



*Do Our Core Values  
Need Modernizing?*

## Do Our Core Values Need Modernizing?

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As we work hard to steady the course after arguably the most change the Coast Guard has seen in decades, one might ask if our core values still remain current, or maybe even wonder if they are just too demanding along with the additional stress and pressures from change. I think the best way to approach this is to delve into each value individually, and then compare them collectively to what our organization values most today and how they relate to accomplishing our mission. First, let's ponder what values are. The most agreed upon definition of values are "*the principles, beliefs, and standards we feel are imperative to our success as an organization.*" I can't help but think of my days as young Boy Scout – Trustworthy, Loyal, Helpful, Friendly, Courteous, Kind, etc. Many of these values are taught to us by culture through parents, schools, religion, etc. Several years ago the Coast Guard identified three foremost values it finds essential in our members, and wrapped them nicely into what we refer today as our Core Values: *Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty.*

**Honor** is first on the list; it is overarching and must exist before the other values. Webster defines honor as *that which rightfully attracts esteem, respect, or consideration; self-respect; dignity; courage; fidelity; especially, excellence of character; high moral worth; virtue; nobleness.* As you can see, honor is indeed all encompassing, and must remain at the forefront of both our personal and professional decision making processes. In short, honor is to do what's right even when no one is looking.

With honor, it is then possible to earn and give **Respect**. Webster defines respect as *to consider worthy of esteem; to regard with honor.* To receive respect, we must both give it and act in a manner deserving of respect in return. Respect in the workplace can make seemingly impossible goals possible. A person that wants to work for or with another person will go the extra mile to make sure their goals are met and often exceeded. Additionally, respect amongst diversified teammates creates synergy, which is a

force multiplier made possible only through respect for each other. The results are a drastically reduced use of energy and resources in order to reach our goals. Additionally, through trust and empowerment we can communicate respect in others by giving them the opportunity to provide new and creative solutions while providing the climate necessary for growth.

By definition, duty means conduct, service, or functions that arise from one's position. Again, all things covered by honor. Therefore **Devotion to Duty** is to uphold your service, enhance the service and its mission through increased responsibility, all-the-while conducting ourself professionally. Duty is our responsibility as public servants, and acting responsibly means to swiftly hold ourselves accountable. . Furthermore, accountability must be taken as early as possible or soon others will soon begin questioning our motives. Would I have held myself accountable if I knew for sure that no one would have found out? It is also our *duty* to hold people accountable that we are responsible for, and doing so at the earliest possible opportunity allows them to learn, recover, and move on. If we don't hold our self and others accountable, the snowball effect kicks in and the next indiscretion will be even worse.

The Coast Guard's core values are ageless, powerfully simple, and provide us with a foundation on which we can use as a compass to guide us as we progress in our careers as well as at home.. Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty are values that will remain of utmost importance to our service regardless of organizational changes. Demanding? Maybe, but the alternative would be at best lukewarm and bring inevitable failure to our country and each other. I have yet to meet someone who sought employment with the Coast Guard because they thought it would be easy. The prevailing reasons I hear are because of the many challenges, positive impact we can have on society, and the boundless pride in serving our country. It is not realistic to expect perfection, nor would we learn if mistakes were prohibited. But as leaders, we must define ourselves by the very core values the service expects of us, showing subordinates that a violation of core values is also a personal act of disrespect towards you. If the core values are not

reflected in our daily life, we enable the same of others as it perpetuates down the chain resulting in character weakness and lack of integrity.