

Leading Others through Action



By: ENS Victoria Borges

On the day of swearing in, Coast Guard recruits at Cape May, NJ and “swabs” in New London, CT are given the task of memorizing “indoc”. It is not long before the new members hear the names Douglas Munro or William Flores. These are two well-known heroes of the sea going service. They demonstrated great heroism and the ability to lead despite their rank. These heroes, among many others, are still mentioned today because of the resilient leadership characteristics they possessed. The common theme defining them as admirable leaders was their selfless hard work and diligence as they led by example. These qualities are sought in every Coast Guard member, enlisted or commissioned alike and goes hand in hand with one of the Coast Guard’s leadership competency referred to as “leading self.” This competency includes recognizing personal strengths and weaknesses to better one’s success. Instilling these leadership characteristics and encouraging leadership by influencing new personnel is critical in carrying out our mission.

The Coast Guard emphasizes leading others by influence. However, the word influence is loosely defined by the Coast Guard. So exactly what does influence mean? As I search for synonyms of the word, I surprisingly find the words pressure, control, authority, and manipulate. Each word is typically associated with negative connotations. So why does the Coast Guard use this word? Are these words really reflective of who Douglas Munro and William Flores were? Influencing others I believe is obtained through acting as a courageous and conscientious person yourself, instilling leadership characteristics upon others by example. Now this is more like who Munro and Flores were as leaders and likely the intent of the word “influence”. Being surrounded by intelligent and motivated achievers who are willing to sacrifice for the greater good is often contagious. Simply put, leading by example (influencing) encourages others to do the same without pressure, control, authority, or manipulation.

When young junior officers (JOs) graduate from the Coast Guard Academy or Officer Candidate School, finding the balance of influencing others can be a challenge. The crew often relies on JOs, seeking their advice, guidance, and knowledge. Only having limited experience and time with the Coast Guard, JOs find themselves faced with the challenge of leading others while still uncertain of how to complete tasks themselves. This is where leading by influence becomes a JOs best bet. By displaying their diligence in finding answers and discovering how to complete tasks to the best of their abilities sets an example, encouraging the subordinates of JOs to work with the same fortitude. This strategy aligns with the leadership competency of self awareness and learning. The ability to analyze your surroundings and to learn from other’s mistakes and your own enables success in the future. The impact of being a good example is paramount in the fleet. This same approach is applicable for junior enlisted members coming out of “A” school as they serve as an example to those around them as well. High performers have a very large influence on their subordinates through the example they set.

On the CGC Confidence, stationed out of Port Canaveral, FL, the JOs strive to make the unit the best in the fleet. This comes with long hours, numerous watches, and other tiresome tasks. Making up a large portion of the wardroom and having the most contact with newly enlisted members, leading by influence is critical. The ability to manage numerous collaterals and various tasks on a day to day basis is unthinkable for many, but through their actions the JOs demonstrate how others can achieve their goals as well.

Demonstrating to others that with perseverance anything and everything is possible is what I believe constitutes leading by influence. Like the past heroes of the Coast Guard, these JOs are influencing others by their strong examples in actions and commitment to achieve and succeed. So, when contemplating how to influence others in a positive way, begin with your own expectations. Aspire to be the best you can be and the impact of your actions on others will be greater than you could ever fathom.

Leadership competencies addressed: Influencing Others, Personal Conduct, and Self Awareness and Learning.