

Women's Leadership Symposium 19 June 2009

Good morning. Stephanie, thank you for that kind introduction. It is truly a pleasure to be with you here today. It's early and you have a full agenda today, so let's get started. I'm reminded of a story about Lord Birkett, a British Nobleman not known for getting his message across in a "timely" manner. He once said, "I do not object to people looking at their watches when I am speaking. But I strongly object when they start shaking them to make certain they are still working." So, I'll know to wrap up when I see people looking down at their arms!

We face unique challenges as members of the United States Navy – striving to balance operational commitments with commitments to ourselves and our families. My wife and daughter are in the audience today and they can certainly attest to this! My wife has a Master's Degree in International Relations. She left a promising career with the Commerce Department to support my career, a career that has included eight moves in ten years, several geo-bachelor tours, and numerous deployments. When my daughter was younger, I was getting ready to go on deployment, and she asked me, "Dad, why do you have to leave again?" I explained to her that this was part of my job in the Navy. Her response was, "why can't you get a real job?" Even at her young age, she recognized that being a member of the Navy involves significant personal sacrifices.

You have probably all been challenged, at some point in your careers, by similar experiences. And, it is because of these unique challenges that events like this Women's Symposium are critically important – this symposium serves as an open forum to share experiences, encourage mentorship and camaraderie, and provide you junior Sailors with the opportunity to learn from incredible role models who have lived these challenges and achieved success such as:

YNCM (retired) Anna Dervartanian (pronounced DER-VAR-TAIN-EEAN), the Navy's first female Master Chief in 1959. It's an honor to have you here.

Rear Admiral Michelle Howard, the first African-American woman to command a ship in the Navy.

CMDCM Jackie DiRosa, the first female Fleet and Force Master Chief in the Navy....just to name a few.

These women are all trailblazers, clearing the path for the next generation of female Sailors to follow – we owe them a debt of gratitude for all they have accomplished. They have laid the foundation for us to start to create new paths to success in the Navy.

We are a Navy Total Force of almost 332,000 active duty personnel, 67,000 reservists, and 188,000 civilians serving around the world. As an integral part of this Total Force, over 51,000 women are making significant contributions across the Navy every day - from saving lives as search and rescue swimmers to navigating ships as master helmsmen to patrolling streets as security force members.

In 2009, more than 30 female surface warfare officers have commanded ships. Five have held major operational commands. Nine female aviators have held command of naval air stations, air wings, and helicopter squadrons.

We have come a long way since the repeal of the Combat Exclusion Law in 1994.

As much as we have accomplished, we are still in the beginning stages of what I define as an ongoing journey – a journey from words, to actions, to culture change. It is this journey that I would like to talk to you about today.

II. Words

All forward progress begins with dialogue – to better understand the issues and their implications, the operating environment, and potential solutions.

We have engaged in “dialogue” about issues facing women in the military through various mediums – surveys, focus groups, and more recently, online social networking. For example, within the surface warfare community, Rear Admiral

Deborah Loewer began regular communication with junior women through a series of e-mails called “SWO Network News.” This has expanded into a quarterly newsletter under the guidance of Rear Admiral Howard. In the aviation community, female aviators converse about a range of topics through the “Leading Edge,” a virtual online community. What has this “dialogue” revealed?

The “face” of our nation is changing – we are seeing growing numbers of women and millennials entering the workforce.

Right now, women make up over half of the college graduates in the United States.

Approximately 50 percent of professional and graduate degrees are earned by women – this is expected to grow to 66 percent over the next decade.

We are seeing this talent enter the Navy in greater numbers. In 1974, the first woman was commissioned through NROTC and in 1980, the Naval Academy graduated its first female officers. In 2008, 28 percent of the entering NROTC freshmen were women. The Naval Academy class of 2013 is 21% female, up 1% from just last year. These represent the most diverse classes in history!

Still, only 15 percent of our Sailors are female and when they reach a decision point about making the Navy a career, females, especially those in highly operational fields, choose to stay at a much lower rate than males.

Many of our female Sailors feel they must choose between their careers and their families if they are to remain competitive. We want to change the perception from “Navy OR Family” to “Navy AND Family.”

We are also facing a generational shift in our workforce. We are bringing 40,000 millennials a year into the Navy – in a few short years, millennials will comprise the majority of the Navy.

These two groups, women and millennials share a common theme - a strong desire for career flexibility and life-work integration coupled with a desire to serve an organization whose values reflect their own.

This is not unique to the United States Navy - we are seeing these same themes emerge in the Navies of other countries as well. During my recent visit with my

counterpart in the French Navy, recruitment and retention of female personnel was a key topic. We talked about a number of issues that we have in common, including flexible career management, childcare, and employment assistance for spouses.

We recognize that in order to be competitive for this emerging talent pool in the future, we need to provide opportunities for flexibility and life-work integration. We need to provide paths to success that do not require Sailors to choose between service and family.

Let me share with you what we're doing to get there.

III. Actions

We place our strategic efforts under the umbrella of becoming recognized as a "Top 50" organization. What does that mean?

We believe a "Top 50" organization focuses on both performance and taking care of their people. We believe that in areas where we can, we must embrace the philosophy that "work is not a place." An important part of this is developing a results-oriented work environment that supports life-work integration while maintaining a strong focus on performance.

Our **Navy Women e-Mentor program**, introduced at last year's Women's Leadership Symposium, helps to create mentor-mentee relationships that are enriched by common culture, values, and shared experiences. Since it is conducted online, it is especially valuable for those who may not have the opportunity to develop face-to-face mentor relationships.

We are in the eighth month of the one year pilot period for this program and so far, it has been a tremendous success. Our goal was to enroll 500 participants in the first year. Since the beginning of the program in October 2008, we have enrolled over 800 participants.

We recently surveyed the program participants and I think this mentor said it best – "I enjoy sharing my experiences with women who are still rising in the ranks of the aviation community. We can't individually make all the mistakes and learn all

the lessons, so having a mentor (or mentee) is a great way to share corporate knowledge and make future generations' paths easier and more enjoyable!"

The **Career Intermission Pilot** is a program that allows Naval personnel to take a break from service without having a negative impact on their careers. The pilot program, involving 20 officers and 20 enlisted per year through 2015, offers an "off ramp" to participants if they agree to return to service after one to three years. These members can transition to the Individual Ready Reserve, while maintaining medical and dental benefits along with a small stipend, if they agree to return to Active Duty service for an obligated amount of time. Their careers stay intact because we stop the promotion clock and then reset their year group or date of rank when they return to active duty.

What benefits does this "career intermission" provide? We just held our first Career Intermission selection board a few weeks ago. The packages we received, from both men and women, demonstrate the value of a program like this to provide Sailors with the flexibility needed to address a wide range of situations. For example, we received packages from individuals who want to do humanitarian work, individuals who need to care for exceptional family members or relatives who are ill, and individuals who want to support the careers of their spouses. Every person that submitted a package has a desire to continue serving in the Navy.....but LIFE happens. The Career Intermission Program provides Sailors with the opportunity to deal with those life events while retaining their ties to the Navy.

The Virtual Command Pilot Program offers the opportunity to fill career-enhancing positions while providing stability for working spouses and school-age children and reducing costs associated with physically moving from one assignment to another. Let me share with you some examples of how this works:

After more than 20 years in the Navy, CAPT Jim Oakes, who worked on my staff in Washington D.C., was planning to retire to Pittsburgh, PA, where his family lived. After three years of working as a geographic bachelor in Washington, it had become increasingly difficult to make both service in the Navy and family work. With the

Virtual Command Program, CAPT Oakes is able to remain in his current job, but live and work out of Pittsburgh.

We have a young LT in Everett, Washington – a top performer, ranked #1 of 8 LTs on her ship. Her next assignment is in my organization here in Washington D.C. Rather than have her move across the country, we are giving her the flexibility to work virtually from Washington state.

Each of these individuals is able to remain part of the Navy family, while attending to the needs of their own families, through technology that is already available. And we, as a Navy, continue to benefit from their knowledge, skills, and experience.

We are also exploring additional ways to increase career flexibility on a daily basis, such as teleworking and other alternate work schedules.

At our headquarters here in Washington D.C., our goal is to have at least 40% of our staff telecommuting at least one day a week by the end of 2011.

I worked from home for the first time a few months ago. I now telework at least one day a week. Eventually, we hope to incorporate telework as part of normal business practices at all Navy shore-based commands.

Some of you are probably thinking, “how would this work at my command?” Now, I understand that teleworking may not always be an option in all situations, but perhaps it can be an option at some point in your career. I ask you to think outside the box. What can you change about the work processes, expectations, and culture in your organization to make it an option? You might be surprised at the possibilities that present themselves.

This brings me to my last point.....

IV. Changing the Culture

Taking action is important, but we cannot stop there. Policies and programs that support career flexibility are necessary. But, they cannot have sustained impact without a change in our culture. What I mean by this is fundamentally changing the

way people think about work, the workplace, and their careers. We need to move from flexibility used in “pockets” across the organization to a results-driven culture where flexible work practices are the norm.

So, what can we do to encourage this culture change?

Leadership support is vitally important. Leaders set the tone at the top. They are critical to ensuring that effective life-work practices are incorporated into the organization’s day to day operations. In order for culture change to occur, they must “walk the talk.”

Increase recognition that flexibility is not just a women’s issue. We are seeing this as a priority for the millennial generation and men as well. Flexibility is key to keeping all of our top talent in the Navy.

Promote a results-oriented work environment where we place greater value on performance than presence.

And, of course, we must have a way to assess our progress. We can do this by keeping the dialogue open through all of the ways I mentioned earlier (surveys, focus groups, etc.) and using meaningful metrics – we must move from tracking numbers of people with flexible work arrangements to measuring attitudes such as supportiveness for flexibility across all levels of the organization and willingness to participate in programs like Career Intermission and Virtual Command without the fear that their careers will be negatively affected.

V. Conclusion

We are still in the beginning stages of this journey. But, it is an important journey, and my support of it is both personal and deep.

Several years ago, I had just received my first star and was undergoing chemotherapy. Throughout this difficult time, the Navy afforded me the opportunity to work from home. I was able to remain engaged and productive, but most of all, I was still able to serve as part of the Navy family. This experience strengthened my loyalty to an organization that had in my mind, clearly demonstrated its commitment

to me. This opportunity should not be tied to my rank. I would like to afford these same opportunities to all of our Sailors.

Our Navy e-Mentoring program, Career Intermission and Virtual Command pilots, and teleworking efforts are all steps in the right direction. But, for continued success along this journey, I need your help.

This is my charge to you - Think outside of the box and continue to engage in dialogue about these issues. I want to hear your innovative ideas to enhance flexibility – e-mail me directly at mark.ferguson@navy.mil or call Stephanie Miller in our Women’s Policy Office. Share your thoughts with your female flag leadership on their Facebook page. Remember, all of the programs we have talked about today came from innovative ideas generated by you.

Thank you for your participation in this symposium, your enthusiasm, and your service. It was a great pleasure to speak with you today. I welcome any questions that you have.