

# A COAST GUARDSMAN FIRST

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**A**lthough we all come to the Coast Guard through different accession points, we're united by our core values of "Honor, Respect and Devotion to Duty." I would submit these words are not hollow leadership talking points; it's essentially the moral compass of our service.

We've all been trained to work as a team and serve with a common mission and a shared sense of purpose. We've also been trained to serve.

However, it seems recently that mentality to serve has shifted to complacency and unwillingness to step outside of our respective specialties or ratings, disregarding the greater good. We've enabled our workforce to accept a detrimental status quo and sometimes dismiss valid needs because, "*it isn't in our job description.*"

In my 16 years serving in the Coast Guard, I often encounter members who aren't willing to challenge the status quo or step outside of their comfort zone. They're not willing to take any calculated risk. Sadly, they seem to have forgotten the meaning of "devotion to duty," which is to serve others, and not themselves. How do you think the Life Saving Service would have performed with that mindset or sense of entitlement that we have today? I don't imagine the Life Saving Service would have its place in our hallowed history if those who carried out its missions suffered from that moral failing.

That's why all members of Life Saving Stations, from Cook to Keeper, responded immediately without question or complaint when there was a call for help or an emergency. I believe if all Coast Guard members led with the life-saving service credo, then we might once again remember that we are "Coast Guardsmen First."

I believe being a "Coast Guardsman First" requires that we live by the Coast Guard Ethos, remain humble servants of the maritime domain, and enthusiastically volunteer our time and services when it's our duty to do so; setting aside our specific title or specialty. It shouldn't be a question of ability; it should be a question of willingness.

I also submit we must serve by the Commandant's guiding principles:

- (1) 'Steady the Service' through shared understanding to steer vital initiatives to completion;
- (2) 'Honor our Profession' by enhancing our unique individual skill sets while also respecting generational experiences;
- (3) 'Respect our Shipmates' by helping to build each other up; and
- (4) 'Strengthen Partnerships' by collaborating to sustain and nurture professional relationships with our agency and industry counterparts

In the political looking glass, we must realize that the Coast Guard will continue to operate in a budget-constrained environment now and into the near future. Working within these boundaries, we'll need each other more than ever to responsibly manage the resources entrusted to us and to perform 21st-century missions expected of us.

As a guardian, leader, and shipmate, I implore each of you to recognize our noble duty to keep our organization relevant and viable through sound leadership practices, even if it means challenging a mission-crippling, "status quo."

So, the next time you find yourself thinking, "It's someone else's job to meet an assigned task," I challenge you to search your hearts and help when you can.

Remember our core values: HONOR your team, RESPECT yourself and others.

DEVOTION TO DUTY means your duty as well as your shipmates.

More importantly, it's time we recall the "team-oriented and mission excellence" mindset we've encountered at our various accession points.

As "Coast Guardsmen First," we are "Always Ready." Semper Paratus!