



# WHAT A DOLLAR BOUGHT ME



By CDR Paul Fawcett, USCG  
MIFC LANT



This article is a sequel to the article “My First Salute Opened a Door”, published in the Leadership News in the fall of 2000 and in RESERVIST in 2002.

## **What That Dollar Bought Me**

Sixteen years ago I was a newly graduated reserve Ensign waiting in front of Lincoln Hall at Training Center Yorktown for my ride (OCS was based at TRACEN Yorktown at that time). A passing Chief rendered my first salute and received my silver dollar. The Chief had never received a silver dollar before and was so overcome by the event that he came back and told me to seek out my Chief at my new unit and tell him to look after me. Well, it's been a few years; I thought I'd pass on what that dollar bought me.

### **Training**

It's no secret that most Chiefs would be happy to share training with you. In my case they were particularly excited to assist me with my chemical irritant (OC) spray training as part of my boarding team member PQS. But in all seriousness, most of my good Coast Guard training came from someone wearing anchors. Whether it was getting qualified as a boat crewman, learning how to decant water from a pollution sample, or conduct a law enforcement boarding properly, the Chief was there. Sometimes they didn't know they were teaching me, I just watched them and gained a wealth of knowledge from their experience.

Chiefs are uniquely placed in our organization to provide this type of training experience. We rely on our Chiefs to be our technical experts with a wealth of experience, practical knowledge, and schooling to know their craft. But it's more than that. We expect our Chiefs to know how to communicate what they know in a way that

the learner, regardless of rank/experience, not only learns the lesson, but *wants* to learn it, knows *why* their learning it, and *why* it's important..

## **Counseling**

“Sir, you know I’m your Master Chief, right?” Oh, boy. That meant I’m going to be told something I really don’t want to hear, but really need to. Read that statement again and see what the Master Chief was saying. “Sir”; I probably had three years of active duty and he had twenty five more than that, but he gave me the custom of the service and made me want to listen to what he had to say. “You know”; took into account that I knew something at a time when I didn’t know much, and gave me credit for it. “I’m your Master Chief”; that established a personal relationship. He wanted me to know that what he had to say was in the context of the special relationship Master Chiefs have with, well, whoever they chose to extend the privilege of that relationship to. It was a special relationship that I wanted to continue. He got my attention.

My Chiefs have frequently used their privilege of the anchor to tell me something that I really needed to hear and maybe should have known on my own, and didn’t. It might have been something about me or about one of my people like a welfare or disciplinary issue that needed to be addressed. If I listened, I secured their trust.

It’s non attributable from them, they don’t write my OER and I can hear what they have to say without feeling defensive. The best ones came in, shut the door, had a quiet, candid conversation, offered a potential solution, and left *me* to make the decision.

I also learned quickly that I’d better hear what they have to say, because if they saw something, my boss probably would too, and I’d really rather hear it from the Chief. Also, listening once, and fixing the problem, usually meant the next time there was a

problem they'd likely tell me again. If I didn't listen, well, the Commander could tell me next time.

### **Stress relief**

"There's no fatigue standards on Junior Officers." This proverb was passed to me tongue in cheek by a Senior Officer I worked for at a field unit. Truer words were never spoken. However, my Chiefs were watching and they saw what I could not, that fatigue robbed me of my ability to make good decisions, my morale, and my energy level. I could hide it from the boss when I saw him, but I couldn't hide it from them. They gave me an out. They allowed me to escape the building to get under way, visit them in their offices to let off steam, or work at their stations for a change of pace. Somewhat good natured ribbing also encouraged me to get back on the treadmill to improve my fitness and energy level when they saw I needed a push in that direction.

Sometimes I couldn't even see that they were using required training or operations as a way to reduce my stress. Law enforcement boardings, boat crew qualifications, or pollution investigation training, served to get me away from the high stress environment of the office and help refocus my prospective. The Chiefs stepped in to redirect me when they thought I needed it.

### **Today**

It was a well spent dollar, although I hope I've paid it back by looking out for my people, like the Chiefs looked out for me. The things that I outlined that the Chiefs did for me weren't magic; they've done for countless others. The lesson here is twofold: Chiefs: don't stop doing any of the above and please mentor the prospective Chiefs to follow these best practices. Junior officers: take note of the above, when the Chief comes

to visit with you, listen to what they have to say. It may involve swallowing your pride a little, but the reward is worth it. Emulate them when you can and take advantage of all they have to offer.

I'm a little more senior now and supposedly I don't need to be mentored by the Chiefs anymore. It's ok Chief; you come on by the office and tell me what you see, and what I need to know. I won't tell anyone, the coffee's on me.

**Leadership Competencies Addressed:**

*Influencing Others, Followership, Health and Well Being, Effective Communications, Mentoring, Taking Care of People*