

Admiral John M. Richardson, Chief of Naval Operations
Women in Defense Forum
14 June 2018

Admiral Richardson: Good afternoon, everybody. It's a real pleasure to be here, as I get settled into the podium here. And I've got to tell you, well one, I just treasure the coveted post-lunch slot. [Laughter]. It's actually just enough past lunch that all the blood sugar's really crashing down here. You know, that immediate one is not bad.

Look, I just want to thank General Carlisle, Hawk, and the entire NDIA for allowing me to do this and I know that there's this [slido] thing going on and we'll respect that, I suppose, but I really just like the dialogue back and forth. So I may depart from the [slide] and we'll go back and forth because as I sit here and just kind of have an engagement with you, it's that two-way dialogue that I really treasure, even for a group this big. I'm as eager to listen to what's on your mind as I am to tell you what's on my mind.

When you get invitations, they generally fit into about three different bins. Right? There're those invitations that you get, whether you like to do them or not you're going to have to do them, so you're going to go and do that event. Then there's those invitations that fit into a bin where well, you get an invitation and you don't really have to do it if you don't want to do it and you say no to all that stuff. But then there's those opportunities that arise where you, I really want to come and find a way to get on the agenda, and this is one of those opportunities. I've really been looking forward to this talk for some time.

I want to start by saying the reason I, you know, I'm going to propose really sort of a hypothesis to you. Right? I'm going to talk a little bit about some theory or some thinking, hopefully stimulate some thinking with you. I'm going to tell you a little bit about some practice, some progress or some programs that we have made, so theory and practice. And then we'll open it up to spend as much time on questions and answers and dialogue as we can.

One thing that's become very vivid to me, particularly as I've become more senior and taken on this job, is how limited my ability is to understand the entire Navy that I'm responsible for leading. Right? So we'll talk a little bit more about

that. But to just put the fine, fine point on it, with respect to diversity and inclusion, no matter how hard I try, I cannot understand, and probably not even get close to understanding what it's like to be a professional woman and grow up in America as a woman and be a professional and rise to the top. I just cannot approximate that. I need a lot of help doing that because we do need, I do need to leave the entire Navy, me and my team, and so this is the sort of dialogue I hope to engage in. You know, how can I do this better? Right? Help me out there. Okay.

I think there's some media in the room. What I'd like to do, I don't know how it's gone before, but what we'll do is confine the question and answers in the dialogue period to just the people attending the conference, and then if it makes sense we'll do a pull-aside with the media.

So we'll get going here. I've got kind of a lot of material to share with you so I'll go through it as quickly as I can.

In the Navy before we get started going anywhere we like to take a fix. We like to figure out where we are. And generally to take a fix, it takes three lines of bearing, right? And where those three lines cross, that's where you are if you've got a good navigating team.

So the three lines of bearing that I like to explore and use for our fix in this conversation are the bearings of humility, the bearings of inclusiveness, and the bearings of trust. Okay?

And what has emerged in my mind is, it goes right to the core of being competitive in today's security and technology environment. Right? And the model for leadership, the model for competitive leadership is changing as rapidly as technology is changing. So as I've sort of thought about that, and thought about how to train and build leaders in the Navy, these three lines of bearing and a couple of books that gave me great insight into those have informed me a great deal. So we'll start with humility, the first line of bearing.

One book that I recommend to all of you is a book by Dr. Hess, down at the University of Virginia. It's a book called Humility is the New Smart. Has anybody had a chance to read that? It's a terrific read. It is a great compilation of kind of what it means to be leading in this emerging technological environment where computers and smart machines are doing so much more of the

things that people used to do, and it's really in a way changing the basis for competitive advantage in a profound way.

So many of us, I would have to say me included, right? You heard my education. A lot of it has been technical, and a lot of what we do in the Navy is technical. And so as a result, a lot of what we value and promoted was the ability to do sort of technical computations or manage technical things. If you could sort of recall data and synthesize across databases in your head, bring that to bear at the right time, that was kind of a thing that was very valued.

Moving forward right now, machines are doing more and more and more of that. So this idea of the book is that the basis for being competitive, the basis for not only being competitive but for winning those competitions is shifting away from the ability to do these sorts of technical types of skills and more towards teamwork, more towards innovation, collaboration. The teams that can do that best are going to have a significant advantage over other teams. All right? That's including teaming with technology.

When Dr. Hess uses this word humility in the title of his book and in the book itself he doesn't mean kind of religious humility. That's often where our mind goes. But he describes it as a mindset about oneself that is open-minded, self-accurate, and not about me, that enables one to embrace the world as it is in the pursuit of excellence.

So it's this openness to the concept that you don't have all the best ideas, that you've got some gaps in your knowledge, you've got some vulnerabilities, if you will, and that you need to be bringing in people to help you do that in a collaborative way. That gives rise to a whole new set of skills to be competitive in this new technological security environment.

So that's the first line of bearing, is this professional humility in this new era of thinking machines, the smart machine age, if you will.

The second line of bearing was inclusiveness. It goes toward this idea of diversity. Diversity yes. Necessary but not sufficient unless that diversity is fully included in the way that you do business.

So you're going to get a reading list from this talk. The book that really kind of shaped my thinking in terms of the value of

inclusiveness is this book called Super Forecasting. It's by a gentleman named Philip Tetlock. What Dr. Tetlock did was, he did a survey of all of these prognosticators and talking heads, et cetera, and he actually graded them against, graded their predictions about what might happen against what's actually happened. He found that in the vast, vast majority, you might as well flip a coin. There's almost no correlation between what these "experts" did versus what actually happened. It's kind of 50/50. But he did do some research, and he found that some people, some organizations actually did break out and could out-perform their competition. They do better at forecasting complex things.

So teams were one of the secrets of success. Those people that can employ teams effectively are better at forecasting. And you have to kind of use your team in effective ways, in a way that doesn't allow them to come in and collapse towards group think, but you sort of keep different opinions and sum them up in interesting ways to try and get some sense of an average approach. Right?

And it goes further than that. It's not just teams. They are more effective than individuals, teams are, and diverse teams are more effective than homogeneous teams. Okay? So he's got the data. Solutions developed by diverse teams are 20 percent more innovative. Diverse teams were 58 percent more likely to accurately assess the situation at hand. Fifty-eight percent is a decisive advantage.

When we get more specific, what type of diversity. Studies have shown that, his studies, that gender diverse organizations are 50 percent more likely to out-perform the competition in being able to kind of forecast and predict the outcome of very complex organizations, which is a tremendously big part of what we want to do. Right? We want to be able to say look, I've got a plan, I want to influence the security environment in this way. I'm going to predict this particular outcome. Diverse teams are 58 percent more likely to predict that outcome. Okay?

And it applies to problem-solving in the Navy for sure. For our active duty force, women make up about 19 percent and we're trying to grow that so that we can have more opportunity to get at this diversity not just for its own sake, but in this era of great power competition, and I know you spoke about that some earlier today. It's going to be the decisive advantage.

So second line of bearing, second book, Super Forecasting by Philip Tetlock.

A third line of bearing is trust.

Has anybody read Super Forecasting? Okay, great.

Third line of bearing, trust. For this one I recommend the book Daring Greatly by Brene Brown. This book is just outstanding in terms of talking about the power of vulnerability. Here you've got to read the book to understand vulnerability not as a weakness but a vulnerability as something that you've got to overcome, move past, to get to a position of trust. Right? This outward expression of humility that leads to trust.

When you start to explore the research here and the space, I do a lot of reading in terms of managing complex and high consequence organizations, right? I came from naval reactors. A reactor plant or a submarine or an aircraft carrier, high consequence, very complex system.

When you read the literature in there, a lot of it has to do with resource management, crew resource management in cockpits of aircraft. And as I was reading it, one example really stood out. In this particular airline there was one particular pilot who had this legendary reputation for being outstanding in terms of the leader in the cockpit. He had a reputation that spanned not only through his particular airline, but throughout the airline industry.

And the story was told from the perspective of one of the people in his crew. He said he came in on a particular day, he's getting ready to take his flight. He looks on the manifest and he's like holy cow, I'm flying with this pilot who is this legend. So he and the flight engineer and everybody, the whole crew got together and said we have really got to be on our very top game. So they studied and they really kind of stepped into this thing with every molecule of energy that they had.

Then of course the pilot comes aboard, and for those of you who remember, for lack of any kind of analogy, he kind of came across like Columbo, right? He comes aboard, he's fumbling, and he's like where are we going? You know. What's our destination? I'm sorry, what's the -- he really created this sort of sense of vulnerability, and the crew's looking around at each other like is this the guy? You know. This is the legend? But it was a very deliberate approach by this person, this

particular pilot, to sort of understand that as good as he might have been, he's not going to be able to cover down on everything, right? So he deliberately created this sense of hey, let's all pitch in here. I'm going to need your very best to get us through this. It was a very deliberate approach.

So this idea of getting past this sense of vulnerability, bring people into that space, create that bond of trust, will get you to a team that is much higher performing.

We've adopted that, or we've tried to embrace that in our leader development framework in the Navy, and I'll talk a little bit about that later on.

So I talked about three lines of bearing, three books, right? First book is Humility is the New Smart; second book, Super Forecasting; and then Daring Greatly by Berne Brown. Who has read Berne Brown, Daring Greatly? Okay. Not a lot of hands going up. [Laughter]. You guys have got to go to the library more often. [Laughter]. There's a lot of good stuff out there.

So we fixed our position. Right? If you sort of sum together the insights from those three books, you can kind of come to a leadership philosophy that says hey, look. No single person has the greatest idea. We're going to need the modern security and leadership environment is going to require us to approach this as sort of a team sport. Collaborative skills, innovative skills, teambuilding skills are going to be highly, highly valued.

Technical computation is going to be better done by a smart computer with a great algorithm, right? So you can see this shift in the competitive advantage space over towards softer, more creative types of skills rather than computational types of skills.

So we've got our fixed position here.

I wanted to talk about one other thing, and it manifests itself in the maritime domain too, and we call it set and drift in the Navy, but it's really the current. So as you're steaming across the ocean or steaming down a river, the thing that you must accommodate for is the current because it will, you know, you may think that you're steering true north, but if the current is going west, you're actually steering something to the west of north. If you don't realize that, you're soon going to be off course, out of the channel and on the rocks. So you have to

kind of steer and adjust back to accommodate and account for this current.

In our business, in leadership, this current, this thing that must be recognized and accommodated for is unconscious bias. There's another body of work. In fact there are two Nobel Prizes here in the recent past that have been given to work that really supports and illustrates the power of unconscious bias, and the two Nobel Prize winners have both written books. One of them is written by Dan Kahneman. It's called Thinking Fast and Slow. I don't know if anybody's had a chance to read that. There you go. Thank you.

And then there's another one by Dr. Thaler called Nudge. He just won the Nobel Prize. And at the root, they talk about, they're giving an economist, right? This is a Nobel Prize for Economics. And some of the fundamental assumptions of economics are that people will make decisions that benefit them the most. You can kind of do a decision tree and whatever comes out to the best result, that's what people will decide. Except that there's countless examples of people who do something that does not benefit them the most. Sometimes they make decisions that actually disadvantage them. Right? And it's all because of these unconscious biases that we have that drive our decision-making.

I recommend both of those books just for the library of fascinating examples where people make decisions that cannot be explained by any kind of rational process, sometimes to the detriment of the decision-maker, the decider.

The idea is so powerful, that we can set up a question, you can create the conditions, and you can say look, I'm going to ask you a question and I want you to be mindful that this question is going to test and challenge this idea that you have heavy, unconscious biases built in. So I want you to be aware of that going in. You are heavily biased, so please be aware of this bias that's going to drive your answer. Think very clearly about that because otherwise you'll get it wrong.

So with all of that awareness, they then ask the question, the person will answer the question, and they will get it wrong, because these biases are so powerful and they're unconscious.

You can't get over them on your own, so it brings you back to this idea of team, and it brings you back to this idea of diversity, the power of diversity, because if we're all kind of

the same shape, look and feel, think alike, we're all going to have those same unconscious biases and you won't have sort of the canceling effect of having all of these diverse ideas which serve to shine light, the spotlight into all of our blind spots.

So if we not only have a diverse team, but we include that diverse team in the planning and the execution and the hot wash, we'll be so much more effective in overcoming these biases, overcoming set and drift, staying off the rocks.

All of this leadership involves a lot of conversations and inclusion and back and forth and working things out. A lot of those collaborative skills.

That's kind of the theoretical part of the talk. What are we doing about it, and it's a fair question to ask any leader. Show me the money. Where's the proof in the pudding?

I'll talk about sort of different phases of career in the Navy. Many of us, about one-third of our officers anyway, start our career at the United States Naval Academy. I want to talk about the composition of the brigade there at Navy. We just graduated a couple of weeks ago the class of 2018, about 1050 new ensigns and second lieutenants. And I'll tell you a little bit about the class that just came in that will graduate in 2022.

First, you heard, I graduated in 1982. Okay? So I'm the Class of '82. In fact, I just want to tell you a small world story here. This is not in my prepared remarks. But as I was coming in and I was getting miked up, this gentleman that was helping me, Jeff Darby, is the son of the Commandant of the Naval Academy when I went there. Admiral Jack Darby was his dad. In fact, 1982 is the class that Jack built, right? So it was this kind of very poignant moment. He said hey, I just want to let you know my dad was the Commandant of Midshipmen when you were there. I was like God, not only was he the Commandant, but we embraced him. We were the class that he built. Anyway, sorry. Talking about 1982, and there's Jeff Darby, and I was just kind of overwhelmed, getting misty-eyed here.

Anyway, I in 1982. Anybody of that vintage? Okay. Several. Listen, if you are a female leader in the room and you are of that year group, let's all give those ladies a round of applause.

One of my classmates, Admiral Michelle Howard, rose and became a four-star admiral, the Vice Chief of Naval Operations and the

Commander of Naval Forces Europe and Africa, and I will tell you, to hear my classmates' stories of entering the Navy in 1982, a vastly, vastly different environment than what we see right now.

In 1982, seven percent of our class was female.

The class of 2022, what is that, 40 years -- I don't even want to think about that. [Laughter]. Fort years, the class is 28 percent women. That's a good ratio. That's a pretty good ratio. We can bump that up, but that's the highest ever in terms of percent for an incoming class.

Just a couple of other thoughts about this. One, we didn't have to kind of put our finger on the scale one way or the other. It turns out that 28 percent of the applications were from women. So there was just this proportional representation in terms of folks the Admissions Board accepted. I think that's as powerful a signal as anything, right? Women are feeling like okay, this is a place where I'd love to apply and maybe go.

Over the past four years, just to continue with the Naval Academy, the starting point for many of our careers. The average graduation rate for men and women has been exactly the same -- 88.5 percent.

In terms of the participation and contribution to the brigade, for the brigade writ wide, 30 percent of the brigade participates in varsity athletics. For women, it's 40 percent.

In terms of the leadership positions. Female midshipmen are kind of over-represented, if you will, in leadership positions. There's absolutely no mathematical corridor or anything else that these selections are just made b raw talent. But in the past three years, four of six brigade commanders have been women. Just by virtue of the talent that they have.

Since 2006, the Naval Academy has had six Rhodes Scholars. That's a pretty high bar to achieve. Four of them have been women.

Even more telling, I suppose, is that when you talk to the leadership on the yard at Annapolis, you talk to the Superintendent, he said that as the percent of women crossed through 25 percent, there was kind of a noticeable shift in the vibe of the brigade. Things were different. Things became so much more relaxed and natural and comfortable in terms of gender

relations and all of that. It just sort of happened at that point. So that 25 percent number is one that, ever since that conversation, it has stuck in my mind.

That's in many ways how we get our start.

Let's move forward now and talk about some performance and progress in the fleet.

I was the Commander of the Submarine Force when we began the program of integrating women into the Submarine Force in the Navy. Right now all jobs are open to women in the Navy. This was the first time that we had integrated women.

First, we're all nuke, so we hit the books and we studied programs from other career fields that had done this, really looking for best practices, things to do, and then also things to avoid.

We settled on sort of three principles. One principle is that we were to the greatest degree humanly possible, keep everything equal. Right? Like so much of our business, everything we do in the Navy is done in teams. Submarine Force is a team sport. And so it was all about the team. We were going to try not to overly highlight or put a spotlight on these women. Just sort of talk about their contribution to the team.

The other principle was that, so level playing field.

The other one was that we were going to strive for this 25 percent. We weren't going to detail one woman to the crew, here's you, here's 135 guys, good luck. You know. [Laughter]. You're just going to submerge for six months and it will all work out, it's going to be fine. [Laughter].

So we started with sort of a deliberate program where we started with officers. We put three or four in the ward room. So there was this kind of a community there, that could kind of achieve that critical mass, if you would, and have a sense of community and mutual support there. And we've recently expanded that to enlisted sailors. We're sticking to that principle. You've got to put sort of, like I said, a critical mass on board.

And the third principle was that we would make sure that there was a senior mentor for women. We had, the Supply Corps officers were where we went for all of that leadership. They did a terrific job. They had been to sea on other ships,

surface ships mostly; they qualified; they kind of knew how the Navy worked. So they would be sort of the senior female or mentor to all these junior officers that were coming on board and provide that.

So those three pillars, we've sort of stuck to that plan.

The final thing was, we chose some absolutely stunning people to be the leaders, the first pioneer women who wanted to do this. I'll tell you, they were just outstanding, every one of them.

Now we're executing the plan. We had sort of a program that would add more and more submarine crews to this integrated approach as more and more volunteers became available, and we were going to expand at the rate of volunteers and boy, for those first couple of years it was a bit touch and go because the volunteer rate was just keeping up with our predicted expansion rate. Just.

But since then, and then you have to wait for a year or two. What is the feedback from those people that are actually going through this, and how does that get back to the people that may or may not want to give it a volunteer try themselves?

It all seems to be going very well. We're thinking about speeding up our expansion program. The volunteer base is really starting to grow. We have more women volunteering for those positions than we have program positions, and so we're seeing if we can expand while still staying true to those principles. And we're all in.

The Virginia Class submarine and the new Columbia Class submarine are designed to be gender neutral to fully accommodate, even in those very confined spaces, women and allow them to go forth.

Navy-wide, we're also kind of trying to make the Navy more I guess accessible to women. Certainly to remove obstacles. Because again, this is our competitive advantage. So kind of embracing that diversity and inclusion. Pursuing policies that sort of promote parenthood. We're thinking about parenthood, not just motherhood. Removing barriers towards, in the Navy, when we can create a lot of career flexibility that allows both parents to go off, have a family, maybe take a break, a career intermission, and come back in and, if they want, and pick up where they left off.

We're striking this balance in our personnel programs. We have a program called Sailor 2025 which has this career intermission program built in. It's growing. And other things like targeted reentry. If you want to leave the Navy, you get out, you decide, you know what, it wasn't so bad, or the grass isn't exactly greener as I thought. I want to get back in. We're making it very easy to come back in.

That type of sailor is a very loyal sailor after that. They say hey, we'll stick to it.

We're looking at giving families a lot more flexibility in when they move, so they can move at those times when maybe it's best for their children or best for their careers. So how much flexibility, it's kind of a PCS system, can we do?

Then with respect to dual military families, you really have to sort of opt out of being collocated rather than leap through five hoops of fire to be collocated. Right? So the default position is that we're going to do everything that we can to assign you to the same geographic location.

We've issued a Leader Development Framework that gets at some of the, puts into practice some of the theoretical work that I was explaining early. It starts off with our statement about inclusion and diversity, the One Navy Team. And so we just issued the second version of this. The second version motivated by a couple of things. One is, I wanted to get that diversity and inclusion statement included. Two is, it's one of those things. I'm sure you've all done this when you've written a paper. Just as soon as you hand it in or you forward it, somebody comes in and tells you a great idea that would have been perfect to include in that paper. You're like uh.

So one of those ideas for me was this idea, we had included the idea of mentoring, right? But then somebody came up and talked to me about this idea of advocacy, and I wanted to share that with you and maybe we'll just close on that because I'm running out of time.

Mentoring, how many people in here would consider themselves a mentor? Of course you would, right? How many would consider themselves sort of a mentee or a protégé? We've all kind of risen to where we are by virtue of the mentors that have advised us. And how many, for the mentors, how many people do you think you would say I'm a mentor to that person? What's your posse of protégés? How big? Ten? Anybody more than ten? Super mentor?

[Laughter]. It's kind of a small number, sort of a single digit number. Ten being sort of the top number, 12, you know. We've got some history there.

But it's a small number because it's a very personal relationship, isn't it? You really do invest in one another and you're committed to one another. But oftentimes it can be kind of a personal relationship. So there's this idea of sort of this closed communication. So that would be mentoring.

The idea that we, one of the ideas that motivated this second version of the framework was the idea of going beyond mentoring to advocacy. And the difference between the two is that a mentor will commit person to person with someone, but an advocate will kind of go active and go outside the relationship. A mentor who becomes an advocate has their radar on scan all the time, and it's sweeping around. Looking for opportunities for their mentees.

An advocate is the person who will pick up the phone, who will see a job opening come open and pick up the phone and call the person who's going to make the decision about that job and say listen, I have the perfect person for you, and let me just tell you why so and so is the perfect candidate to fill that job and you need to interview her, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

So there's this active component to advocacy where you're actually looking to put people in positions that will challenge them, allow them to advance and reach their potential. It goes beyond just this personal, interpersonal relationship of mentoring.

So that's step one.

Now step two is, how do you use that as a lever, a fulcrum, to enhance and advocate for not only a person but for diversity? So now you can say okay, if you're a mentor and you have six to ten people in your posse, what do those folks look like? Is that a diverse group? Are you mentoring a diverse group of people? If not, what can you do about that? You can make some deliberate choices. You can reach out and find people and make your group diverse. And then go that second step and advocate for their advancement in a very active and deliberate way. And you get a lot of people doing that, and you start promoting a lot of diversity. Right?

Similarly, just about everybody who was a mentor also said they had mentors. And I bet many of you have more than one. Make sure that your mentors are diverse as well. Right? It's very hard in our business, we're all kind of, I think this is Women in Government, right? So it's hard sometimes to legislate a ratio or anything like that. You run right into a lot of legal obstacles. But there's nothing that says we can't kind of sort of agree amongst ourselves that if we value this diversity as a competitive advantage in winning this great power competition, we're going to have to do something deliberate about that.

The unconscious bias, that current that I talked about, you know, we've got to overcome that deliberately. If you read Kahneman, he says hey, write an equation. We can't legislate an equation, but we can certainly think of ways that hey, let's make sure that my group of protégés, mentees, there's a deliberate decision there to make them diverse. My mentors, diverse. And then when we advocate for those folks, that diversity goes out and up in the organization. It's a powerful concept. Okay?

I see in here many women and people in uniform. I see most of you are in the civilian sector. One of the things that became clear as I was transitioning in, was that our Navy civilians, they just kind of came up to me and said hey, we could use a little bit of support here. So we issued a Navy Civilian Workforce Framework that strives to really kind of further integrate the military/civilian team. WE call it One Navy Team, which is defined by our sailors, our civilians and our families, right? There's a lot of people that we work with, but under the umbrella of the One Navy Team, it's those three cadres.

So we want to do the same thing for our Navy civilians as we do for our sailors, which is go out, find those super talented people, recruit them, bring them in, train them, educate them, promote them, give them a career plan, developmental opportunities along the several stages of their career, so they can see a rich and rewarding future in the Navy as a Navy civilian. Then we provided sort of a governance, Civilian Work Force Advisory Board which reports to our Chief of Naval Personnel and to me in terms of how are we doing that.

If you look across the Navy, our civilians are, well there's a vast diversity there. Some of them are welders. A lot of them are shipyard workers. Many of them are in security. Some of

them are in our labs, PhDs and getting awards and those sorts of things.

So one size does not fit all in terms of an approach, but the commanders of those different facilities, the leaders, the directors, have to come in and sort of demonstrate how they're going after promoting their civilians.

So we're underway. Talked about getting a fix. Gave you, I think a total of five books to read. There is no quiz on those. We talked about some of the progress we're making in the Navy.

But again, I say that at the end of the day, this is a hypothesis. We're sort of as informed as we can be. I've got a lot of, I try to get a lot of diversity on my team because I think that's what gives me the best advice is these teams approaches. I strive to make them as inclusive as possible, so we think, we hope that this is as informed an approach as possible. But again, I recognize that I am vulnerable. I am limited by my unconscious biases. So I can't know everything that you know about your challenges. But I do know that I'm responsible for leading the entire Navy and I want to do that as effectively as possible.

So while we are under way we need everything that we can to stay on track and in the channel. I'm excited to get to our discussion and listen to what you have to say.

Thank you very much.

#