

**ETHICS IN THE U.S. NAVY**

U.S. Naval War College

RADM Walter E. Carter, Jr

President, USNWC

24 March 2014

**ETHICS IN THE U.S. NAVY**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[PREFACE 3](#_Toc382894959)

[Introduction: The U.S. Navy and the American people 5](#_Toc382894960)

[The Naval Profession and the Public Trust 6](#_Toc382894961)

[*Implication 1* 6](#_Toc382894962)

[Ethical foundations: More than compliance 7](#_Toc382894963)

[*Implication 2* 7](#_Toc382894964)

[*Implication 3* 8](#_Toc382894965)

[Moral choice: Domains for ethical decision making 8](#_Toc382894966)

[*Implication 4* 9](#_Toc382894967)

[*Implication 5* 10](#_Toc382894968)

[Culture for Navy ethics: Proactive vs. reactive 10](#_Toc382894969)

[*Implication 6* 11](#_Toc382894970)

[A Way Forward 11](#_Toc382894971)

[Ethics Development: From the bottom-up and the top-down 12](#_Toc382894972)

[Recommendation #1: Inculcate understanding of the “naval profession” 12](#_Toc382894973)

[Recommendation #2: Construct “good barrels” and cultivate “good apples” 12](#_Toc382894974)

[Recommendation #3: Build a culture for Navy ethics beyond compliance 13](#_Toc382894975)

[Recommendation #4: Engage the Command as well as the Schoolhouse 13](#_Toc382894976)

[Recommendation #5: Engage both ethics training and ethics education 14](#_Toc382894977)

[Recommendation #6: Intersect ethics development with leader development 14](#_Toc382894978)

[Conclusion 14](#_Toc382894979)

[APPENDIX A 16](#_Toc382894980)

[Ethics Terminology 16](#_Toc382894981)

[APPENDIX B 17](#_Toc382894982)

[“Teammates – the Art of Selecting Character and Competence” [NSW] 17](#_Toc382894983)

[APPENDIX C 21](#_Toc382894984)

[Mapping Naval Special Warfare Methodologies to Ethics Recommendations 21](#_Toc382894985)

[APPENDIX D 23](#_Toc382894986)

[NAVAL LEADERSHIP AND ETHICS CENTER 23](#_Toc382894987)

[List of Contributors 26](#_Toc382894988)

# PREFACE

From the onset, both officer and enlisted personnel share a common bond in the U.S. Navy – we took an oath and solemnly affirmed …*to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic;* [and that we would] *bear true faith and allegiance to the same…* This oath binds us from the start; we’re in this Navy – this profession of arms – together. While our professional skills are most historically associated with activities on, under and above the maritime domain, they have evolved; extending to the realms of space and cyber and are now global reaching. Our enduring ethical responsibilities, though, have never been bounded; they have remained with us permanently, described not by domains or temporal limits, but as a constant, a part of who we are.

Our profession is unique. As a Service in our Nation’s Department of Defense we are trusted to be experts in the profession of arms. We operate with lethal force and are expected to prevail under conditions of extreme adversity; in peacetime, through crisis and war. We build winning teams to deliver on this expectation and believe *warfighting first* accurately captures our priorities. The missions we are regularly asked to perform, and must be ready to perform, together with the lives of those we are charged to lead, demands a trust in our leadership to employ every means available to make the right decisions. These means include a strong ethical foundation.

Warfighting, by definition, requires ultimate commitment; a willingness to lay it on the line –with our lives– if required. That commitment is reinforced through discipline in our actions and trust. This is a realm where absolutes *do* apply, and as such, drives an imperative for scrupulously adhering to high standards and consistency in ethical behavior –at both the individual *and* institutional level. Why? This behavior reinforces *trust*; alternately, breaches and omissions in ethical behavior undermine it. In the end, trust is the single most important factor upon which our authority to lead is derived. When an order is given in combat and we rely on the training, skill and courage of our Sailors (officer and enlisted) to execute; their actions and commitment are ultimately founded on trust in their leaders, trust in their fellow shipmates and trust in our institution –the Navy. Everything we do in the execution of our duties either adds or subtracts to this trust. This condition of commitment is enduring, no “on” and “off,” it describes who we are and how we live 24x7x365.

This notion of commitment and the logic connecting it to our duties in the naval profession and the central role of trust is a truth we can't take for granted. It must be actively discussed and promoted in our wardrooms, chiefs’ messes and on the deck plates. The understanding of ethics, ethos, character, virtue, morality and integrity are not relics from the dusty shelves of the classroom; they are terms and concepts that dwell in the environment of trust --natural accompaniments to this most central element of our profession.

As we endeavor to build winning teams we commit to making ourselves, and those we lead, better people. It's "all in" ...all the time ...all the way.

*Remember …we took an oath*

**ETHICS IN THE U.S. NAVY**

*“[Enlisted] Sailors surmise that Navy leadership expects them to adopt prescribed morals, standards, and rules of behavior without investing in the process required to instill, teach, develop, and mentor these standards on the deck plates.”*

PACFLT Sailor Roundtables Report, 17 Dec 2013

# Introduction: The U.S. Navy and the American people

The U.S. military is among the most trusted of American institutions.[[1]](#footnote-1) The trust accorded to the U.S. Navy by the American people derives from our status as members of the military profession. Only to the degree that the Navy is, and is perceived to be, trustworthy can we maintain our status as the naval profession in American society.

The American public we serve and some members of Congress recently have questioned the Department of Defense concerning a number of ethical lapses. This is the nexus where the central importance of ethics emerges for the Navy. It is the trust of the American people that grounds the ethical and behavioral expectations for all Sailors[[2]](#footnote-2) at every level. While only a small percentage of our people are caught engaging in *illegal* actions, what can we conclude about *ethical* behavior in our ranks? Does our culture discourage ethical actions in the name of mission accomplishment or career advancement? Does acceptance of low-level ethical failure lead to the sort of high-profile law breaking that undermines the trust of the American people in their Navy? [[3]](#footnote-3)

Our warfighting capability is diminished by the reality – and the perception – of illegal, unethical and immoral behavior. Navy Core Values and moral and ethical conduct serve as theenablers to build trust, morale, unit cohesion, and ultimately, our combat readiness. Yet, it is possible, for instance, for Sailors to matriculate from accession source to retirement without having had more than basic ethics training over the course of an entire career.

Our predominant approach to ethics is legalistic in content and often negative in tone. Ethics training is equated with the Code of Conduct, law, policy, and JAG guidance. We exhort our Sailors to follow the rules or suffer the consequences, without the corresponding effort to train and educate, to develop and mentor, and to create the systemic conditions for dealing positively with the ethical challenges and problems inherent to the profession of arms. At best, we employ a checklist of what *not* to do, and at worst, ethical development of our people is a chore or a burden that takes away from getting the job done. Too often in our current approach the *intrinsic* *good* assigned to ethical conduct, either to service, to unit or to self is lost. We have a moral obligation to do better. We can and we must.

# The Naval Profession and the Public Trust

In modern English, “professional” often means anything a person is paid to do. However, there is another sociological sense of the term “profession” based on the notion of “social trust”. That is, the bond of trust between the profession and society. True “social trust” professions – such as medicine, clergy and law – have a special bargain with the societies they serve. In exchange for the high regard and trust placed in them by their societies, they are: (1) granted a high degree of collective autonomy; (2) allowed to control their own education, certification, promotion, and dismissal; and (3) given considerable discretion and latitude in how they apply the unique professional knowledge they possess. This status as a profession is allowed and maintained only insofar as the trust relationship with the client – in our case, the American people – is firm and intact. Whenever that trust is compromised, the society reduces or even eliminates professional autonomy through its legislative and executive branches.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Only to the degree that the Navy is, and is perceived to be, trustworthy can we maintain our status as a profession in American society.

The foundation of our naval profession is the Oath of Office/Enlistment. Individuals come into the Navy from a diverse range of backgrounds on many dimensions – cultural, religious, ethical, socioeconomic, and so forth. All Sailors share central ethical obligations resulting from their oath to the Constitution, providing the foundation for common values. By taking the oath, Navy personnel explicitly adopt a shared commitment to service and sacrifice; and implicitly assume a shared identity as a member of the naval profession.

Furthermore, the unique professional knowledge that is developed and maintained by members of the naval profession leads to ethical expectations and requirements that establish the *professional* *military* *ethic.* The personal ethics that diverse individuals bring into the Navy are not necessarily identical to, or in perfect correlation with the professional military ethic on the one hand – nor mutually exclusive on the other.

*Implication 1*: For our diverse Navy, the critically important take away is that the foundation for common values comes from shared membership in – and identity with – the *naval profession*. Shared identity as members of the naval profession helps to inculcate Navy Core Values and Navy Ethos throughout the force, engendering a more meaningful application of ethics for individual Sailors. The strength of our shared identity must be built over time and continually reinforced.

**Ethical foundations: More than compliance**

A fuller understanding of ethics beyond compliance models rests on the foundations of moral philosophy. Indeed, by his own accounting, Vice Admiral Stockdale noted that his character, courage, and discipline were shaped by his study of philosophy and the humanities. Stockdale believed that an ethics course for military officers need not be organized directly around military ideas or military writings. Rather, he advocated the study of classical philosophers as a matter of personal and professional development, with the attendant consequence of molding better (and moral) human beings.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Philosophical traditions on ethics provide a number of touchstones to guide Navy ethics education and training and foster a culture for Navy ethics. Both classical and modern philosophical traditions direct our attention to multiple aspects of moral philosophy to include: (1) self-discipline (Plato); (2) individual character (Aristotle); (3) sense of duty (Immanuel Kant); and (4) the collective good (John Stuart Mill). Together these philosophies point to the importance of both the individual and the institution in maintaining ethical standards.

When we compare Plato’s moral philosophy with that of Aristotle, for instance, we learn the importance of – and some limitation to – ethics education and training centered on character and integrity. Plato espouses the virtue of self-discipline and personal restraint; particularly applied to the “soldier” for a well-ordered society and developed through rigorous and repetitive military training. He argues that people’s capacity for understanding both their own and the common good enables the inculcation of persuasive ethos and cultural norms to guide good behavior. Aristotle espouses moral virtue – “excellence of character” – developed through formed habits. He contends that a stable character leads a person to always do the right thing, in the right way, at the right time.

An underlying assumption of Plato’s philosophy is that “no one knowingly does wrong.” In other words, if people know and understand what is morally right, they can be relied upon to act accordingly. This assumption, of course, is easily challenged; and points to the limitation of relying primarily on directives for ethical outcomes. At the same time, Aristotle’s ideas of character have been shown to be only partially correct. While integrity and good character are indeed important, research indicates that situational factors also have a great influence on actual behavior.[[6]](#footnote-6)

[W]e need to look at both **“good apples”** as well as **“good barrels”** if we are to do everything possible to facilitate ethical behavior and foster ethical climates.

*Implication 2*: What this means for our Navy’s ethics efforts is that self-discipline, character, and integrity are indeed important for a well-ordered organization. However, we must be also mindful that we cannot presume a prescribed common meaning of moral integrity among all Navy personnel; and we must consider the potential effects of the situation and the environment (e.g., command climate; system-driven expectations) on ethical behavior. As many social scientists would put it, we need to look at both “good apples” as well as “good barrels” -- i.e., the environment, the tools, and the conditions *we create* -- if we are to do everything possible to facilitate ethical behavior and build ethical climates.

A comparison of Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill speaks to *why* individuals might act morally. Kant espouses the concept of moral obligation, distinguishing between *actions that are merely in accordance with duty* (i.e., the individual performed the right action, but for many possible reasons – including fear of punishment or hope for reward) and *action from duty* (in which the individual did the right action because of a dutiful allegiance to do the right thing). The former reasoning speaks to compliance to the rules. In the latter reasoning, moral actions are derived from an intrinsic sense of duty – for example, an internally-driven moral imperative to uphold the standards of the naval profession – resulting in more resolute ethical behavior.

John Stuart Mill adopts a utilitarian perspective for moral actions, stressing the importance of acting in such a way that the outcome provides “the greatest good for the greatest number”. This “greatest good” motivation requires subordination of individuals’ interests in favor of those of that best benefit the collective organization. In this way, members of the naval profession, for example, desire to act in a way that forgoes self-interested behavior in favor of moral actions that support Navy Core Values and the Navy Ethos.

*Implication 3*: What we learn from Kant and Mill is that Navy ethics education and training must address internal motivations for ethical behavior, beyond the application of rules and policy. Comprehending the underlying impetus for ethical behavior and moral choice informs both the approaches to instilling, training, and mentoring on ethical standards as well as the policies and procedures intended to facilitate ethical behavior.

Taken together, these various perspectives of moral philosophy indicate that more than “a one size fits all approach” is required for sustainable ethical behavior and a culture for Navy ethics. As we re-examine our approach to ethics, the efforts must be comprehensive, considering not only the individual Sailor – his or her commitment, ethical understanding, and moral motivations – but, perhaps even more importantly, the systems and processes within our Navy that can facilitate ethical behavior.

# Moral choice: Domains for ethical decision making

Fundamentally, ethics is about choice. The decisions to adhere to core values, adopt prescribed morals, and act in accordance with ethical standards all revolve around personal choice. Our frame for understanding moral choice pivots on two distant but complementary perspectives: (1) a speech given by Lord Moulton, minister of munitions for Great Britain during WWI, which was published in 1924; and (2) a more recently published popular book by Dan Ariely, *The (Honest) Truth about Dishonesty*.

Lord Moulton describes the domains of ethical choice, which he divides into three spheres of human action.[[7]](#footnote-7) The first is the sphere of *Positive Law* – actions in which individuals adhere to rigidly prescribed and dutifully enforced rules. The third he called the sphere of *Absolute Freedom*, where individuals enjoy complete free will regarding their behavior. In between, he identified the domain of *Obedience to the Unenforceable*, which he called “doing what you should do although you are not obliged to do it.” In other words, this is the sphere where individuals must exercise discretion and judgment, making decisions when the only enforcer is themselves (Figure 1). *Obedience to the Unenforceable* relies upon an internalized sense of responsibility and an intrinsically-developed ethical core.

*Implication 4*: Again, for our Navy, this suggests that compliance is the moral minimum. Complying with rules and policies is but one – and to some degree, limiting – factor that contributes to ethical decision making. Due attention, therefore, is needed to address the unenforceable domain of human action as well – specifically, discretion and moral judgment. Tending to the moral development of Sailors such that ethical choices become routine helps establish a culture for Navy ethics, and in essence transforms the unenforceable into “enforceable”.

**Positive Law**

**Absolute Freedom**

**Obedience to the Unenforceable**

**Ethical Choice**

Figure 1. Lord Moulton’s Domains for Human Action

*The (Honest) Truth about Dishonesty* notes that all individuals possess the human capacity for both honesty and dishonesty; whether in enforceable or unenforceable domains.[[8]](#footnote-8) In other words, every person is susceptible to this most human foible and less-then-optimal behavior. There are a host of forces that can lead individuals down the slippery slope of dishonesty such as: (1) ability to rationalize, (2) conflicts of interest, (3) creative reasoning, (4) one immoral act, (5) being depleted – tired and overtaxed, (6) others benefiting from dishonesty, and (7) watching others behave dishonestly.[[9]](#footnote-9) Ultimately, these forces have been shown to shape moral choice.

One key lesson from Ariely’s research is that a first act of dishonesty – even a seemingly innocuous one – might be particularly important in shaping an individual’s subsequent ethical decision making. Therefore, it is important to address poor moral choices early on, so as to be preventative (proactive) in addressing ethics behavior over time. Another key lesson from this examination of dishonesty is that highlighting acts of *honesty* is incredibly important for establishing the sense of social morality. By publicly promoting salient examples of commendable behavior, we improve what is viewed as acceptable behavior; and ultimately improve ethical decisions and actions.[[10]](#footnote-10)

*Implication 5*: When our Navy attributes unethical behavior to just a few “bad apples,” the extent of potential ethical challenges throughout the naval force can be obscured. When pitted against a compliance-based approach aimed at maintaining high standards, the result is policies and rules that serve only to punish those “bad apples” that cross the “red line.” At the same time, when our Navy promotes commendable ethical decisions and behavior it fosters a culture for Navy ethics.

# Culture for Navy ethics: Proactive vs. reactive

As we seek to develop and maintain a solid ethical foundation in all Navy personnel, it is important to consider how change comes about in large organizations, particularly with respect to organizational culture. It is within an organization’s culture that expectations for ethical behavior are sourced and reinforced.

Organizational culture, defined by Edgar Schein as the “set of structures, routines, rules, and norms that guide and constrain behavior”, constitutes the overarching organizational environment. [[11]](#footnote-11) Culture encompasses the identity of the organization and its members – i.e., how they define “who we are” as an entity – and is a primary driver of the organization’s outlook. Culture is enduring. While leaders, policies, and circumstances revolve, culture transcends organizational transformations (e.g., the Navy’s culture of command). Schein proposed that culture can be understood and analyzed at three levels: (1) on the surface, (2) among espoused beliefs and values, and (3) within underlying assumptions.

At the surface level the most obvious indicators of an organization’s culture are visible structures, processes, and rituals (e.g., platforms, operational regulations, change of command ceremonies). The organization’s espoused beliefs and values form a deeper stratum of the culture and guide and justify behaviors and choices (e.g., “we believe in warfighting first”). At the deepest level are the underlying assumptions that are the true foundations of the organization’s sense of itself (e.g., “this is how we do things here.”). A challenge for many organizations is ensuring that espoused values align with the sometimes more forceful underlying assumptions (e.g., a “say-do” mismatch). In the case of ethics, the organization’s culture defines and dictates what its members understand to be most important to their leaders and their actions as a result.

*Implication 6*: Organizational culture informs our understanding of the utility of the Navy’s current ethics approach for shaping ethical behavior. Considering both the visible aspects of culture and the underlying assumptions, the Navy seems to have developed a “prohibitive” and “reactionary” culture for ethics. The tendencies to spotlight individual ethical failures (“bad apples”) and generally respond by firing the offenders, issuing new policy, and mandating more training – each occurring *after* ethical misconduct has occurred – signals a pervasive sense of “just don’t be that person!” The “don’t do this” sentiment then becomes deeply entrenched in the culture. Even the language of “ethics failure” or “lapse” emphasizes a negative culture for Navy ethics vice a positive approach. Thus, the current culture for Navy ethics is one based on obeying the rules in order to avoid punishment; rather than a proactive culture for Navy ethics that fosters and inspires individuals to embody Navy Core Values and the Navy Ethos, and to use their discretionary judgment professionally, making the right ethical decisions and actions – even in the domain of the unenforceable.

# A Way Forward

As our Navy reexamines its approach to comprehensive ethics development, education, and training at all levels while fostering a proactive culture for Navy ethics, Stockdale’s wisdom is worthy of serious consideration. When and where in the development of Navy personnel does the kind of deep reading, thinking, and reflection Stockdale advocated occur? When do we engage our people in serious conversation about their identity as members of the naval profession and the kinds of ethical responsibilities that flow from that identity? For most of a Navy career at present “ethics” means a focus on legal compliance and general exhortations to be persons of good character. If we take Stockdale at his word, however, we should be thinking in terms of more substantive engagement that would make not just better naval personnel and better citizens, but a better warfighting organization.

Grounding the Navy’s ethics development, education, and training efforts in a shared understanding of the naval profession will instill in our Sailors a cultural ethos to act for the good of the service, for the unit and for themselves. In addition to focusing on observable behavior, a common understanding of the naval profession helps to shape self-awareness, shared identity, and a more internalized application of ethics. From this vantage point, the broader scope of ethical development is inherently valuable. This is not, however, education for its own sake. This is about improving our warfighting readiness today, and maintaining the trust of our fellow citizens for the future.

# Ethics Development: From the bottom-up and the top-down

The following recommendations derive from the implications listed in this paper as well as insights based on previous taskings and research related to Navy ethics. The orientation is both bottom-up and top-down; meaning engaging Sailors at the deckplate level all the way through to responsibilities of senior leadership. Establishing a culture for Navy ethics requires investment on the part of individuals *and* our Navy as an institution. Ultimately, recommitting to the naval profession – and maintaining the trust of the American people – serves as the driver for Navy ethics.

The following recommendations are in no way all-inclusive. They offer a broad view of necessary efforts to strengthen the culture of ethics for the Navy.

### Recommendation #1: Inculcate understanding of the “naval profession”

* We must have a common understanding of what it means to be a member of the naval profession. Presently, we represent 18 distinct communities, which most often shapes our views and actions (e.g., “I am a fighter pilot; I am an Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialist”).
* Recognizing that we are *first and foremost* members of the naval profession (e.g., “I am a United States Sailor”) – then, members of our respective communities – places greatest emphasis on our unifying Navy Core Values and the Navy Ethos.
* The naval profession establishes why maintaining the trust of the American people through a culture of Navy ethics matters.

### Recommendation #2: Construct “good barrels” and cultivate “good apples”

* Examine policies and procedures – as well as system-driven expectations (e.g., perceived pressures to cheat) – that may unintentionally lead to poor ethical choices.
  + *For example, examine existing or previous ethics challenges to study how policies, procedures, and expectations may have contributed to less than optimal decisions and behaviors – and adjust accordingly.*
  + *For example, consider where in the continuum of leader development – or certain career milestones – to inject more intensive ethics development, training, and education; recognizing that the scope of Sailors’ ethical responsibilities grows as their experience levels increase and contexts shift.*
* Examine whether we are helping or hindering Sailors in the execution of their mission through ethical leadership.
  + *For example, consider the impact on "good barrels" -- i.e., the trust environment created by leaders -- of endless "priority one" tasks.*
* Enforce existing, and institute new, policies that support the ethical development of our Sailors.
  + *For example, enforce policies requiring completion of Navy PME, which includes a significant ethics component.*
* Invest in the ethical and leader development of our people. As indicated in the statement from the PACFLT roundtables, our Sailors desire to be better and *want* to be developed. *“Sailors surmise that Navy leadership expects them to adopt prescribed morals, standards, and rules of behavior without investing in the process required to instill, teach, develop, and mentor these standards on the deck plates.”*
  + *For example, develop activities and processes that allow for regular feedback without consequence (i.e., will not negatively affect evaluations).*
  + *For example, provide tools that will aid coaching, counseling, and mentoring of our Sailors. [See also Recommendation #6]*
  + *For example, alter the view of development activities as an investment rather than a cost.*

### Recommendation #3: Build a culture for Navy ethics beyond compliance

* Acknowledging that ethics means more than “just obey the rules” is a huge step in changing the way ethics is currently perceived and enacted within Navy culture.
* *For example, spotlight examples of good ethical choices and behavior; as well as examples that favorably represent the naval profession.*
* *For example, institutionally reward good decisions and actions that reinforce Navy Core Values and the Navy Ethos.*
* Tend to the moral development of our Sailors – i.e., helping them develop habits for making the right ethical choices and utilizing proper discretionary judgment.
  + - *For example, provide opportunities for facilitated dialogues, peer discussions, and open roundtables around topics of motivation, reasoning, and processing of moral choices.*
* Capitalize on existing training and education that present opportunities to instill ethics discussions and learning.

### Recommendation #4: Engage the Command as well as the Schoolhouse

* Ethics development goes beyond just training and education. Deckplate leadership is still our most effective influence!
* Sailors at every level of the chain of command serve as positive influencers on ethical choices.
* One-on-one engagement among Sailors, peers, and leaders enables effective coaching, counseling, and mentorship; providing opportunities to address ethical decision making prior to, during, and after ethical challenges.
  + - *For example, continue to engage the Chief’s Mess – “the backbone of our Navy” with perhaps the most direct influence – in regular and informal ethics conversations with junior Sailors.*
* The Commander/Commanding Officer is the moral arbiter for the command and sets the standards of behavior and performance that contribute to esprit de corps, unit cohesion, mission accomplishment, and ethical climate.
  + - *For example, foster a command climate that spotlights successes and rewards positive behavior (vice a command climate that spotlights failure and stresses punishment.)*
* Encourage the application of ethics education and training on the deckplate.
  + *For example, set the command climate for Bystander Intervention. Remind Sailors of their responsibility to step in and intervene when a situation is not right.*
* Develop a view of the Schoolhouse (and service college) as opportunities for personal and moral development.
  + *For example, build participation in, and attendance at, available training and educational opportunities into career progressions.*

### Recommendation #5: Engage both ethics training and ethics education

* We train for compliance (and competence); we educate for knowledge and understanding. With knowledge development we better address the domains of the unenforceable and ethical “gray areas” that require moral thought.
* Together, training *and* education produce demonstrably greater allegiance to Navy Core Values and the Navy Ethos, than training (compliance) on its own.
  + - *For example, utilize ethics training to reinforce compliance to legal rules and policy standards.*  *Provide ethics education that offers a broader understanding of ethics, self-awareness, and personal development.*

### Recommendation #6: Intersect ethics development with leader development

* Stand up the Naval Leadership and Ethics Center (NLEC) around the existing functions of the Command Leadership School.[[12]](#footnote-12)
* NLEC will guide the development of leaders with a strong, abiding sense of their responsibility, authority, and accountability, and who are committed to Navy Core Values and the Navy Ethos.
* NLEC will provide leadership education and training, curricula support, leading-edge research, and assessment of leadership effectiveness across the Navy to ensure our leader development activities remain current and relevant.
* Conduct further study on how we measure the character and integrity of our people. If we measure these things and hold people accountable for the results, cultural change will rapidly follow.
* The attributes, behaviors, and skills expected of Navy leaders at all levels coincide with expected ethical standards. Leadership and ethics are inexorably intertwined.
* The Leader Development Outcomes (LDOs)[[13]](#footnote-13), which specify leader expectations for officer and enlisted, E-1 to O-10, provide a useful tool for both ethics and leader development.
* When coupled with the other recommendations, application of the LDOs will influence both individual leader development and the overall culture for Navy leadership and ethics.

# Conclusion

This paper is intended to continue the dialogue which will broaden our perspective and lead to actions necessary to improve ethics in our Navy. The overarching discussion drives us to a set of questions we must continually ask ourselves with regard to our culture for Navy ethics:

1. Are we doing what is required to maintain our trust with the American people as the naval profession?

2. Are we investing in the development of our people to enable them to decide and act instinctively with character and integrity?

3. Are we providing the tools to enable our senior enlisted and command leaders to effectively coach, counsel, and mentor their Sailors?

4. Are we creating ethical climates where good moral choices are more salient than bad ones?

5. Are we providing the right opportunities at the right time for personal and moral development?

6. Are we appropriately utilizing policies and procedures to anticipate rather than react – to improved ethical decision making for our Sailors?

In our “As Is” state of ethics in our Navy today, the responses to these questions are not a binary “yes” or “no”, but rather somewhere along a continuum. However, the answer to the question “Can we do better?” is an emphatic “absolutely”. Our Navy Ethos charges that:

*“We are patriots, forged by the Navy's core values of Honor, Courage and Commitment. In times of war and peace, our actions reflect our proud heritage and tradition.”*

Our goal, therefore, should be to establish a culture for Navy ethics such that we have confidence that every Sailor – in every community – will fully embody, uphold, and operate from Navy Core Values and the Navy Ethos.

Fortunately, we have the opportunity to build upon existing foundations and draw lessons and examples from various communities (see Appendix B, for example, of character development efforts in the SEAL/SWCC community). Other efforts such as *The Navy Leader Development Strategy, The Navy Education Strategy 2025* and the *21st Century Sailor* all align to advance the Navy’s approach to ethics development, education, and training*.* Importantly, we must engage the positive influencers in the lives of our Sailors, namely the chain of command, mentors, and especially our families, to collectively invest in the character development of our people, build ethical behavior, and commitment to the naval profession.

# APPENDIX A

## Ethics Terminology

Given the multiple theoretical underpinnings that were applied to our understanding of ethics, it follows then that an exposition of various ethics terminology is warranted. There are many terms, often used interchangeably and not always with a consistently shared meaning. Consider the following contextualized compilation[[14]](#footnote-14):

**Ethic/ethics**: a code of conduct, especially in the setting of a profession.

**Ethos**: the character or culture of a profession or professional organization; the ends or ideals it serves and the professional standards of conduct it endorses and inculcates.

**Character**: the emotions and moral virtues or vices typical of a particular individual; that individual’s moral disposition. As a positive term (=“good character”), a moral disposition that controls emotion and issues typically in virtuous behavior or right action.

**Integrity**: a sense of personal worth or honor that predisposes an individual to virtuous behavior or right action.

**Morality/moral principles**: the principles of right action from the point of view of the individual; the principles typically guiding/defining virtuous behavior.

**Virtue**: a disposition to right action, inculcated by learning and habituation. (In classical times, four so-called “cardinal virtues” were commonly recognized: courage, moderation or temperance, justice, and wisdom or practical judgment).

**Culture**: patterns of behavior in an organization that develop over time in response to (often unconscious) organizational or societal imperatives and can be very difficult to alter. A professional ethic is an explicit part of an organization’s culture.

**Command climate**: patterns of behavior in an organization reflecting a mixture of organizational culture and the leadership style of particular senior officers.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**From Webster’s II New Riverside University Dictionary**

**Ethics:** the rules or standards of conduct governing the members of a profession.

**Ethos:** the character, disposition, or basic values peculiar to a specific population or culture.

**Character:** the combination of emotional, intellectual, and moral qualities distinguishing one person from another; moral or ethical strength or integrity.

**Integrity:** firm adherence to a code or standard of values.

**Morality/moral principles:** rules or principles of conduct

**Virtue:** moral excellence or goodness.

**Culture:** the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns typical of a population or organization at a given time.

**Command climate:** patterns of behavior in an organization reflecting a mixture of organizational culture and the leadership style of particular senior officers.

# APPENDIX B

[The following summary written by CDR Jay Hennessey provides an overview of a new approach to selection, training, and development utilized by Naval Special Warfare (NSW) Basic Training Command (BTC).]

## “Teammates – the Art of Selecting Character and Competence” [NSW]

By Commander Jay Hennessey, Commanding Officer, Basic Training Command

***Have you ever served in a platoon or boat detachment and wondered how someone made it through training…***

**The Problem**: All selection and training programs try to avoid two fundamental mistakes: deselecting/dropping good candidates; and selecting/qualifying bad candidates. While it is nearly impossible to measure the missed “benefit” from those who attrite, we have seen first-hand the impact of selecting and qualifying the wrong guy – it can be catastrophic. This is especially true in an organization like NSW where the strength and success of the unit relies heavily on each individual’s contribution to the ***Team***.



**Selecting the right men to join the ranks of Navy Special Warfare cannot be based on physical performance alone – NSW requires additional tools to select, train and develop our future Teammates – Men of Character and Competence.**

Accordingly, leaders at the Naval Special Warfare “Schoolhouse”, Basic Training Command, continuously seek ways to mitigate this risk – ultimately select and qualify only the best candidates.

Over the past 18 months, NAVY SEAL and SWCC Training cadre identified two opportunities to mitigate this risk. The first opportunity identified was the historic over-valuing of physical performance and undervaluing of the character attributes. Simply put, ***Selection Error*** – graduating fit athletes who were not good *Teammates (Quad III)*.

Senior cadre members often felt that their hands were tied. They observed behaviors of trainees that were not consistent with the SEAL and SWCC Ethos. However, since the trainees were passing all their test gates, they were progressing. Or as the 1st Phase Master Chief once commented, “Hey sir, this guy may be passing our test-gates, but I would not want him on my team. I don’t trust him and he’s not a team player. I see it, my cadre sees it, and his classmates see it.”

The second opportunity identified was the *schoolhouse’s* inability to track each trainee’s character and performance throughout the respective pipelines. The only time the command flagged a trainee’s record was when he failed a test-gate (predominately physical). However, there was no method to track the “character attributes” that both fellow students and experienced cadre members observed. To the cadre, these were best explained as the “***blind spots***” of the pipeline.

The SEAL and SWCC Pipelines are 63 and 28 weeks respectively. Intuitively, this should be enough time to select and assess the trainees; however, the staff recognized that blind spots occurred at the transition of each phase of training with very little turnover between staffs. Of course the staff usually was aware of the most and least successful students – they always stood out. The problem was mapping the progress of the rest of the pack.

The ***Blind Spot*** became most evident, however, when a student failed a test-gate. At this time, the trainee would go to a student performance review board. In this board, the command’s most experienced cadre would assess that trainee’s performance to date and determine if this trainee should remain in the pipeline. Has he been a ***good teammate***? Has he been ***trustworthy***? Did he show up ***on time with the right gear***? Did he prioritize the ***team over self***? Would his classmates and instructors ***choose him for their team***? These critical questions are at the root of selecting the right *Teammate*.

Unfortunately, the board found that cadre members were often ill prepared to answer those questions. Instead, the answer was usually, *“…in assaults he is really struggling. Otherwise, I don’t know….we have only had him for 2 weeks*.”



In this scenario, the trainee in his 2nd week of Assaults training has been in the SEAL Pipeline for 42 weeks – certainly a reasonable expectation to know a bit about each trainee’s character.

**The solution**: The answer was clear – determine what matters most to being a SEAL and SWCC operator and measure it. Then, create a process that maps each trainee’s performance and progress.

**What matters most in selecting *Teammates*?**

The issue of ***Selection Error and Blind Spots*** sparked incredible dialogue among senior cadre members. Collectively the comments from the cadre were similar. One senior enlisted stated, “I don’t really care how fast a guy is on the four mile run, or two mile swim…as long as he is fast enough; I want to know if he is going to be a good Team-guy. Will he have my back? Can I trust him….that’s what we need to be testing.”

**Reputation is the Currency of NSW**: Most would agree that establishing a strong reputation as an operator and a teammate is crucial to eventually succeeding in the Teams. With this in mind, the cadre believe that providing on-going and constructive feedback to a trainee on his performance will not only help address the challenges of ***Selection Errors*** and ***Blind Spots***, but will also help future trainees succeed – our ultimate goal. Too often struggling students are unaware of their substandard performance, or they have not been properly counseled on how to improve.

Step 1: Solicit feedback. BTC Staff formalized an ***anonymous*** peer evaluation system that had been utilized in a variety of ways for many years. In the new system, students would answer more questions about less people. Rather than trying to evaluate their entire class, each trainee would provide and receive feedback from trainees in his squad. In addition, each trainee would be asked a few additional questions:

* + - * Is anyone in the class performing so well, or so poorly, that he is worth mentioning?
      * Is anyone in the class at risk of embarrassing NSW or himself due to his conduct?
      * Are there any natural leaders in the class?

Step 2: Squad Mentors. BTC Cadre leveraged the strengths of this “Squad-Model” by assigning a single instructor to each squad – the idea being that rather than instructors looking at an entire class, one instructor can get to know a squad of trainees. By the end of a block of training, the instructor should know how everyone is performing. Finally, while the trainees are conducting peer evaluations, the mentor answers similar questions on every member of his squad.

Step 3: Provide feedback. At the end of each phase of training, the squad mentors and phase leadership provide feedback to each trainee. At this time, the trainee receives the ***anonymous*** feedback from his squad members, and direct feedback from his mentor. Each trainee should be well informed on his performance and any areas in which he needs to improve.

**So What**: What’s the “***so what***”….*remember the first question presented*?

***Have you ever served in a platoon or boat detachment and wondered how someone made it through training…***

The “***so what***” is that cadre have measurable data with which to make decisions – decisions determined by trends, not sporadic occurrences. It is not uncommon to see peer evaluations that reflect a “stressed friendship”; or others that illustrate an immature perspective of someone in the class. The cadre are well armed to sift through the data and determine legitimate issues versus personality conflicts. In the end, the cadre is better armed to be intrusive with problems in the class. From potential alcohol issues, to trainees exhibiting behaviors inconsistent with NSW Ethos, the cadre is informed with quantitative and qualitative information to make decisions.

***In the end, this methodology has removed students from the pipeline who have passed every single test gate; similarly, it has provided additional opportunities to trainees who have stood out as stellar Teammates.***

**End of the Gray-Man**: Finally, the methodology provided cadre with insight on the rest of the class – the guys typically referred to as ***gray-men.*** Assigned mentors were now able to have tighter relationship with a smaller number of trainees; and if the mentor missed noteworthy behavior, the peers picked it up. In the end, the methodology enables mentors to be more informed and better equipped to lead, coach and mentor all trainees to be successful ***Teammates***.

**Informed cadre – informed trainees**: In the end, this methodology is about helping trainees become better teammates by providing them honest and ***anonymous*** feedback. Some might argue that evaluations and fitness reports are designed for that purpose; however, in reality, those reports are really only utilized for promotion and are completely void of any constructive criticism.

Conversely, this methodology is not designed to influence promotion or advancement – it is designed to tell the individual operator how he is meeting the mark of a ***Teammate***, and how he could do it better.

**Potential Way Ahead**: As the Basic Training Command codifies this process at the schoolhouse, NSW is exploring how this may apply to the rest of NSW, by evolving “word of mouth” feedback, with a consistent process for the Teams.

# APPENDIX C

## Mapping Naval Special Warfare Methodologies to Ethics Recommendations

The NSW approach to deliberate and integrated character development within their basic training systems aligns with the Recommendations suggested in this paper.

**Recommendation #1: Inculcate understanding of the “naval profession”**

* Members of the SEAL and SWCC community, as with most of our 18 communities, identify most strongly with their community rather than the naval profession. Thus, the SEAL and SWCC Ethos permeates all selection, training, development, and evaluation.
* [Note: To the degree that we can develop as strong of an identity with our *naval profession* – and our Navy Ethos – as we have with our respective communities, the stronger our Navy will be.]

**Recommendation #2: Construct “good barrels” and cultivate “good apples”**

* NSW recognized that some of their selection and training processes (specifically, overvaluing physical performance and undervaluing character attributes) created blind spots in their development pipeline and missed opportunities to select, train, and develop the best people.
* As a result, NSW has constructed “better barrels” to better enable cultivation of “good apples.”
* The new NSW system includes deliberate, on-going, integrated, and constructive feedback processes along with opportunities to correct/improve behavior and actions, which demonstrates *proactive* investment in the character development of their people.

**Recommendation #3: Build a culture for Navy ethics beyond compliance**

* From the NSW perspective, a culture of compliance equates to a culture of physical performance – where failing a physical test-gate garners the most attention, to include performance review boards.
* Absent from this culture was/is awareness – and assessment – of important character attributes critical for NSW team success (e.g., trustworthiness, selflessness, good teammate, etc.). The new system deliberately incorporates peer and leader assessments of character attributes as development tools.
* With the new NSW system, a “red flag” translates to *“an opportunity to further develop and help trainees succeed”* – vice a red flag equating to failure.
* As a result, the new system places even greater, if not equal, emphasis on character as they do (physical) competence – initiating the shift from a “compliance only” culture to a “competence and character” culture.

**Recommendation #4: Engage the Command as well as the Schoolhouse**

* Within the NSW system, the senior cadre, squad leaders, and *peers* are trained, and provided the tools to, effectively mentor and offer constructive feedback.
* The system sets the conditions for – and connects to – the graduates’ 1st platoon to continue the development process following BTC.

**Recommendation #5: Engage both ethics training and ethics education**

* The system provides the foundation for further training and education on character development at subsequent career milestones (e.g., E6, E7/O3, E9)

**Recommendation #6: Intersect ethics development with leader development**

* The system leverages character development to also identify – and further develop – leaders within their teams.

# APPENDIX D

**DRAFT COMMAND CHARTER**

## NAVAL LEADERSHIP AND ETHICS CENTER

MISSION

The Naval Leadership and Ethics Center (NLEC) inculcates the fundamental tenets of ethical leadership throughout the naval profession, from Seaman Recruit to Captain. NLEC guides the development of leaders with a strong, abiding sense of their responsibility, authority, and accountability, and who are committed to Navy Core Values and the Navy Ethos. NLEC provides leadership education and training, curricula support, leading-edge research, and assessment of leadership effectiveness across the Navy to ensure our leader development activities remain current and relevant.

FUNCTIONS

1. Leadership Education and Training. NLEC will deliver first-rate, role-specific leader development that builds confidence and competence in attaining Leader Development Outcomes in our Navy professionals, from Seaman Recruit to Captain. NLEC retains at its core the responsibility to develop leaders at the command level, including Major Command, Commanding Officer, Executive Officer, and Command Master Chief/Chief of the Boat.

2. Curricula Support. NLEC will partner with accession sources, the Center for Personal and Professional Development (CPPD), the Senior Enlisted Academy, the U.S. Naval War College, and the MCPON’s Leadership Mess on developing Navy-wide leadership and ethics curricula that support effective leader development and strengthen our collective stewardship of the naval profession.

3. Research. NLEC will conduct leading-edge research, in conjunction with the U.S. Naval War College, in areas such as self-awareness, command climate, organizational culture, and decision-making that will influence curricula and leader development activities.

4. Assessment. NLEC will assess leadership effectiveness across the Navy, analyze trends, and modify curricula to ensure currency and relevance. NLEC will partner with the U.S. Naval War College, academia, sister Services, and the Fleet to bring to the forefront best practices and areas for further work, and to ensure synchronization and alignment with the Leader Development Strategy.

TASKS

1. Leadership Education and Training.

a. Design, develop and deliver first-rate, role-specific leadership learning activities to command-level leaders and their spouses, including:

(1) Sequential Major Commanders

(2) Prospective Major Commanders

(3) Prospective Commanding Officers

(4) Prospective Executive Officers

(5) Prospective Command Master Chiefs/Chiefs of the Boat

(6) Command Spouses

(7) Command Master Chief Spouses

b. Partner with Commander, Navy Personnel Command (PERS-4) to detail only “due course” officers and senior enlisted Sailors to NLEC instructor billets.

2. Curricula Support.

1. Partner with accession sources, CPPD, the Senior

Enlisted Academy, the U.S. Naval War College, and the MCPON’s Leadership Mess to guide the design of consistent, current, relevant, and Navy-wide leader development activities.

b. Via the Leader Development Continuum Council (LDCC), make recommendations to the Advanced Education Review Board to fill identified gaps in the Leader Development Continuum from E-1 to O-6.

3. Research.

a. Identify best-practice education strategies for developing self-awareness, a positive command climate and organizational culture, and decision-making skills for leaders at multiple levels.

b. In conjunction with the U.S. Naval War College, convene an annual Leader Development and Ethics Symposium that includes sister Services, academia, and the Fleet.

4. Assessment.

a. Develop an assessment strategy to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks within existing Navy-wide leader development curricula.

b. Partner with the U.S. Naval War College and the Fleet to create and implement tools to assess the effectiveness of our leaders, particularly at the command level.

c. Provide to the LDCC annual reports on trends as they relate to the Leader Development Outcomes gaps and challenges.

COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS

NLEC is an Echelon 3 command assigned (ADCON) to the President of the U.S. Naval War College (PNWC). In order to effectively and efficiently execute its mission, NLEC shall be authorized direct liaison with the following commands and staff elements for the purposes identified below. NLEC is further authorized to pursue memoranda of agreement with the below listed commands and staff elements, where necessary, in order to specify and clarify supported/supporting duties and responsibilities.

1. DCNO(N1) will liaise with the four-star staffs to schedule Navy leadership engagements with students at NLEC. DCNO(N1) is the primary resource sponsor for NLEC, via PNWC; manpower and budget levels will be “fenced” by N12/10, with any changes requiring DCNO(N1) approval.

2. Center for Personal and Professional Development (CPPD) and NLEC shall have a mutually supporting relationship in order to ensure curricula consistency, from E-1 to O-6, in realizing Leader Development Outcomes.

3. Navy Personnel Command (PERS-4) will coordinate with all community managers for selection and management of NLEC course quotas, and serve as NLEC’s single point of contact for quota management. PERS-4 will propose “due course” officers and senior enlisted Sailors to President, U.S. Naval War College for duty with the NLEC staff. Commanding Officer, Naval Leadership and Ethics Center remains a nominative billet, selected per MILPERSMAN 1301-202.

4. Naval Services Family Line will provide a Director of the Command Spouse Leadership Course Steering Committee from within membership of the Naval Services Family line executive board.

# List of Contributors

RADM Robert Girrier

RADM Peter Gumataotao

RADM Michael White

CAPT Mark Johnson

RADM (Ret.) Jamie Kelly

CAPT (Ret.) Tom Bayley

CAPT (Ret.) John Meyer

Dr. Martin Cook

Dr. Tim Demy

Dr. Carnes Lord

Dr. Olenda Johnson

Professor Gene Andersen

1. *The Gallup Poll® http://www.gallup.com/poll/163052/americans-confidence-congress-falls-lowest-record.aspx* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Throughout this paper the term Sailor refers to both officers and enlisted personnel. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See, for example, Malcolm Gladwell’s treatment of the Broken Windows theory of crime in *The Tipping Point* (New York: Little, Brown and Co,, 2000), pp. 140-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Don M. Snider and Lloyd Matthews, Eds. *The Future of the Army Profession*. 2nd Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2005) for a collection of articles applying this concept of “profession” to military organizations. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Admiral James B. Stockdale, *“Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot”,* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Dan Ariely, *The Honest Truth about Dishonesty: How We Lie to Everyone – Especially Ourselves* for an overview of this research. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Lord Moulton. “Law and Manners”, *The Atlantic Monthly*, (July, 1924). <http://www2.econ.iastate.edu/classes/econ362/hallam/NewspaperArticles/LawandManners.pdf> (accessed 1 March 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Dan Ariely, *The Honest Truth about Dishonesty: How We Lie to Everyone – Especially Ourselves.*  (New York: HarperCollins, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid, p. 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid, p. 216 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Edgar Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 4th ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2010, p. 1) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Draft Charter attached as Appendix D [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Approved by VCNO August 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Compiled by Naval War College scholar, Dr. Carnes Lord [↑](#footnote-ref-14)