The Way of the Warrior Sailor:

A Command Philosophy for CVN 69

Updated February 2025

I intended to have a one page "command philosophy," but I realized that good leadership demands more rigor than a one-page document. So I have made this bigger document. I realize it is too long and ought to be simplified. It is certainly too long to be hung on a bulkhead. But I hope you read it and absorb some of it and join me in making us the best damn ship in the Navy.

Ike's motto is to be "Greater Each Day." To be greater each day, we have to give a damn about the soul of every Warrior Sailor on board this ship. Every…Single…Warrior Sailor. This is the Way of the Warrior Sailor.

The following diagram unpacks several themes, which I will discuss. All the diagram is saying is that there are so many things that can influence human beings, positively or negatively. ***The Way of the Warrior Sailor*** touches on several tactics that may contribute to the morale of individual Warrior Sailors. And as the diagram depicts, **morale is the goal – indeed, it is what we aim to achieve, because it leads to mission success, which includes defeated enemies and better ship performance**.

What is morale? Morale is pride, motivation, job satisfaction, spirit. It is much deeper than happiness. In the collective, it is "esprit de corps," and the greatest military commanders of all time have recognized that those armies who have the greater morale will prevail over their enemies.

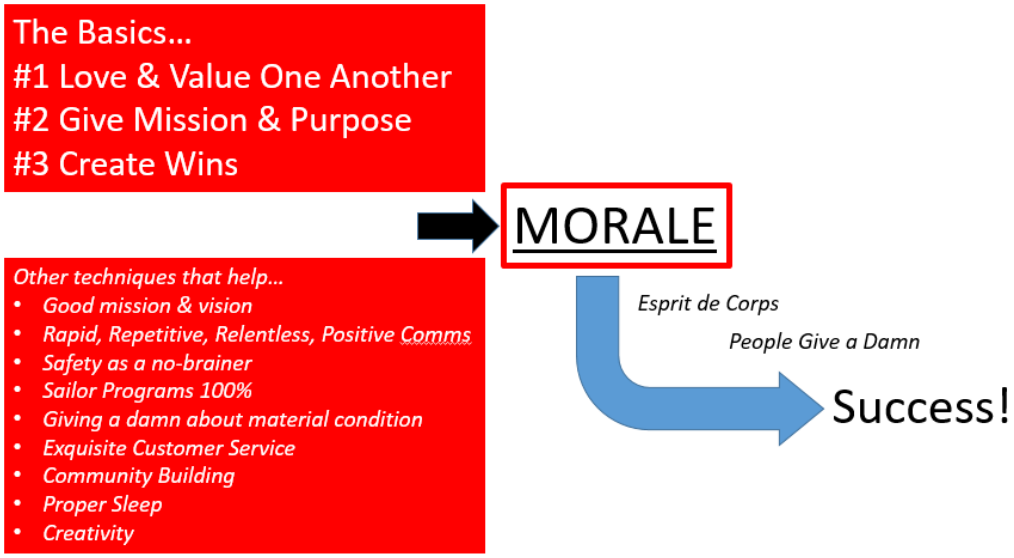


Figure 1. What It Takes to Build Morale

I. Warriors have three requirements.

1. *The desire to be **loved and valued***
    - As leaders, we have to figure out ways to show that we both love and value Sailors. We need to listen to them, praise them, train them, and set them up for success with the highest possible standards.
    - This requirement has to be embodied by everyone regardless of rank, among peers, up and down the chain of command, in every human interaction. I realize it's a big request, but without loving and valuing our fellow humans, we become less human.
2. *The desire to have **mission and purpose***
    - We need to give Sailors a concrete mission and a daily purpose, and remind them they are part of something greater than themselves. This may require frequently explaining "why" what we do matters to the greater mission.
3. *The desire to **win***
    - Leaders are both coaches and umpires. We set up the game (the job requirement), and we declare when we've won (the job completion). All leaders have the ability to create a winning environment. The game is rigged in your favor.

A warrior leader manufactures these three things every day, sometimes even out of thin air. I need to see this practiced across every division and department on this ship because it will increase morale and lead to concrete results.

The opposite of a warrior leader is the selfish, careerist, toxic leader who neglects these three requirements. There is no place for toxicity on this ship – toxicity leads to sailor attrition and weakens us in battle. *I cannot afford to lose a single Sailor – every one of them matters to the mission.*

II. What happens when you address the three needs of the Warrior Sailor?

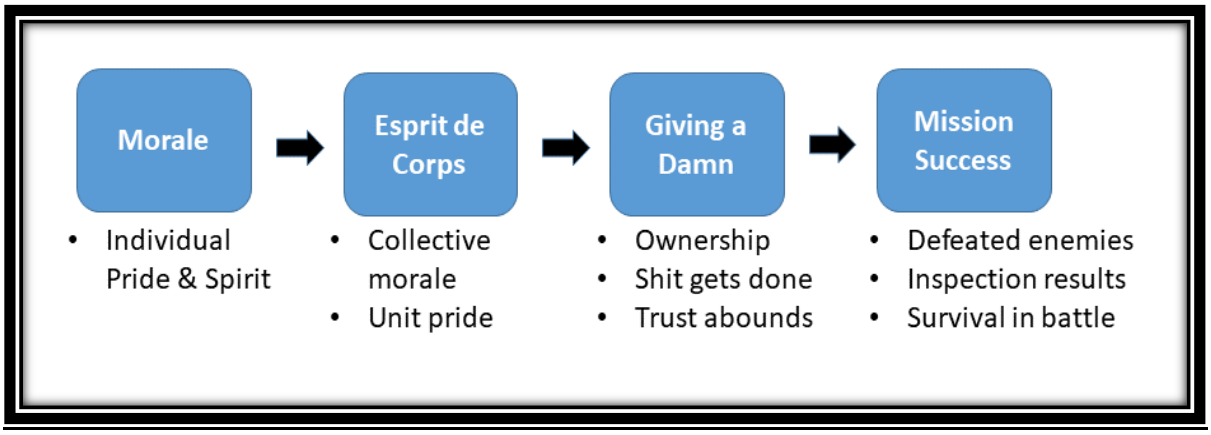


Figure 2. Morale-Success Flow

Morale is the root of success. Morale leads to esprit de corps, sets the conditions for people to genuinely give a damn, and then leads to a variety of successes – defeated enemies, ship survival, and conquering inspections (See Figure 2). Too often leaders demand things like mission success and ownership without taking into consideration what it takes to get there – sometimes ignoring morale or thinking of it as just a function of more time off or temporary happiness. As noted, morale is way deeper than that. Morale is individual pride, human spirit, the spark of the divine.

This morale-success flow can lead to spiraling positive morale where increased success feeds back into increased morale. Some of us have been part of commands that have experienced this positivity-spiral loop. Some of us have also been part of negative-spiral, low-morale commands where you don't want to show up to work, leaders don't seem to care, and we fail at our mission.

The bottom line is ***the Way of the Warrior Sailor*** demands that we flip the script and focus first on the soul of the human person, targeting the spirit and motivations of every single Warrior Sailor. If we love and value people, give them mission and purpose, and create winning environments, we increase the odds that more people will succeed, advance in rank, reenlist, self-monitor, want to win, demonstrate ownership, improve safety, and avoid a range of destructive behaviors.

I did not make these ideas up. These themes are increasingly more common in academic and medical literature and have been discussed by military leaders for centuries. But you won't see much of this in leadership schools. Not yet.

Unfortunately, some of my peers like to believe in myths like there are massive generational differences between young and old sailors (such as the suggestion that today's youth are somehow mentally weaker, don't like to work, or are self-entitled). They said the same about me when I was younger. In reality, the biochemistry of the human brain has not changed in more than 100,000 years, nor has good leadership. I truly believe today's young men and women could perform just as well as those who served in World War 2 (and I am willing to bet my life on it, and I have). The only factual difference between younger and older people is that older people tend to have more experience. This obligates leaders to share their experience with junior warriors. That's all.

Others say that morale is just a happiness or liberty thing, separate from work. That is very misleading. Sure, liberty is important (and I love it just as much as everyone), but the number one driver of morale in any military or civilian workplace is job satisfaction. This is well documented. Morale also depends on quality of life factors, such as good health, sleep, free spirituality, supportive relationships, friendships, leaders who truly care and listen, and recognition for work well done.

III. Mission and Vision of USS Dwight D. Eisenhower

Since the desire for mission and purpose is one of three major requirements *for* ***the Way of the Warrior Sailor***, let's start by defining our ship's overall mission and vision…

Our Mission:

To launch and recover aircraft to stomp on bad guys.

Our Vision:

To be the best damn ship in the Navy.

Mission and vision statements die if they're not discussed regularly. They also die if they are lame. Feel free to define your division/department/squadron mission in accordance with the simple mission and vision stated above. Be bold. Be inspirational. Speak about it often. And while you're at it, be the best damn ship in the Navy!

Disclaimer: I take no personal pleasure in stomping on bad guys, but I know it is our mission and we will do it well. War is horrible. My goal is to help make us so damn good at what we do, that when IRON IKE shows up in hostile waters, our enemies crap their pants and refuse to fight. This is truly ***the Way of the Warrior Sailor.***

IV. What is our #1 problem?

I have heard Sailors say, "I was told I was going to worst ship in the Navy." Nothing is more detrimental to our mission of stomping on bad guys than lazy, cynical comments made by people who have not served on this ship, nor understand what makes a ship successful. There are external entities who have fed this poisonous nonsense to inbound Sailors, only weakening the Navy.

I look around this ship and I see decades of Sailor attention and care. I see warriors. Yes, I also see things that need more attention – but not much different than things I've seen on other ships that are only 10 years old. Ships require constant attention. I also see remarkably positive attitudes. I see Warrior Sailors who are proud to have signed up and are willing to fight for their country, friends and family. This motivates the hell out of me every day. It should also make you proud. In fact, there are several thousand proud parents of IKE warriors out there who think about us every day – several of whom have also served on this ship!

Even so, there are a few Sailors who show up to work with a pit in their stomach and don't feel inspired to work. We have all been there at one point in our lives, where morale is zero. If any warrior feels that way, then I am personally responsible as the Commanding Officer, legally and morally. Help me do something about that. Help make an environment where people are proud to show up to work to represent America and stomp on bad guys when tasked.

It has been said that the Marine carries the weapon, and the Sailor is carried BY the weapon. This is true, except that our Aircraft Carrier weapon system is the most lethal, most survivable, bad-ass freak of engineering ever built. So let's reclaim our status as the best damn ship in the Navy!

V. What will help us stomp bad guys and reclaim our status as the best damn ship on the planet?

I have already talked about the basics – to deliberately love and value people, to give them mission and purpose, and to create winning environments. These go without saying. But there are several other tactics we can employ that will contribute to morale (and thus create success).

A. Build a Community. Reclaim the wardroom, make the Chief's Mess stronger, give Sailors time to grow the FCPOA, SCPOA, JEA, etc. These must all be grassroots efforts. Functioning fraternal groups and cross-department teams like these break down barriers between micro-cultures and make us feel like a community and family, where trust and connectedness grows and everyone has each other's back. Despite claims to the contrary, this CAN BE DONE in a command of more than three thousand sailors. Let's do it.

Similarly, embarked commands and Sailors – even civilian contractors and shipyard workers – are now part of the IKE warrior family, true brothers and sisters in arms. They are ours and we are theirs. Welcome them to the team – as we say, "Welcome to the best damn ship in the Navy and let's stomp on bad guys together." This is ***the Way of the Warrior Sailor.***

B. Sailor Programs at 100%. ALL sailor programs need to function to build a healthy warrior community. Several dozen Sailor Programs exist because Sailors back in the day said they were important. They were right. I recognize that most Sailor Programs are collateral duties in addition to our normal jobs. But a command that doesn't get the Sailor Programs right and lets them die is not really a command that we want to be part of.

We will be at 100%. This is ***the Way of the Warrior Sailor.***

C. Rapid, relentless, repetitive and POSITIVE communications (R3P). Commands that fail to communicate often, seem to fail often. We will do the opposite. Our communications will be rapid, relentless, repetitive and positive.

What are some of the ways we communicate? We have triad communications to the crew, 1MC, all-officer-meetings (AOMs), CPO meetings, daily quarters for every Sailor, Site TV, social media, Five-Star magazine.

What should we be talking about in these communications? I recommend recognizing past achievements (by name is even better), talking about what matters now, and then talking about the future (plans, schedules, etc.). Every division needs short term goals so warriors are marching in the same direction. All this supports valuing Sailors and reduces anxiety in an

environment where the future is rarely certain. Also, if there are questions arising in the ranks, let's respond rapidly and repetitively. It costs us nothing to do this.

Negative talk, yelling, publically berating anyone is a failed communication strategy and has no place on this ship. That's not to say we don't point out what is wrong – we are always obligated to correct mistakes. But if you want to create an environment of "greater each day," then you better make every mistake an enriching, learning experience that encourages people to actually become greater each day.

Also, when you give orders, it is customary to explain why these orders matter. Nobody likes being told to do something that seems to have no connection to our mission and vision, or to be told "shut up and color." If leaders take a moment to explain "the why," you get better results (because you're demonstrating you love and value people). This is ***the Way of the Warrior Sailor.***

D. Reclaim our Namesake. Dwight D. Eisenhower the man was arguably the most successful military commander in more than a century. He was the ultimate Warrior Soldier. He was also the most popular president since World War II, and the only two-term President since then who presided over eight years of peace. He literally prevented the use of nuclear weapons against adversaries three times, setting the standard for the non-use of weapons of mass destruction, a standard that holds to this day. Few ships can claim to have a better namesake.

Yes, Eisenhower was a total badass, but he was also a fallible human being who accepted responsibility for his failures. This is the epitome of courageous leadership. Having said that, we don't expect perfection on this ship, and we are willing to give second chances. Like Eisenhower, we will be the best at recovering from failures so we can pivot to a winning environment. This is ***the Way of the Warrior Sailor.***

E. Everyone is a Warrior. The enemy does not care what rate or rank you are. They don't care if you're wearing brown or black shoes, have a pony tail or a perfectly bald head like I do. They want you dead. When the missiles start coming, every single Warrior Sailor will be on duty – serving food, plugging holes, restoring power, answering bells, lifting bombs, manning scopes, fixing equipment, driving the ship, saving lives, and so much more. If history tells us anything, extraordinary things come from ordinary Sailors when you least expect it. Many of us can tell their stories.

Every warrior must hone their warrior tradecraft. That means getting qualified, mastering skills, and then learning how to teach one's tradecraft to others. Eventually the Warrior Sailor becomes the fulcrum around which many others get **greater each day**.

I declare that every Sailor on this ship is a "Warrior Sailor." Update all correspondence accordingly. This is ***the Way of the Warrior Sailor.***

F. Give a Damn about the Material Condition of the Ship. If left unattended, both humans and equipment deteriorate over time. All too often we ramp up for major inspections and later neglect the day-to-day programs and routine stuff that are designed to keep the ship whole for the long haul. 3M and Zone Inspections, for example, are critical always. And external inspections make us better warfighters. If inspectors give us a wire brushing, we smile and say "thank you," then do our best to make improvements. Inspectors take pride in seeing us improve. And keep in mind, we all could be inspectors someday too.

As a matter of fact, this ship has received a service life extension beyond 50 years, which means at least two more deployments over the next six years. We have an obligation to set ourselves up for efficient stomping on bad guys next deployment.

Cleanliness matters too. A clean, bright, well-painted space has psychological benefits that impact morale, the science of which baffles me, but it works. There are even psychological benefits for those who do the painting and cleaning. Just like our civilian fire fighters do for their fire engines, we take pride in making the ship look beautiful because it instills trust and confidence in the public to whom we have made an oath to protect.

It has been argued that for some Warrior Sailors, the ship and its equipment are baked into our souls. If one suffers so does the other. If our equipment has problems, we feel it, we suffer. Similarly, if our souls suffer, then we see the material condition of the ship suffer. This might all might seem weird, but it's a real thing. It is also ***the Way of the Warrior Sailor.***

G. Enhance Brain, Body and Soul. Warriors give a damn about their brain, body and soul. All three are interconnected. Failure of one causes suffering to all. The best way to address all three is to make personal goals for each, such as healthy eating, reading, education, exercise, breathing, prayer, etc.

Scientific data shows that if warriors are not sleeping, eating, or exercising properly, or if they lack connectedness with others, they are at much higher risk for mental health issues, which in turn impacts morale and success.

Normally we would use the word "mind" instead of brain, but in my research, the mind has a tendency to wander and worry when left to its own devices. Some of you have probably experienced trouble sleeping where you worry about the past or worry about the future (or both) before you go to bed. Warriors learn to center themselves through breathing and micro-meditation to calm the mind. Warriors also focus on the now and are thankful for the many blessings given to us no matter how hard yesterday was or tomorrow is going to be. Center yourself and focus on your inner being. This is ***the Way of the Warrior Sailor.***

H. Be Creative. For some reason, Americans are unusually creative compared to the rest of the world. Likewise, among us are warrior artists, innovators, musicians, thinkers, and people with all kinds of gifts. Warriors find a way to exercise their gifts.

It has been said that the meaning of life is to find your gift, and the purpose of life is to give that gift away. On this ship, we encourage sharing our gifts. It gives us increased purpose and improves morale. This is ***the Way of the Warrior Sailor.***

I. Provide Exquisite Customer Service. We have all been victim to poor customer service. Since it is our policy to value and love our brothers and sisters in arms, we will provide exquisite customer service in every department on this ship. When we serve others, we gain a greater sense of mission and purpose, and thus morale improves. If people get hostile to our customer service, we fight back with kindness and watch their anger melt away.

It is known that a good smile can alter moods all around you. It is also known that even faking a smile can trick the brain into being happier! Try it some time. This is ***the Way of the Warrior Sailor.***

J. Plan Like Warriors. Good planning usually leads to good results. It has also been said that even the best laid plans melt away in the face of the enemy. Having said that, the more we communicate and coordinate cross-departmentally, the better we can plan for the future, always keeping in mind the "what ifs" and thoroughly thinking through all the risk mitigations we can put in place to prevent failure in the face of the enemy.

Our business is a dangerous business – arguably one of the most dangerous environments on the planet. Procedural compliance, questioning attitudes, safety, risk assessments, previous lessons learned, following the basics, and creativity must be baked into every plan. If we get this right in training, we will be more likely to efficiently stomp on bad guys when it matters most.

We won't, however, risk manage ourselves to the point of doing nothing. As the Commanding Officer, I am willing to do things where the benefits of action outweigh the real risks, and for the right reasons. I will proudly be accountable. This is ***the Way of the Warrior Sailor.***

K. Sleep Right. We have not done a good job of managing Warrior sleep for decades. In some cultures within the Navy, it was considered a badge of honor to be sleep deprived. Since sleep deprivation contributes to poor moods, lower morale, lack of response time, physical sickness, and mental degradation, we have been weakening ourselves before we even get to battle. That's pretty sad if you think about it.

Good sleep gives us the tactical edge. Ironically, our goal in combat is to make it so the enemy is weakened by lack of sleep, because we know that it reduces their will to fight back. So why do it to ourselves? On this ship, we will continue to push for circadian-friendly schedules for all, assuming we have the manning and the qualifications to make it so. This will help us to better stomp bad guys during those critical moments when sleep becomes harder to come by.

I ask that when given adequate sleep opportunity, you take advantage of it. We have lost too many Sailors to excessive unauthorized absences, mental health problems, and injuries, because of late night gaming, social media, and other distractions that take away from sleep

and degrade our health. Warriors need to unplug and rest. This is ***the Way of the Warrior Sailor.***

L. Give a Damn about Mental Health. It is my belief that mental health issues have plagued humanity for at least 100,000 years. What's different now is that there is no longer a stigma associated with seeking assistance for it. This is a remarkable thing – a true shift in culture that should make us proud. And it's about time we did something about it.

Everyone who has a mental health issue will receive some form of care. Period. We have pushed hard over the past couple years to get the right providers and resources on this ship, and we finally got there.

Leaders play a huge role in mental health. It all starts with leaders building a culture of trust and respect with open, two-way communication among warriors. As noted, toxic climates are heretofore banned from the ship, because they lead to lack of trust or respect and even to increased mental health issues. Good warrior leaders look out for behavioral changes, actively listen, and get to know the whole Sailor, even their personal life concerns. They may hand off a Sailor to a medical professional, but their work is never done. Ultimately, our goal is to reintegrate our warriors back into to the team. I will say it again, every Warrior Sailor matters and we cannot effectively stomp on bad guys without the whole team. This is ***the Way of the Warrior Sailor.***

M. Squash Bad Behaviors. I wish I didn't have to focus on negative aspects of human behavior, but we sometimes see examples of fraternization, sexual harassment, hazing, bullying, sexual assault, sexism, racism, theft, etc. It's rare, but it does happen. The one thing these all have in common is the dehumanizing lack of respect for our warrior brothers and sisters. Many incidents lead to Sailors separating from the Navy or worse. Sometimes these behaviors come from habits formed prior to entering the Navy, so it is imperative that everyone educates one another and leads by example (to quote one wise XO, "Show what right looks like").

Know the fraternization policy. Fraternization creates a culture of unfairness, loss of trust, and decreases morale.

Sexual harassment and sexual assault have no place on or off this ship either. There is nothing more disrespectful, more damaging, than treating professional Warrior Sailors – your brothers and sisters in arms – as objects. Warriors pride themselves at being the most respectful humans on the planet – so let's do that!

Hazing is stupid, degrading, and a colossal waste of time. Just like bullying, sexual assault and sexual harassment, hazing does not create an environment where we love or value the Sailor. It does not give mission and purpose to Sailors. It has no place on this ship either. If you see these things, use honor, courage, and commitment to do something about it. An entire ship of three thousand warriors has your back.

We also find that alcohol is a major contributor to bad behavior off ship – no surprise. I wish there was a way to convince some people that getting blitzed should not be the goal of drinking. I have lost too many Sailors, friends, and family to DUIs, horrible car accidents, domestic violence, and fights, all while drinking. My dad died at my current age now due to cirrhosis of the liver from alcoholism, and I miss him terribly. He was an ABE3 and the reason I joined the Navy, but he is not here now.

The Way of the Warrior Sailor demands personal discipline, moderation, and the embodiment of honor even when off duty.

N. Care for Loved Ones. Family, friends, boyfriends, girlfriends, and loved ones of all variety are part of who we are too; they are our external support network; they give us greater purpose. I no longer believe work life is somehow distinct from home life; nor could I believe that a human can be two persons divided. Still, it has been said to Sailors, "Your family isn't part of your seabag." This is clearly wrong.

As Warrior Leaders, we can't issue warriors a spouse, but we can assist with relationship concerns and strive to give Sailors time to nurture relationships with loved ones. It's a tall order given the amount of time we have to be at sea to defend freedom and democracy around the world, but we are obligated to try when we can. This is ***the Way of the Warrior Sailor.***

O. Safety is a No-Brainer. I don't discuss safety too often because I think it's a no-brainer. Why would you not do safety? Why would you not follow strict procedural compliance to protect humans and equipment? Leaders are required to apply safety oversight all the time, so they need to be out and about making shit happen. To do otherwise destroys our ability to fight the real enemy and stomp on him.

If we get to a point where we have to be unsafe, I'll let you know. Even in the thick of combat in the Red Sea in 2024, we never had to sacrifice safety of personnel and equipment while fighting Houthi rebels.

That said, we will strive to go after small problems, near misses, and mistakes non-punitively to prevent larger nightmares from happening. A true Warrior exposes all their mistakes in public (i.e., self-flogging) and accepts total responsibility. General Eisenhower even wrote his resignation letter in the event that the D-Day invasion had failed, totally ready to accept responsibility for his failures. This is the one of the many ways to get greater each day, and this is ***the Way of the Warrior Sailor.***

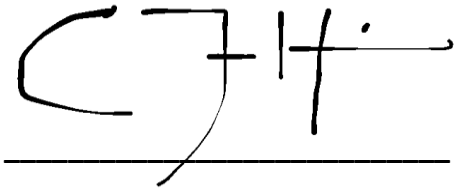
VI. What are my Expectations?

Since I have just written the longest command philosophy ever, I will be short on expectations and allow everyone to creatively find their own path in ***the Way of the Warrior Sailor.***

Remember, our vision is to be the best damn ship in the Navy, but it takes more than just saying it.

- **Expectations for Senior Officers.** Take some time to think about leadership. It has been said that our greatest failure is not doing this. Also, you are measured on how well you support other departments, as well as your ability to apply the philosophy discussed above.
- **Expectations for Junior Officers**. Learn your tradecraft, and then get shit done. Learn from the Chiefs. You are measured by your tactical and technical skills and how you apply the leadership techniques discussed above.
- **Expectations for the Chiefs.** Chiefs get shit done. Also, ***The Way of the Warrior Sailor*** is meaningless without the Chiefs Mess buying into it.
- **Expectations for Petty Officers.** Practice the art of Warrior Leadership. Become the role model you always admired. Steal methods from the best Chiefs. Show what right looks like.
- **Expectations for Junior Sailors.** Become the warrior you wanted to be when you signed up. You joined the Navy because you wanted to be a warrior, to put on that uniform, to make your family proud, and to be part of something greater than yourself. Now is the time. Only you can make it happen.

Above all, when I evaluate individual warriors (including myself), I always go back to the basics: did we love and value everyone, did we give others mission and purpose, and did we create a winning environment whenever possible? These are essential for morale and success. These concepts are absolutely foundational to ***The Way of the Warrior Sailor***.



CAPT CHRIS "CHOWDAH" HILL

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