Sailorization: A Career-Long Process / 12 JUNE 17
NAVY TIMES, Vice Adm. Robert Burke and Fleet Master Chief Russell Smith

Tweak the words a little bit, and this quote might be the subject of a conversation in any chiefs mess or wardroom today.

The above caption came from a 1950 Life magazine article by Bill Mauldin, which featured a cartoon of an older gentleman looking suspiciously at a middle-aged man who, in turn, stared puzzlingly at a young boy. Any one of us could probably pencil in appropriate names for all three of them that would make any of our peers laugh.

We hear a variation of that theme at nearly every fleet engagement: "Today's generation of sailors isn't cutting it. When are you going to start sending us better Sailors out of boot camp?"

By any metric, today's sailors are the best we've ever seen. Go to a graduation ceremony at RTC and talk with those new sailors who have just swapped out their "RECRUIT" ball caps for ones that are labelled "NAVY." They are motivated, squared away, team-first and excited about what the future holds. It is nothing short of amazing to witness the transformation of these diverse individuals into U.S. Navy sailors who believe in and exemplify a common set of core values after only eight short weeks.

So what's the real issue?

What happens next depends on them, to be sure. But it also depends on the rest of us as well. And that is where some leaders are failing our sailors.

Sailorization - our Navy's professionalization process - really begins with graduation from Recruit Training Command. It always has been that way. This is a career-long process that ends only when a sailor is piped ashore for the final time.

Soon after completion of rating-specific training, sailors arrive in the fleet. Some come just weeks after finishing recruit training, while others spend nearly two years in their training pipeline learning the technical requirements of their trade. That initial motivation and excitement may have already been influenced - positively or negatively - by various encounters during the training experience. Regardless, these sailors are all looking for the same thing at this point - they are again full of hope and promise that they will play a meaningful role as a member of the warrior class that defends our nation.

This is a critical phase - the longest and most important of Sailorization - and must be squarely owned by our Navy's chiefs, the ones who most influence a sailor's development.

The foundational process taught at RTC that instils a rudimentary level of knowledge and understanding is just that - foundational. It requires continued pressure and heat to mold an individual into a sailor who stands ready to fight. The incessant reinforcement of gun drills, general quarters, battle stations, man overboard drills, damage control training and more - with high expectations and exceptional performance demanded by training teams - is what will forge young sailors into seasoned, experienced maritime warriors.

Deckplate leaders must be involved in both the professional and personal lives of their subordinates. Even the most basic of skills and structure must be rigidly enforced. They should insist that new sailors
address them by their appropriate rank, as they do the same. Seamen have earned that title. They must also help teach sailors how to cope with stress, balance their personal lives and professional responsibilities, ensure a culture of dignity and respect, ensure sailors are fit to fight, teach advanced technical proficiency and reinforce the core attributes of our Navy team. Most importantly, they must enforce military discipline.

These are difficult, time-consuming tasks, but are the most important part of the Sailorization process. Continued training and development in the fleet of sailors who have been given foundational knowledge at RTC will help them grow into who we need them to become - men and women who are ready to fight and win at sea, continuing the long blue line for generations to come.

We will continue to evolve and adjust what is done at RTC. Those adjustments will never replace the critical developmental role of fleet leaders. So let's embrace this vital mission and get to it!