

CNO Podcast
17 September 2007

MC1 Chad McNeeley: Welcome to the CNO podcast for September 17, 2007. This week, the CNO has a message to the chief petty officer selectees.

ADM Mike Mullen: Hello everyone.

Today, I'd like to offer my congratulations to the more than 4,100 Sailors who this week will pin on anchors and become Navy Chief Petty Officers. It's a great achievement.

I don't need to tell you how much that means to our Navy. And I'm sure I don't need to tell you how great an accomplishment it is for you and your family. I think you already know that, or you wouldn't have pursued the rank in the first place.

But here's what I am going to tell you, as I've told anyone who has put on khakis, and that's lead. My expectation when you put those khakis on is that you will do that, pure and simple, every single day.

That's what we need you to do. That's what your Sailors and junior officers need you to do. It's what being a Chief is all about.

You are no longer a Machinist's Mate, Fire Controlman, Culinary Specialist, Operations Specialist, or you pick the rate. You are a Chief, and you are responsible for one thing and one thing only and that's leading.

I remember once, turns out it was a long time ago, when I was a young Gunnery Officer on a destroyer, still pretty green. The ship was in the middle of a gunnery exercise my first, and, of course, I wanted it to go really well.

It didn't. In fact, the gun didn't even fire. I was embarrassed and angry and I went to the Chief. I really started to let him have it. I demanded to know what happened, but he brought me up short, pretty quickly.

He said, "Lieutenant Mullen, there's about 5,000 micro-switches in that gun that all have to work perfectly for it to fire. Now, obviously, at least one didn't. Why don't you let me worry about finding out which one it was, and I'll keep you informed."

In other words, it was his gun, his gun crew and he was going to get it working. He was going to lead the problem.

I never forgot that day. I never wanted to forget that day. Because it reminded me who really runs the Navy. It's not us officers, for sure.

We certainly lead don't get me wrong. But if a command is running well, it's primarily because the Chief's Mess is running well.

When the mess is hitting on all cylinders when all those micro-switches are firing, there is no better command and when the chiefs' mess is broken, well, there is nothing worse.

I've seen it both ways, and I'm telling you there is no substitute for a Chief's mess that is out and about, that knows the crew and the captain and the wardroom as well

as they know themselves. That can take the pulse of a command in the blink of an eye, and make things happen.

That's what MCPON means by deck plate leadership. And I believe he is spot on. You can't be a Chief from behind a computer screen or in an email or even on the phone. You've got to be there, out on the deck plates with your people and their families. You've got to walk the spaces. It's the first principle of naval leadership.

As the MCPON says himself, it's knowing your Sailors and knowing your command that gives Chiefs their credibility. You're about to be invested with that credibility that special trust and confidence.

And special trust and confidence it won't just come from your division or your department or even your CO. It's going to come from the American people. They may not completely understand your rank or your responsibilities, but they will know you are set apart by your uniform and the way you carry yourself.

They will understand that you have a special place in the Navy, and they will expect much of you. As we all do.

We surely live in a dangerous world. We are a Navy at war in that world. And I believe it's the most dangerous time since I've been in the Navy.

We have Sailors, sons, daughters, husbands and wives in harm's way right now on the ground in Iraq, Afghanistan, Africa and elsewhere, not to mention thousands more at sea and it is to you, the Chief Petty Officers, those Sailors and their loved ones back home look to for guidance and a safe

return. It is a heavy load, a big responsibility. I have no doubt that you're up to it.

I'd only ask you one last thing.

Never forget that somebody paved the way for you to be here a coach, a teacher, a pastor, another Chief, somebody grabbed you by the hand and helped you up.

More than likely, it was more than just one somebody.

Now it's your turn. You must give that opportunity to someone else. You need to extract that same potential from your Sailors.

It's not enough that you have a seat in the Goat Locker. That's great. Now, you need to open up a seat, or two or three for a future generation of Chiefs. You need to be the mentor, the coach and the example. Like I said, it's your turn. Take advantage of it.

Again, congratulations to you all and thanks for service at this critical time in our nation's history. It matters. As does the service and sacrifice of your families, who helped make this day possible.

We can never do enough or say enough to properly recognize the role they play in keeping our Navy strong. It's a team effort, for sure and we are all grateful for their support.

So, enjoy those anchors, Chiefs. Enjoy the day. You've earned it. But tomorrow get out there and lead, Chief

Thank you.

MC1 McNeeley: Thanks for joining us for this weeks CNO podcast. Check back next week for our latest edition.