MOC Updates from MOC Directors: SIXTH Fleet

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SIXTH FLEET achieved our MOC Certification in February 2017 during AUSTERE CHALLENGE 2017, a 10-day USEUCOM theater-wide exercise. I’m proud (and relieved) to report that our MOC did well. If USFF N7’s Russ Williams could have handed out Battle E’s – we would have gotten one. (ACOS and I are planning to paint one on our C6F Battle Building).

While the whole thing is still fresh in my mind, I wanted to share my thoughts on how we prepared for success. This is humbly submitted to you, fellow MOC Warfighters, for you to see what worked here and decide for yourself if you want to take it aboard and employ it in your MOC.

If I had to condense it down to five essentials, it would be these:

1. MOC-D Owns it.
2. Have a plan. Start two years out, or if you’re already inside that, start now.
3. Get command buy-in to clear the decks for the certification week.
4. Challenge the Crew.
5. Get Chaps involved.

Now, if you have time to read more, let me amplify with a few thoughts. The five essentials run into each other at some point but at the beginning it has to start with owners and plans. MOC-D owns the MOC and therefor owns the MOC Cert. No one else on the staff is going to have the ability to harness the rest of the command to accomplish such an ‘All-Hands-On-Deck’ event. N7, who owns Staff Training and the process of the certification, certainly will work hard in preparing for it but does not have the organizational power to drag some of your directorates through Kuebler-Ross’ 5 Stages of Death and Dying.

Moreover, it will take MOC-D’s vision to look two years out and begin shaping it. The CCDR exercise schedule is fixed far enough in advance to allow for a choice of which exercise will work for the certification. Major exercises are often over a year in the making. The MOC Training Team will review the training objectives from the past two years for your certification. If you begin planning this two years in advance, you control this process. If you wait until 6 months before certification to begin, then you’ll realize that there are some things your MOC has missed which you will not be able to recoup in time. So, get control of it by starting your plan two years out. Then, get really serious about it six months out; staff academics, battle drills, fast cruises, Rehearsals of Concept Drills, coordination with the other components and
your CTF’s. Finally, include a count-down counter at your morning brief: “120 days until MOC Cert.”

Best way to do this? Tie the exercise, and thus your certification, to your War Plan, the Big One – but you need time to put this in place; think Leonardo DiCaprio in “Inception”.

Getting command-wide buy-in for this could the hardest one of the five essentials. For one, the real world will get a vote during execution. There will always an X-factor you did not consider. There will be a crisis somewhere, which will take staff capacity to handle BUT you don’t have to kill yourselves by scheduling a simultaneous Black Sea CNO’s Symposium. So, get the MOC Certification time fenced off early and you will need everyone in the staff on board with that decision. Protocol and TSC have to know to turn away or reschedule every GO/FO or VIP, who wants to visit the command or extends an invite to the Commander. N6, Fleet Engineer, and ACOS have to know to not schedule major maintenance during this time, i.e. taking down the heads during this time would be bad. Your own CCDR conducting the exercise will schedule a competing event, like an all 6’s Syndicate Meeting right in the middle. You know that your Fleet Staff is large, intricate and involved. You cannot possibly know what everyone is planning for, so get the fence put up around the Cert Week early.

Best way to do this? Command-wide buy-in starts with the Boss. So, talk to the Fleet Commander. He will want a good MOC Certification result, especially one which successfully exercised his big War Plan. He can help you in a very big way by putting out the Commander’s Intent that there will not be a single distraction during the Certification.

Challenge the crew. You are going to have to motivate your team to work the extra hours both in preparation and execution. Remember, all this MOC Cert stuff comes on top of our standard duties. The real world will not stop for MOC Cert. If you don’t get your crew focused early and fired up, there will always be something more important to do than prepare for the MOC Cert – that is, until it’s staring you in the face next week and then it’s too late. In execution, keep the crew on board by helping them stay focused. Be creative in having things in place to help them save time. In our case, with our flagship, USS MOUNT WHITNEY, in the yards, we moved the crew aboard the Base, provided Spartan berthing, meals, and 24/7 gym access.

Best way to do this? Competition. Challenge your MOC to prove that they are the best Fleet MOC in the Navy. In ships, dets and squadrons, this type of challenge is easy. “We’re going to be the best DDG in the squadron” is a challenge everyone on board can get behind. Sailors want to be on the best ship in the Fleet. However, once you’re at the Fleet level, this challenge becomes impossible. Fleets don’t compete with each other;
they’re in different areas with different missions and manning. Fleets competing with each other doesn’t even make sense, unless it’s for the MOC Certification. That is the one thing each Fleet has to accomplish through the same process with pretty much the same evaluators. So, thrown down the gantlet – challenge your MOC to prove that they are the best.

Get Chaps involved is one way of stating that you will need divine intervention to succeed. I prayed long and hard and many times throughout this process, especially during my first staff exercise about 18 months before the Cert. Get Chaps involved is also a reminder that you will need everyone to help you. All Hands on Deck – means exactly that – All Hands, especially Chaps, because if you have Chaps involved in MOC Cert, then you will have everyone. One of my epiphanies in going through this is that this is not an MHQ versus MOC thing. The MOC needs the MHQ, you’re all part of the crew.

*Best way to do this? Get Chaps’ events into the Battle Rhythm. Include Bible Studies, Divine Services, whatever Chaps asks for, because this can only help and will support your crew’s resiliency in a stressful time. Plus, if you’re thinking of this, you’re thinking of just about everything,*

It’s certainly clear to me that while MOC’s are standardized to 80%, the remaining 20% of individuality is a big part of what makes up a Fleet’s MOC organizational culture and, thus, not necessarily everything suggested by me will work everywhere else, nor do I want to come across as arrogantly assuming I have all the answers. Nevertheless, I do want to share what worked in SIXTH Fleet with the rest of the MOC Warfighters in the hope that you can take some of it on board and succeed like we did.

In closing, sincere thanks to the MOC TT’s of USFF and NWC – you guys are true shipmates; with us on every underway period and exercise. We couldn’t have improved without your guidance, mentorship, and sound advice. Many thanks!

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CAPT McLane has turned over MOC Director duties to CAPT “Bingo” Vincent and will be joining the staff at COMSURFOR.