

Professional Excellence for the Christian Officer

Commander Robert Durfey, U.S. Coast Guard

The U.S. Coast Guard motto is *Semper Paratus*, "Always Ready." Smaller than the New York City Police Department, the U.S. Coast Guard today must carry out economic, environmental, law enforcement and humanitarian missions while serving a key role in national security. A tall order. Its personnel must be "always ready" to respond; the challenge to leaders is to serve those who serve.

Those most effective in that role are those who put others' interests ahead of their own and put their trust in the Lord. By doing so, they exemplify the service's core values of Honor, Respect, and Devotion to duty, and become true servant leaders.

The Coast Guard core values cited above are simple yet godly. Honor and high integrity should be considered synonymous. Integrity is a critical ingredient in any leader. The dictionary defines integrity as soundness or completeness. Christian leaders know they can only be complete in Christ; they must keep their eyes on Him whom they are following.

An Old Testament charge to leaders by King Jehoshaphat included four facts: Leaders did not carry out duties for man, but for the Lord; the Lord was with them when they performed their duties; they were directed to conduct business in the fear of the Lord, faithfully and wholeheartedly; and they needed to be very careful what they did because the Lord would have no part in unrighteousness or partiality. The Lord demanded honor (integrity) from those who choose to serve as leaders.

Superiors and subordinates must know that what is heard from the leader's lips is true; what is done (seen and unseen) is for the organization's good. Furthermore, honoring God in all our day-to-day dealings is critical to a successful life. This includes our family life, relationships, finances, and church life as well as our recreational activities.

The Coast Guard's second core value is respect. We as Christians are called to be "need meet-ers." This is the crux of being a servant leader. If we can put aside our own personal agenda and our own needs, we are much more likely to see others' needs more clearly and have the time and energy to meet them.

Respect, or sensitivity, toward the needs of subordinates, peers and superiors will help a leader

better prioritize tasks and guide one in unselfish (or more just) decision making. One becomes "disinterested" in short term personal gain when they sense the value of their work in the long term (even eternal) benefit of others.

Through a concerted effort to be a servant leader, something that does not come naturally, a giving heart, is cultivated and inner strength is realized or renewed. This inner strength is often seen in "Coasties" who diligently work eighteen-hour days on search-and-rescue missions or compassionately conduct illegal migrant operations.

A surprising phenomena was documented by an Austrian doctor in a Nazi death camp during World War II. Prisoners who used what little energy they had to serve others and to take care of others' needs showed themselves to be physically and psychologically stronger than those who did not.

In putting others' needs before our own, we will stand out as different or peculiar. No doubt, a leader who understands all God's creatures are worthy of respect will become the subject of much observation. Modeling servant leadership is one of the greatest testimonies one can give.

Jesus goes even further by saying, "Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all." He also said, "Give and it shall be given unto you." A leader must give respect before he can expect it in return.

The Coast Guard's third core value is devotion to duty. Once again, let us look at dictionary definitions: devotion means strong love or affection or an act of prayer; a duty is any assigned service. These sound very familiar to any Christian who has spent time reading letters from the Apostle Paul. As Christians, we have clear directives to serve, love, obey, and worship the Lord. Notice the acrostic formed from the first letter from each of these directives, "S-L-O-W."

One can gain much more from any experience if "extra" time can be taken. Food shared at the wardroom table with friends in conversation is much more of a meal; an inspection of the spaces interspersed with small talk with those who did the cleaning is much more productive. Commuting on a bike, one will see things never seen from a car.

Leaders must force themselves to slow down. Prayer is designed by God to do just that! Prayer also puts things into perspective-God's perspective! The Lord does not over-schedule our days. He does not demand so much of us that we do not have time to pray-slow down!

In all things we are to turn to the Lord of lords and acknowledge His lordship. He does have some very strong opinions about how things should and should not be done. Some of His strongest feelings have to do with something called sin. If He has made it clear to us that something is wrong or sinful, we are absolutely foolish and at great risk as a leader if we do not turn away.

Hollywood makes sin look really good. Leaders must see the danger of continuing to flirt with sin. It is destructive to us personally, professionally and spiritually. If we allow sin to continue, it will severely hurt those around us.

Would we as an underway OOD purposely drive a ship onto a reef? Of course not, but why do we think having an affair "of the heart" (enjoying pornography or drinking/gambling to excess) is any different? We have seen others "shipwrecked" but for some reason do not give it a second thought. We have been warned! As Christian leaders, it is our duty to be obediently devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ, so that we may speak with His authority and "free the captives."

Christian leaders must remember to acknowledge the Lord in all their tasks and decisions. The bottom line is that we want to go in the right direction-or better yet, follow the Lord as He leads us. The more we get to know the Lord, the more we know He is always right. We also learn over time that He is always good and He always has our best in mind.

With that knowledge, we learn to trust Him as we go through our personal trials and hardships. Trusting in the Lord is another key ingredient in a leader. Trust brings stability and minimizes the stress of the unknown in addition to building confidence and commitment to purpose.

Christians have an incredible leader in Jesus Christ. We can be fully confident that He who began a good work in us will bring it to completion. In other words, He will lead us in the way we are to go. King Solomon wrote in the book of Proverbs: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your path" (3:5-6). Trust God by acknowledging Him for who He is and following Him.

The key to successful leadership is found in the person of Jesus Christ. His example of servant leadership is the model all Christian leaders should use. Ingredients that must be present for a servant leader to be successful include integrity, putting others' interests first and trusting in the Lord. Are you ready?... "Always ready?"

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Commander Durfey, a 1999 selectee to Captain, began his career as a watch officer on a buoy tender, after which he completed flight training in Pensacola, Florida. Since then, as a Coast Guard aviator, he has had six operational tours with increasing responsibility, culminating in his current assignment as Commander Group Humbolt Bay, where he commands all Coast Guard operations, personnel and material along a 250-mile coastline in northern California. A 1978 graduate of the Coast Guard Academy, he holds a Master in Public Administration degree from Harvard University. Commander Durfey is a longtime member of OCF and is a Council Member, Class of 2001. He, his wife, Carolyn, live in Eureka, California, with their daughter, Sarah, and son, Joseph.