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Reflections on Reading

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REFLECTIONS ON READING

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Surveys have shown that truly successful people, from whatever walk of life, are driven by a desire for self-improvement and personal growth. They are never content to go into a holding pattern after achieving some milestone; they always are setting new goals and working diligently to accomplish them. This is particularly true within the U.S. Navy, since the organization selects and promotes its leaders on the basis of merit, demonstrated past performance, and indicators for probable future success. In January 2017, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) released his *Navy Leader Development Framework*, which can be found on the CNO Professional Reading Program (CNO-PRP) website and at www.navy.mil/cno/docs/NLDF_Final.pdf. The framework states as follows:

When we imagine truly world class leaders—those who are consistently at the top of the pack; victorious in the most challenging contests—they embody one essential quality:

Top leaders inspire their teams to perform at or near their theoretical limits. By making their teams stronger, they relentlessly chase “best ever” performance. They study every text, try every method, seize every moment, and expend every effort to outfox their competition. They ceaselessly communicate, train, test, and challenge their teams. They are toughest on themselves; they routinely seek out feedback, and are ready to be shown their errors in the interest of learning and getting better. When they win, they are grateful, humble, and spent from their effort. By doing all these things, great leaders bring their teams to a deeply shared commitment to each other in the pursuit of victory.

The framework details two parallel lanes that sailors should follow on their personal paths of leader development. Lane 1 develops operational and war-fighting *competence*, and lane 2 develops *character*. There are three methods to move down the path: education and certification obtained from a network of *schools*; *on-the-job training* and qualification; and “[s]elf-guided learning through reading and other forms of research and self-study.” Of particular interest to the

managers of the CNO-PRP is the role that a career-long commitment to professional reading can play in building the leaders the Navy and the nation will need in the future. The framework further states as follows:

- “Self-study is . . . important in character development, and the opportunities have never been better. The CNO’s suggested reading list provides a jumping-off point to build knowledge about both competence and character.”
- “The intensity of one’s self-guided learning effort is perhaps the most direct reflection of the drive to be the best leader possible.”
- “Leaders with the passion to make themselves and their teams the best do not wait for schools . . . they get to it on their own.”

Reading can serve as a form of “connective tissue” between people, and can provide concepts that help facilitate the very personal connections between leaders and subordinates. Some books are great for giving us ideas, methods, and tools; other books are instructional about how to use these things; and others paint a vibrant portrait of leadership as a process through which we recognize the value of every person with whom we connect. Each of these is fundamental to organizational leadership, and reading can help us learn about ourselves and what the framework of leadership looks like.

All sailors are encouraged to spend some time investigating the wealth of information available on the CNO-PRP website. It lists the titles of over 150 books of interest and direct relevance to all segments of the Navy—all warfare and staff communities, officers and enlisted personnel, and Department of the Navy civilians. It provides links that enable registered users of the Navy Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) digital library to download digital versions of many books. The site even recommends movies and videos that illustrate aspects of the Navy’s history and heritage. Admiral Richardson has said: “If you find just one book on this list that challenges you as a leader, then it has been a success.”

The CNO-PRP management team challenges every sailor to read at least one book from the program each month during 2018. We guarantee this effort will make you better able to contribute to maintaining maritime superiority for the nation.

JOHN E. JACKSON