settle for an individual good scores, he only settled for success in the end game.

**Category**

1. History
2. Political

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