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## Reflections on Reading

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## REFLECTIONS ON READING

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**T**he Chief of Naval Operations Professional Reading Program (CNO-PRP) encourages sailors at all ranks and grade levels to seek to enhance their professionalism by reading books of consequence. The CNO has identified more than 150 titles for consideration in such professional-development efforts.

We begin with a question: What is the true measure of a sailor's identity? We often wrap ourselves in the defining terms of rates, designators, skills, and rank. Of course, these are important—they give structure to a system that manages talent and promotes individuals on the basis of performance and ability, establish incentives and organize pay scales, and create a unique culture that both pervades our institutional identity and transcends history. This is the identity of the Navy as a whole, not of the individual, and rightly the focus is on the organization, the unit, and the collective nature of sailors deploying together in harm's way.

Another question should be asked, however, especially when considering the old adage that the whole is often greater than the sum of its parts. Is the measure of an individual really a matter of collar devices, chevrons, or warfare devices? Or is it the individual's qualities—innate or learned—that engender a sense of purpose, or simply place weighted value on the characteristics that sailors should reflect—the core values, if you will? Together, sailors adopting the Navy's core values make the organization stronger. These values are primarily personal, but they are intertwined with the core attributes delineated in the CNO's "Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority."

Cohesion of a fighting force depends on having trust and confidence in each other and in the chain of command. Sailors are called on to serve the ship and each other, especially in combat, and trust in one's shipmates must be based on shared principles and a core identity. As stated in the Design, "Four core attributes of our *professional* identity will help to serve as guiding criteria for our decisions and actions. If we abide by," or internalize, "these attributes"—integrity, accountability, initiative, and toughness—"our values should be clearly

evident in our actions.” Deckplate education provides skill development through hardscrabble work and the satisfaction of knowing a job has been done well. A classroom, even if that classroom is a berthing space or barracks room, provides space for intellectual growth that supplements and strengthens the person and the organization.

The CNO-PRP provides a list of books that discuss core attributes of a professional identity. Books on leadership, management, philosophy, ethics, learning, perseverance, and teamwork—all terms familiar to sailors—blend stories of success and failure that shape the world in which we live and the nation and Navy we serve. Reading others’ stories, theories, and philosophies entertains and educates, but it also allows us to grapple with ideas that are not our own. We learn by fusing the lessons of history with our own knowledge, beliefs, and values. The core attributes are foundational in our professional lives, but we must dedicate time and effort to reflecting on why they are important. In doing so, we permanently embed these attributes in the foundation of our Navy for the current and future generations of sailors.

Thankfully, we have some resources to guide us.

- *Integrity*—upright and honorable conduct—requires conscious decisions in tough situations. Consistent adherence to our core values defines who we are as individuals and builds trust among people. In the CNO-PRP, Joseph J. Ellis’s book *His Excellency: George Washington* and *The Road to Character* by David Brooks offer testimony on the worth of personal integrity.
- *Accountability*—holding each other to objective standards—keeps us focused on the mission. Often we bemoan the repetition of general quarters and man-overboard drills, but when the time comes we must be able to stand shoulder to shoulder, with the understanding that everyone knows how to do the job. General Stanley McChrystal’s *Team of Teams* and Simon Sinek’s *Leaders Eat Last* are powerful tomes that argue that we are better in groups than as individuals acting alone.
- *Initiative*—approaching situations with open minds and ownership—promotes a willingness to challenge the status quo, but always with the mission in mind. “Ship, shipmate, self.” *Leadership on the Line* by Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky and *The Rules of the Game* by Andrew Gordon illustrate the importance of accountability.
- Books such as *The Conquering Tide* by Ian W. Toll and *Matterhorn* by Karl Marlantes illustrate the importance of *toughness*. Resilience in combat and an ability to carry the fight to the enemy despite overwhelming odds are hallmarks of our service. We “Don’t give up the ship.”

These examples found under the Core Attributes section of the CNO-PRP website are complemented by many other titles, many available in e-book or audiobook format. We encourage all sailors to visit the website or social media pages of the CNO-PRP and the Navy General Library Program. The resources are free of charge to sailors and are an essential part of the self-education so critical to the future of our Navy.

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