A Tale of Two Captains â€“ Depth of Vision

Description

A few posts back, I discussed the contrast between two of ship commanding officers, and how they handled being the best ship in the fleet.

This post will be a contrasting article, again between two commanding officers, and I submit, a discussion of how a good leader handles the days of their â€œwatch.â€• In doing so, it tells a story of todayâ€™s political leadership. For the purposes of this discussion, know that references to â€œCaptain Aâ€• refer to the same named character of â€œAct One,â€• the prior post linked above. â€œCaptain Bâ€• here is not the same person discussed in the other post, but he is also someone I served with, so the details are accurate in the depiction.

default watermark

Once again, the goal of the two captains was to be the best ship in the fleet, a great strategic statement of purpose. They differed on the tactics implemented to the get there.

Tactics:

Captain A: The Shipâ€™s schedule was just that. It was not his schedule, nor his command period schedule. I came to work for him after he had been CO for a year, with a two year tour. Within a few days of relieving the prior XO, the CO asked me how the Plan of Action and Milestones (PO&M) for the upcoming major inspection was coming along. This was mid Oct, and the inspection was happening in mid-February. Quickly culling the on board databanks of very recently accumulated information, I could not recall that being a turnover item, so I said: â€œIâ€™ll find out.â€• What I found out, when I asked the Department Heads, isâ€¦there wasnâ€™t one. I relayed this to the CO, knowing my newness still was a shield. He took it in stride and had me get to work on it. On cracking the TYCOM instruction on this inspection, the dummy POA&M began with the line â€œ-12 months.â€• I gulped and got to work.

We got it done, but along the way in making up for 8 months lost time, this is what the CO gave me to chew on: â€œXO, my job is to look out a year ahead. Yours is to be watching at least 6 months out. Department heads should be in the 3-4 month window and Division Officers looking at the month in front of them.â€• That proved to be sound advice, as well as an excellent devision of labor across the management levels of the command.

How did he do it? He had a dry erase board in his cabin, within easy eye shot of his desk, which I had detailed the Operations Officer to keep current, showing the long range schedule of the ship. He and I didnâ€™t discuss it with me daily, but usually about once a week, and then in the form of â€œHow are we coming for the Harpoon Certification?â€• type question. My job was to let him know, by show and tell, or verbal report, where we were.

I translated this method (tactic) to my discussions with the department heads. I know they passed it along to the divisions officers. The great thing about this, as a management effort, is we each got into the detail commensurate with our position within the command structure.

The net result is it just became habit for each of us to stay focused in the time frames described above. We did well with Captain A, but more importantly, even after the change of command, the plans for the next year were in in the works. Captain A saw no barricade with a time stamp of the day of his relief taking over, for the course, as actually determined by the Navyâ€™s operational needs, had been his compass and he made sure, each and every day that his â€œconning ordersâ€• kept us pointed fair.

Captain B took a different view. I had served with him, and, in staff meetings, regularly heard of the progress of his ship towards completion of all pre-deployment training, and things were going well. Certainly, even though I wasnâ€™t directly involved with most all of the work, my ears still perked up when my old shipmateâ€™s crew was mentioned.

The change came when the training department head was briefing our boss on how the ship had miserably failed a major tactical evaluation in a staff meeting. The OIC began probing, for he too, was baffled by the ship that had performed at an above average level just a few weeks ago. What came out was there had been the change of command in the interim. That, in and of itself should have been much of a concern, but our instructors certainly knew how to politely get the scuttlebutt from the crews they worked with. It seemed it was not the new CO had come in and made massive changes, but the prior CO, Captain B, had set up the best of his crew to do the training runs, and hadnâ€™t allowed them to put the less experienced people in the watchstations, for fear it would show badly on his commandâ€™s reputation. The net result was some of those people transfered off about the time of the change of command and the skills demonstrated so well about two months ago, went with them, and no training time was allowed, as it was beyond the date when he cared about itâ€¦.

default watermark

Net result: Captain A keep focused on the long term requirements, and therefore set his entire command up for long term success. He successor was able to slide in and execute because the path was already determined. The crew followed the lead.

Captain B did get his end of tour Meritorious Service Medal, but left his successor to be explaining to the Commodore how things could have gotten this screwed up in just a few months. The shipâ€™s reputation suffered terribly as a result of Captain B being only concerned for events to the last day of his responsibility. On the way to the disaster, he certainly looked good, good enough to be given a fitness report that indicated he had had a successful command tour, which Iâ€™m sure that after the dust settled, the Commodore, who was a no nonsense, straight forward guy, wished he could have re-written.

Once more, as in the first installment of â€œA Tale of Two Captains,â€• one took a short term view of the issues at hand and left his shipmates on rocks. The other, disregarded the catcalls and gossip, and made sure the future was well in hand, and his shipmates thrived.

Cross Posted at:
Mudville Gazette

Castle Argghhh!

Category

1. History
2. Military
3. Navy

Date Created
June 26, 2006
Author
admin

default watermark