

 **TOTAL
SAILOR**
FIT TO FIGHT



WARRIOR TOUGHNESS PLAYBOOK



MAY 2026

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FORGING TOUGH, READY WARFIGHTERS, TOGETHER



To every Sailor—Officer and Enlisted—across our Navy:

The world today is more dangerous and unpredictable than at any point in my career. Peer adversaries are openly challenging the rules-based order, and regional threats are becoming increasingly complex. Our Navy must be ready to respond swiftly, decisively, and united.

We are no longer preparing for conflict, we are in it. There is no margin for error. Our greatest advantage has always been our people. Ships don't sail, aircraft don't launch, and missions don't succeed without tough, connected, and resilient Sailors. Sailors who lead with character, act with competence, and persevere through adversity.

Warrior Toughness provides us with the tools to perform under pressure, recover quickly, and strengthen our Minds, Bodies, and Spirits. These skills are grounded in science, honed by Sailors, and validated through Fleet experience. They are how we train ourselves and our teams to be brilliant at the basics, especially when it's hard.

This Playbook is not just a document; it is a **call to action**. Every Command Triad must take ownership of integrating Warrior Toughness into the daily rhythm of life and operations. Every Sailor, regardless of rank, must model these skills, teach them to others, and take responsibility for their toughness and for building it in their team.

Warrior Toughness is how we align our personal values with our professional mission. It provides us with a common language for stress, resilience, and recovery, and it helps ensure that when a Sailor takes a hit, whether in combat or life, they can continue fighting.

We will not outsource toughness. We will build it, we will practice it, and we will live it together.

This is who we are. This is how we fight. This is how we win.

Admiral Daryl Caudle
Chief of Naval Operations

INTRODUCTION

What is Warrior Toughness?

Warrior Toughness is a **set of skills** that enables Sailors to take a hit and keep fighting, **perform under pressure**, and **excel in life's** daily challenges. These skills, grounded in the science of human performance optimization, train the Mind, Body, and Spirit to perform at our best every time. **These are not new ideas**; they are winning habits used by high performers in every field—from elite athletes to special operations forces. This Playbook helps every Sailor build these habits to prepare to fight and win.

“We don’t rise to the occasion—
we default to the
level of our training.”



Photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Pimpaka Kruthun, DVIDS

Why Warrior Toughness?

Warrior Toughness is how we bring goals to life at the individual level. This isn’t just about combat; **it’s about life**. Warrior Toughness bridges the gap between who we are and who we need to be on the deckplates, on deployment, and at home. **It’s not a program**. It’s how we train to win. It’s how we live. One Sailor, one evolution, and one day at a time.

The Results We Need

Warrior Toughness bridges the gap between our highest performers and those still building their foundation. It gives Sailors the skills to align their personal values with mission demands, manage stress, and develop habits that **build toughness and resilience**. It gives every Sailor, from E-1 to O-10, the tools to get better, both individually and collectively, so that when the pressure is on, **we rise to the challenge, we respond, and we win!**

BRINGING WARRIOR TOUGHNESS TO LIFE

Command Triads

Command Triads set the tone for everything that happens within a unit. Warrior Toughness must be visible in how your command trains and communicates, and how you lead under pressure.

You don't need a new instruction to make Warrior Toughness real. **You create the conditions** where Sailors can use it. That means building a climate of trust, cohesion, and accountability. It means modeling toughness skills yourselves—especially when the pressure is on. It means reinforcing the Warrior Mindset during quarters, watch turnover, mission briefs, and after action reports.

Triads should seek opportunities to incorporate Warrior Toughness into their command rhythm. This can be done through simple methods, such as teaching a different technique at quarters, highlighting a skill during command PT, or discussing the Warrior Ethos during check-ins. Start small and gradually build upon these initiatives.

This is not another program to “bolt on.” It's how we prepare our people to think clearly, act decisively, and recover quickly. **The more real-world, relevant, and repeated the application, the greater the impact.**

Every Sailor

Every Sailor is more than a rate or warfare pin. We are mariners, teammates, problem-solvers, family members, and warriors. Above all, we swore an oath to support and defend the Constitution. That oath carries a promise: to keep pressing forward, even in adversity.

Warrior Toughness is how we train for that promise. It's not just for boot camp, the Naval Academy, or INDOC, it's a **mindset and a set of practical skills** that help you stay calm under pressure, bounce back from adversity, and lead with purpose in every part of life.

Whether you were introduced to these skills at Recruit Training Command, Officer Candidate School, or a leadership course, **this Playbook helps you strengthen them.** Think of it as your personal guide to mastering one skill at a time. Practice them daily. Use them during evolutions, in your shop, and at home. With practice comes proficiency.

You don't need permission to get tougher. Start today. One choice. One evolution at a time.



Photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Tajh Payne, DVIDS

ONE EVOLUTION AT A TIME

What Warrior Toughness Looks Like in Real Life

Petty Officer Second Class Marcus Lee rubbed his eyes as morning quarters ended, and the crew dispersed across the pier. Though they'd pulled into San Diego three days ago, it hardly felt like liberty. His division was in a maintenance blitz, and he was right in the middle of it.

By 0930, Lee was knee-deep in the main space with a junior Sailor, tracing a grounding fault. It was hot, loud, and cramped. He focused on his breathing—[Recalibration](#)—just like they had practiced.

Then it happened. A pop. Sparks. Smoke and fire. "Class Charlie fire!" someone shouted.

Lee didn't hesitate. He grabbed the CO2 bottle, stayed low, and issued calm, clear orders to isolate power and evacuate the area. The fire was out in under two minutes, but time seemed to stretch. When the smoke cleared, his Sailor stood wide-eyed, chest heaving.

"You good?" Lee asked, steady.

"Yeah... I think so."

"Good. Let's **recover**. Then we'll talk it out."

Once cleared by the firefighting team, Lee walked his Sailor through what they'd done right, how they personally reacted, and what they could've done better. It was an impromptu after-action review and a direct application of the [Warrior Mindset](#): **commitment, preparation, execution, reflection**.



Image 185226271, Adobe Stock

The team was rattled, but safe. Lee spent the rest of the day restoring power to the lighting systems. He kept a [Performance Statement](#) on loop in his head: One evolution at a time.

By 1900, Lee was finally in his car. Traffic on the I-5 was brutal. Tension crept into his shoulders, but he caught it. He turned off the news, played his favorite playlist, and practiced [Intentional Recovery](#).

At home, his wife met him at the door with the mail and a worried look. "The power bill is overdue. And Dylan's teacher called; he's slipping in math." Frustration surged. Lee paused and refocused.

"I'll look at the bill tonight. Tomorrow, I'll sit down with Dylan after dinner. We'll figure it out together." He wasn't perfect, but he had the tools. [Mindfulness](#) kept him present. [Emotional Intelligence](#) stopped him from snapping. [Flexible Thinking](#) helped him shift roles from Petty Officer Lee to dad and husband.

Marcus Lee wasn't born tough. He made himself tough; one decision, one moment at a time.

That's Warrior Toughness.

DEVELOPING A “WARRIOR MINDSET”

Using Warrior Toughness, Sailors approach evolutions using the **Warrior Mindset** – a continuous cycle of **Commitment, Preparation, Execution, and Reflection**.

COMMITMENT

Builds on our **Core Values** by empowering Sailors to persevere through hardship and overcome challenges. Committed Sailors possess a sense of purpose and personal philosophy that enables them to overcome adversity and build resilience as they strive to live out their personal values.

PREPARATION

Strengthens our minds, bodies, and spirits to better withstand destructive stress, while embracing and leveraging the stress that builds us into a stronger warfighting team.

EXECUTION

Where our commitment and preparation are ultimately tested whether that test comes from complex combat evolutions or from the life challenges we face day-to-day.

REFLECTION

How we actively learn from those tests. It includes both group reflection such as after-action reviews that reinforce what we learned as a team, but also individual reflection where we ask ourselves what we did well and acknowledge where we could do better.

Just as athletes condition their minds, bodies, and spirits to be victorious, Sailors train their own minds, bodies, and spirits to enhance their toughness and resilience that leads to optimal performance. Incorporating the 15 Warrior Toughness Skills on the following pages will help Sailors become tougher and more resilient.



THINK OF THE WARRIOR MINDSET AS PBED FOR THE BRAIN

- ▶ Plan = Commitment
- ▶ Brief = Preparation
- ▶ Execute = Execution
- ▶ Debrief = Reflection

We use PBED to improve every evolution. We use the Warrior Mindset to improve **our performance** in those evolutions.

WARRIOR TOUGHNESS SKILLS

The Warrior Ethos | Know Your “Why.”

Your **Warrior Ethos is the foundation** of the Warrior Mindset. It fuels commitment and provides direction when things get hard. Whether it's challenges at home, the strain of the operational requirements, or the pressures of leading, your Warrior Ethos provides support.

Knowing your “why” keeps you grounded. It helps you push through challenges and stay mission-focused, even when motivation runs low. Every Sailor should write a Warrior Ethos: a personal letter to yourself that defines **who you are, what you stand for, and why you serve. Your “Why” is your anchor.**

When clearly written and lived daily, your Warrior Ethos becomes a steady guide through stress, setbacks, and uncertainty. **It builds Spiritual Readiness and reinforces identity, values, and purpose; the core components of toughness.**

In the Navy, adversity is part of the job: long watches, missed holidays, difficult news from home. Your “why” helps you show up with discipline, recover faster, and stay locked in when it counts.

A Warrior Ethos doesn't have to be perfect; it just **has to be yours**. Keep it short, honest, and actionable. Review it during milestones. Share it at midterm counseling. Let it grow with you.



Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Joshua Martinez, Navy.mil

A solid Warrior Ethos includes:



IDENTITY:

▶ Who you are (e.g., “I am a Sailor, a leader, a protector.”).



VALUES:

▶ The principles that guide your decisions.



CONNECTIONS:

▶ Who and what you fight for; your family, your team, your nation.



GOALS:

▶ Where you're headed and who you're becoming.

YOUR “WHY” IS YOUR ANCHOR

It helps you lead with clarity, endure stress, and never lose sight of what matters most.

Start writing your Warrior Ethos today!

Download the

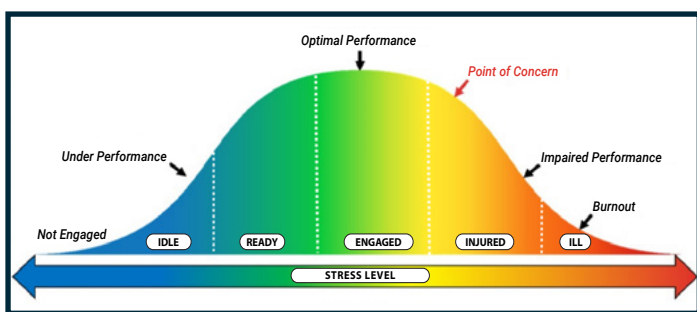
Warrior Toughness app

<https://www.applocker.navy.mil/#!/apps/C1AF02C4-DD4D-4877-BA7A-8AACB0A96AEF>

Understanding Stress | Know the signals. Own your response.

Stress is an inevitable part of the military and life. Understanding and managing stress is a common theme in both **developing the toughness** that peak performance demands and **building the resilience** that enables our minds, bodies, and spirits to remain balanced and ready for challenges. Stress is our response to events or situations that we **perceive** as challenging, threatening, or overwhelming. It is a natural and adaptive mechanism that helps individuals cope with difficult circumstances.

Positive Stress can be a highly effective motivational tool when the tension and anxiety of stressful conditions are leveraged to boost performance and increase readiness. On the other hand, unmitigated stress is the silent adversary of readiness and resilience. By learning how to **better manage stress**, individual and team performance will increase, especially when challenged with adversity or facing new situations.



The Stress Continuum – [Stress and Performance Relationship](#)

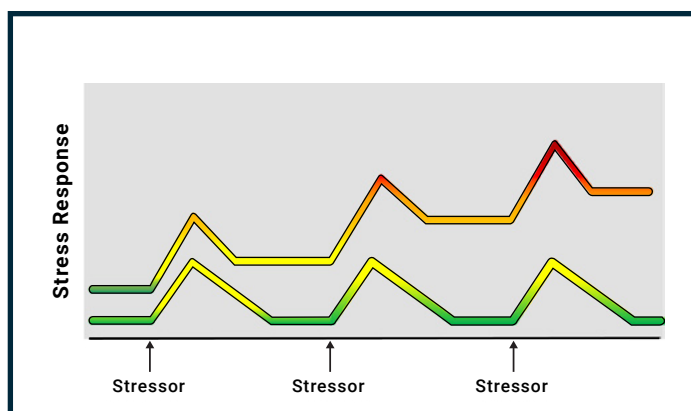
Symptoms of stress present themselves in both the mind and body. Not only is it important to be aware of our own stress responses, it is also important to see it in others. We need to look for stress in others because of the complex nature of the equipment and technology that we use. The important question to ask yourself, as well as your team, is: “Where am I at honestly on the stress continuum?”

The mind-body connection is so strong that unmitigated reactions to stress can not only affect physical and mental responses but our behaviors as well. Ultimately, those three things can lead to increased or decreased performance.

Sailors need to remain focused and engaged while **understanding that stress isn’t inherently bad**. However, *unmitigated stress can* be bad. It is important to understand the Stress Continuum in order to provide a common language to speak about stress and its relationship to performance.

Stress Recovery

Proper stress management enables us to reduce stress to a normal level after the conclusion of an event. When stress becomes overwhelming and chronic, Sailors may continue to experience the adverse effects of stressors beyond the event. When people do not effectively recover after a stressful event, they become less resilient to the next stressful event. Instead of the stressors being sequential, enabling us to handle them one-by-one as they arise, they become cumulative and increase the overall stress level with each successive stressor.



Mindfulness | Train your focus – stay in the fight.

Mindfulness is the ability to stay fully present in the moment; aware of what you’re doing, how you’re feeling, and what’s happening around you, without judgment or distraction. It’s not about being calm all the time, it’s about being aware and in control when it counts.



Photo by Seaman Gabriel Weber, DVIDS



Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Cryton Vandiesal, DVIDS

Mindfulness is an exercise for your mind like push ups are an exercise for your body. When practiced consistently, mindfulness helps you stay grounded under pressure, reduce distractions, and respond with control even when stress is high.

THREE PRACTICAL WAYS TO EXERCISE MINDFULNESS		
BODY SCAN	MENTAL SCAN	PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION (PMR)
<p>Start at the top of your head and mentally scan down to your feet. Focus on physical sensations; tightness, warmth and movement. When your attention drifts, gently bring it back.</p> <p>This helps build focus and self-awareness.</p>	<p>Sit quietly and observe your thoughts without judgment. Acknowledge them, then let them go like waves passing on the surface.</p> <p>This is especially helpful before bed, during recovery, or when your mind feels overloaded.</p>	<p>Tense and release muscle groups, one at a time from your hands to your shoulders to your legs.</p> <p>This is especially useful before evolutions requiring precision, like weapons handling or fine repairs.</p>

Practice these exercises 10–15 minutes a few times a week: before watch, after drills, or at the end of the day. The goal isn’t to “clear your mind,” it’s to train it to stay present when it matters most.

Energy Management | Find the right energy for the mission.

Every task you face has a **best energy level for performance**. Too much energy, and you're jittery, distracted, or prone to mistakes. Too little, and you're sluggish, checked out, or miss the moment. Energy Management is about knowing what the situation requires and adjusting your internal dial to match it.

This is not about "always being hyped" or "always staying calm." It's about knowing how to get in the zone. That means learning to recognize your current state, read the environment, and up-regulate or down-regulate, like using a thermostat to adjust the temperature, as needed. Whether you're prepping for a replenishment at sea, launching from the flight deck, or walking into a tough personal conversation, your energy level affects your focus, control, and impact.



Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Jackson, Navy.com

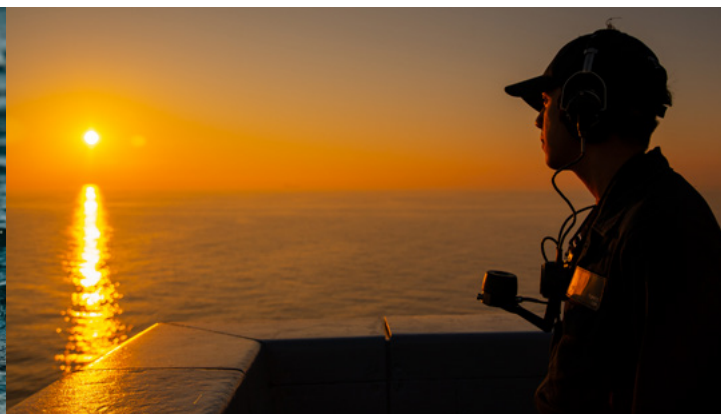


Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Jesse Turner, DVIDS

Learning to manage energy is a core part of the Warrior Mindset. Managing energy connects directly to performance, and it's a skill you can learn, like anything else.

Sailors should normalize these energy check-ins. Talk about energy before evolutions, watch relief, or inspections. Just like checking your gear, your energy should match the mission.

With practice, regulating energy builds confidence and control; Sailors push beyond comfort zones and perform at a higher level, especially under pressure.

Energy Management techniques include:



MENTAL TOOLS

such as Self-Talk, [Performance Statements](#), [Mental Rehearsal](#), [Recalibration](#), and [Flexible Thinking](#). These help regulate energy by focusing attention, controlling breathing, and guiding action.



EXTERNAL CUES

like music, sound, or imagery. Energizing inputs (e.g., upbeat music or motivational videos) can help up-regulate; calming inputs (e.g., slow rhythms or nature sounds) can help down-regulate.



PHYSICAL MOVEMENT

even brief, can reset energy levels. Standing up after sitting too long, walking before a stressful event, or doing a few pushups before a brief; motion helps align your body to match the task at hand.

Recalibration | Reset in the moment. Stay in control.

There are times when the task or the situation does not allow you to take time to do [Intentional Recovery](#) or a deliberate [Energy Management](#) technique, but you still need to focus and work through stressful situations and evolutions. One technique to manage these stressful situations is called **Recalibration**.



Photo by Seaman Kleighton Vitug, DVIDS

Recalibration is a [Mindfulness](#) exercise that is highly effective for slowing down an individual's heartrate and breathing to regain focus and mitigate negative stress responses. **Recalibration is NOT a break, a pause, or a time out.** It is a skill meant to be "applied in the moment," to allow Sailors to continue focusing on the task at hand while slowing down their breathing and heart rate to maintain focus.

Recalibrating in the moment requires practice. Live execution of the most demanding tasks is not the time to begin practicing Recalibration. If, during a demanding task, you are not able to do a full five-second inhale and seven-second exhale, use a shorter period such as a three-second inhale and a five-second exhale. With practice, Recalibration keeps you in the fight when it matters most.

Practice Recalibration individually, at quarters, or as part of a drill package. Practice it during routine evolutions such as stores onload, cleaning stations, or working parties to best prepare yourself for higher-stress evolutions.

Recalibration is simply regulating your breathing. To conduct effective Recalibration, follow this breathing pattern:

- ▶ Inhale for five seconds
- ▶ Exhale for seven seconds
- ▶ Repeat 3-5 times to realize benefits

Intentional Recovery | Deliberately recharge. Sustain your edge.

Intentional Recovery is a skillset to **reset and recover from stress**, enabling one to perform at their peak through disciplined and deliberate restorative activities. Intentional Recovery helps Sailors understand how stress impacts the Mind, Body, and Spirit, and **prepares them for the next challenge**. To reset and recover from stressors, Sailors need to identify the stressor and align an effective plan. For example:

- ▶ **Mind:** After studying for an advancement exam, a 30-minute walk can help reset focus. If the day was filled with monotonous tasks, consider reading or listening to a podcast that challenges your thinking.
- ▶ **Body:** When preparing for a long watch, go to bed early to rest and recover. If the day lacked movement, like one spent behind a desk, use a workout to re-engage physically and restore balance.
- ▶ **Spirit:** After a tough day or a personal setback, like failure to promote, recharge by reading spiritual material, talking with someone who encourages and supports you, or by listening to a motivational podcast.

The opposite of Intentional Recovery is escapism or mindless activities. For example, sitting in front of the television binge-watching episodes may feel relaxing, but this kind of distraction is less effective in restoring energy and focus. While mindless activities may provide short-term relief, over-reliance on them can hinder a Sailor’s recovery. Intentional Recovery is **deliberate and purpose driven**.

INTENTIONAL RECOVERY OPPORTUNITIES INCLUDE:			
WORK DAY	POST-DUTY	LIBERTY	LEAVE
Brief activities (30 seconds to 5 minutes) built into the daily routine.	Targeted to specific recovery needs after the workday to enable optimal performance the following day such as an intentional transition from work to home.	Activities performed to facilitate balance and engagement with one’s values. May require a greater allotment of time.	Activities that further increase recovery and reestablish a sense of self and one’s connections.
Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Tactical breathing ▶ Quick walk ▶ Stretching ▶ Short mental rest 	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Music on commute ▶ Journaling after watch ▶ Light conversation 	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Work out ▶ Structured downtime ▶ Time with family or friends 	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Spiritual retreats ▶ Outdoor trips ▶ Home visits

Healthy Behaviors | Fuel the whole you – Mind, Body and Spirit.

Optimal performance doesn't happen by accident. It's the result of daily choices that strengthen the whole person, giving attention to the Mind, Body, and Spirit. These choices are what we call **Healthy Behaviors**.

Sailors who practice Healthy Behaviors tend to excel at work, build stronger relationships, recover faster from stress, and lead with confidence. The goal is progress, not perfection. When you treat your Mind, Body and Spirit like high-performance equipment, you increase readiness, reduce risk of injury, and expand your ability to lead.

Healthy Behaviors involve a deliberate commitment to three key areas:

- ▶ **Mind:** Develop skills that improve how you think and respond, such as problem-solving, journaling, mindfulness, and reading books and articles.
- ▶ **Body:** Prioritize sleep, movement, nutrition, and preventative medical care.
- ▶ **Spirit:** Connect to something greater than yourself through your faith, values, family, or service.

Obstacles like poor sleep, negative self-talk, or unrealistic expectations are real but manageable. Small, consistent actions in each area can lead to real change. When in doubt, ask, *"Is what I'm doing making me sharper, stronger, or more grounded?"* If not, adjust. The tables below provide practical strategies to fuel the Mind, Body, and Spirit.

SLEEP	
STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS	BARRIERS TO SUCCESS
✓ Stick to a sleep schedule and bedtime routine	! Screen time within 60 minutes of sleep
✓ Relax, meditate, read a book, or stretch	! Use of caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol
✓ Use headphones, ear plugs, or eye masks	! Using sleeping pills (unless prescribed)

DIET	
STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS	BARRIERS TO SUCCESS
✓ Eat mindfully, read the food label	! Strict diets
✓ Make careful meal selections when eating out	! Diet fads/trends
✓ Only eat when you are hungry	! Starvation or excessive fasting routines

PHYSICAL FITNESS	
STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS	BARRIERS TO SUCCESS
✓ Exercise regularly year-round, not just during PFA cycles	! Being too hard on yourself
✓ Exercise with a friend, family member, or shipmate	! Being impatient with results, setting unrealistic expectations
✓ Establish a well-rounded fitness program	! Interruptions to schedule

SPIRITUAL READINESS	
STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS	BARRIERS TO SUCCESS
✓ Write, revisit, and reflect on your Warrior Ethos	! Drifting from Core Values under pressure
✓ Connect regularly with a faith community or trusted individual for support and perspective	! Isolation or lack of intentional relationships
✓ Talk to a Chaplain, mentor, or peer when struggling with doubt, grief, or fatigue	! Believing spiritual support is only for religious or crisis moments

Mental Rehearsal | Visualize success. Perform with purpose.

Mental Rehearsals increase your ability to successfully execute any evolution from the simple to the complex. A strong mental rehearsal is a vivid description using mental imagery and involving all the senses to give one an understanding of **what they can expect** to see, hear, smell and sense during an evolution.

Mental Rehearsals involve accurate and detailed repetition of the task in a controlled environment so that **the Sailors are more prepared** when they execute the task.

Although helpful if time allows, Mental Rehearsals do not have to be led by anyone standing in front of a group. Sailors can **think about what they're about to do** using the same structured approach, prior to the exercise or evolution. Many of us have done this when we played sports, learned how to drive, or before an exam.

Key principals in conducting a Mental Rehearsal are:

- ▶ Mental Rehearsals should be in a deliberate, step-by-step order, in accordance with a checklist or Standard Operating Procedures for the evolution.
- ▶ Concentrate on the most challenging actions that you know you must execute well.
- ▶ The more **vivid, detailed, and holistic** a Mental Rehearsal is, the more realistic and effective it will be.

Command leaders should highlight **complex or high-risk evolutions** where Mental Rehearsal can sharpen performance and encourage their teams to walk through those scenarios in advance.



Photo by Chief Petty Officer Michael Russ, Navy.mil

MENTAL REHEARSAL

Put yourself in the evolution.

Ask yourself questions such as:



What do I see when I enter the space? Where are the key pieces of equipment located?



What equipment am I wearing? How does it make me feel?



What is my environment like? Is it loud? What do I smell? Is my visibility obstructed?



What are the signals or actions I should be looking for? Where am I likely to feel confused or uncertain?



What distractors should I anticipate? What do they look or sound like?

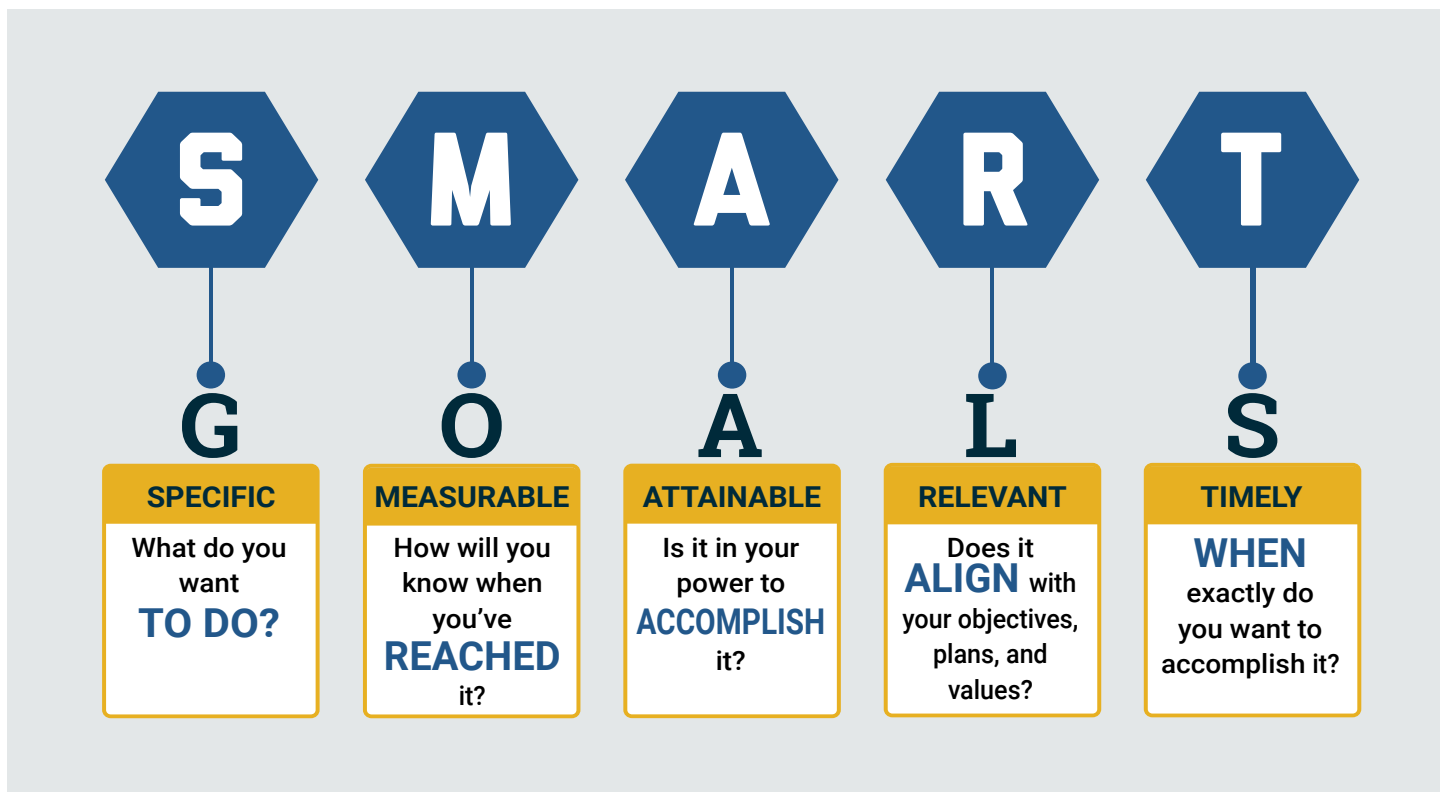
Goal Setting | Focus your effort. Build Momentum.

Goals shape how we think, feel, and act under pressure. They direct our attention, increase focus, and drive persistence. Setting goals isn't a one-time task; it's a continuous process that evolves throughout a Sailor's career. Most goals fall into three categories: outcome, performance, and process—all of which build toughness and purpose.

- ▶ **Outcome Goals** are aspirational, often overarching and may have subordinate process and performance goals, and often the hardest to measure up to.
- ▶ **Performance Goals** have defined targets that will help an individual know if they are progressing towards achieving their Outcome Goals. An effective Performance Goal often uses Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely (S.M.A.R.T.) criteria.
- ▶ **Process Goals** are the easiest to do and are the small "next steps" to measure movement towards completion of the Performance Goals.

When a Sailor incorporates Goal Setting in their routine, it increases the likelihood of remaining diligent in their pursuit and achieving their objective.

The best practice is to set all three types of goals, not just Outcome Goals. Goals may be reassessed at any time and should be frequently re-examined to ensure they are relevant and framed appropriately. Leaders should use opportunities such as onboarding, career development boards, midterm counseling, and Human Factors Boards to discuss Sailors' goals.



Performance Statements | Train your brain to stay in the fight.

When pressure hits, your brain will talk to you. The question is, "What will it say?"

Performance Statements are short, powerful phrases that help you stay focused and in control during high-stress situations. Whether you're in the middle of a damage control drill, a flight deck evolution, or a tough conversation at home, these statements give you a way to interrupt unhelpful self-talk and re-center on what matters.

You've probably said one before without realizing it:

- ▶ "One evolution at a time."
- ▶ "I can stay in it."
- ▶ "Slow is smooth. Smooth is fast."

These are not just words, they're tools. Used consistently, they help shape how you think, feel, and perform under pressure.

**Build a few that fit your
role and routine**

Test them under pressure

Say them out loud

The more you use them, the more
automatic they become

A strong Performance Statement is:



BRIEF

- ▶ You can recall and repeat it without losing focus.



INSTRUCTIVE

- ▶ It tells your brain what to do rather than what to avoid.



REALISTIC

- ▶ It fits the moment and your actual training. Say, "I've got this," during a chaotic casualty response is only helpful if you've actually practiced that response.



HELPFUL

- ▶ It builds confidence, steadies your breathing, and brings your mind back to the present.

Use them:



DURING PREPARATION

- ▶ Before evolutions, quals, or personal challenges.



DURING EXECUTION

- ▶ Underway, under stress, in the fight.



AS REFLECTION

- ▶ Reinforce what worked after the event.

Flexible Thinking | Adapt faster. Stay on mission.

Flexible Thinking is the ability to think about new or different ways to approach a situation, allowing Sailors to manage stress and optimize performance while adapting to and overcoming adversity. It can improve our ability to make decisive calls when we face unique challenges and help manage our emotions when things are overwhelming us. Flexible thinking enhances the ability to quickly weigh the merits of multiple perspectives and properly respond to the unique challenges of any situation.

Sailors who excel in this skill can more swiftly adjust to changes, consider new solutions, and respond.

TOOLS TO DEVELOP AND PRACTICE FLEXIBLE THINKING		
SKILL	WHAT TO DO	EXAMPLE
CHALLENGING THOUGHTS	Recognize and confront irrational beliefs or statements.	I can challenge thoughts such as "I never do anything right," because "I know that I have done many things right."
REFRAME	Identify unhelpful thoughts and replace them with more positive or adaptive ones.	Take "I'm never going to learn my job," and reframe it into "it is going to take some time, but I will get better at my job."
ACCEPTANCE	Acknowledge certain things are beyond personal control (extended working hours or high operational tempo). Then shift thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to focus on the elements that you can control.	"I know the next underway will be a tough one, but I prepared for it."
DEFUSE	Recognize every thought does not require a response or an action. Create opportunities to explore options and different perspectives.	"I need to pick new orders but, maybe I should talk to some of my mentors before I talk to the detailer."
ACTION-COUNTER ACTION	An intentional action that is opposite of the automatic behavior response.	An automatic response to fear might be to run away. Using Action - Counter Action, the Sailor will choose to stay, assess the situation, and take a different action.

Apply Flexible Thinking In Your Daily Life



Challenge assumptions – Instead of taking things at face value, ask yourself, What if the opposite were true? Is there another way to see this?



Shift perspectives – Put yourself in someone else's shoes, even when you strongly disagree with them. Understanding different viewpoints makes you a more versatile thinker.



Embrace uncertainty – Try stepping outside your comfort zone. Engage in activities that push you to think in new ways, like learning a new skill or debating a topic from multiple sides.



Play with possibilities – Brainstorm multiple solutions to a problem without judging them right away. Sometimes the most unexpected ideas turn out to be the best ideas.

Emotional Intelligence (EQ) | Lead yourself before you lead others.

Emotional Intelligence, or EQ, is your ability to understand and manage your own emotions, while also recognizing and responding to the emotions of others. It’s what helps you stay composed under pressure, lead with trust, and keep your team aligned when tensions rise. In high-stakes environments, EQ elevates reason over reaction and allows you to act with clarity and purpose.

The five core components of EQ are:

- ▶ **Self-Awareness:** Recognizing your emotions and thoughts, and how they impact others
- ▶ **Self-Regulation:** Controlling impulses and choosing how you respond
- ▶ **Motivation:** Staying driven by purpose, pushing through challenges with focus and energy
- ▶ **Empathy:** Understanding others’ perspectives and emotions to build connection and trust
- ▶ **Social Skills:** Building positive relationships, resolving conflict, and leading effective teams

BEST PRACTICES FOR BUILDING YOUR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE:				
SELF-AWARENESS	SELF-REGULATION	MOTIVATION	EMPATHY	SOCIAL SKILLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Recognize your emotions ▶ Keep a journal ▶ Slow down ▶ Practice mindfulness ▶ Re-examine your Warrior Ethos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Know your values ▶ Hold yourself accountable ▶ Practice being calm ▶ Flexible Thinking ▶ Practice gratitude 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Sacrificial service ▶ Be hopeful and confident in your efforts ▶ Practice optimism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Put yourself in someone else’s position ▶ Pay attention to body language ▶ Acknowledge the feelings of others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Learn conflict resolution ▶ Improve your communication skills ▶ Learn to praise others

High EQ strengthens leadership at every level. It lowers team stress, improves decision-making, and builds stronger connections—on duty and at home. Developing your EQ makes you a better Sailor, teammate, family member, and leader.

Building EQ starts with self-reflection; use the questions below to assess your strengths and identify areas to grow.

- ▶ When I’m under pressure, do I pause before I respond, or do I react without thinking?
- ▶ Which of the five EQ skills come naturally to me, and which ones do I avoid or struggle with?
- ▶ How do I respond when someone on my team is frustrated, stressed, or quiet?
- ▶ What do I want my team, shipmates, or family to feel after interacting with me?

Combat and Operational Stress First Aid (COSFA) | Spot stress early. Step in with care.

Combat and Operational Stress First Aid (COSFA) is a simple, flexible process used to recognize stress reactions early and offer immediate support. Learning the COSFA model helps Sailors protect their teammates' health, restore performance under pressure, and maintain long-term readiness across the watchfloor, on the flight deck, or in the field.

The first step in **Stress First Aid** is to use the [Stress Continuum](#) to **identify** if a person has a stress illness or stress injury. Ask the following to further assess if a person is suffering a stress injury:

- ▶ Are they currently unable to effectively control their own bodies, behavior, thinking, and emotions?
- ▶ Are they distracted and impaired to the point of diminished performance?

If yes, then perform the following steps to respond to this situation:

- ▶ Primary Aid
 - **Cover:** Protect them from impulsive or destructive decisions.
 - **Calm:** Use a calming voice and move them to a calming environment.
- ▶ Secondary Aid
 - **Connect:** Connect them to resources or trusted people.
 - **Competence:** When ready, return them to previous tasks.
 - **Confidence:** Help them regain confidence after injury.
- ▶ Continuous Aid
 - **Check:** Continuously assess the injury.
 - **Coordinate** with additional resources: medical, chaplain, trusted friends, etc.

When Sailors use the COSFA model, they quickly identify stressors in their shipmates, respond effectively, ensure their long-term well-being and keep them in the fight.



SEA STORIES: BRINGING COSFA TO LIFE

During final checks on the hangar bay of USS Ronald Reagan late Friday afternoon, AO3 Carter saw SN Lopez alone, hands shaking as he refastened his cranial strap. Recognizing acute stress, Carter moved in (**Check**), stood shoulder-to-shoulder to give **Cover**, and whispered, "Breathe with me," to **Calm** and **Connect**. A subtle hand signal **Coordinated** with the flight deck Leading Petty Officer. After hearing Lopez's worries about the night launch, Carter retightened the cranial, restoring **Competence**, and said, "Trust your drills and crew. We've got you." The brief Combat Operational Stress First Aid returned Lopez's **Confidence**, letting him rejoin launch preparations.

Peer-to-Peer Support | Every Sailor. Every day.

Peer-to-peer support is the daily frontline of resilience. It's Sailors looking out for each other, recognizing when something feels off, and having the skill, and courage to engage. This isn't therapy. It's connection. It's one of the most effective ways to reduce stress before it escalates.

For leaders, this shows up as engaged leadership noticing changes in behavior, checking in regularly, and creating a culture where it's normal to talk about stress. Peer support goes beyond leadership roles. Every Sailor, regardless of rank, has a part to play in building a team that checks in, backs each other up, and speaks up when something's wrong.

When peer support becomes part of the daily routine, asking for help and offering it stops feeling like a weakness. It becomes just another part of mission readiness.

A peer-to-peer interaction consists of:

1. **OSCAR communication:** a technique for opening a discussion with a person
2. **Empathetic listening:** a method of listening without judgement
3. **Connect to resources:** connecting to the right resources and a warm hand-off
4. **Follow-up:** continuing to care for the individual as they make progress towards resolution

Another aspect of communication is empathetic listening skills, which involves not only hearing words but also understanding the other person's perspective of a situation. Empathetic listening skills include:

- ▶ **Perspective taking:** Appreciate another person's viewpoint
- ▶ **Don't judge:** Listen in an active and nonjudgmental way
- ▶ **Recognize emotion:** Be sensitive to the other person's feelings
- ▶ **"Reflect on" your understanding:** Ensure you understand the Sailor's issue

O OBSERVE	Actively observe behaviors—look for patterns	<i>"I've noticed that you have been looking really tired this week."</i>
S STATE OBSERVATIONS	Address behaviors only, just the facts without interpretations or judgements	<i>"This is the third time I've caught you falling asleep on watch."</i>
C CLARIFY ROLE	Stating why you are concerned about the behavior validates why you are addressing the issue.	<i>"If Chief catches you sleeping on watch, you could end up at Captain's Mast."</i>
A ASK WHY	Seek clarification; try to understand the other person's perception of the behavior.	<i>"I did not realize you have a two sick children at home."</i>
R RESPOND	Clarify concern if indicated. Discuss desired behaviors. State options in behavioral term.	<i>"Let's talk with Chief, he may recommend special liberty for you."</i>

Peer-to-peer support is essential in managing stress reactions where Sailors supporting one another serve as the first line of defense. Using peer-to-peer support techniques help Sailors recognize changes in their shipmates' behavior enabling them to engage appropriately.



Photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Geoffrey Ottinger, DVIDS

Core Leader Functions | Lead the mission. Care for your People.

Core Leader Functions help leaders build a mission-ready team by promoting resilience, reducing behavioral health stigma, and addressing stress early. When leaders use this model to support their Sailors, more issues are recognized, more help is provided, and both command performance and individual well-being improve.

Core Leader Functions consist of five areas that leaders use to assess, plan, and implement strategies for Sailors to be successful.

- ▶ **Strengthen** against stress reactions, injuries and illnesses.
- ▶ **Mitigate** the force and intensity of stressors experienced whenever possible.
- ▶ **Identify** the stress zones and stressors affecting individuals.
- ▶ **Treat** by taking actions to promote healing and hasten recovery.
- ▶ **Reintegrate** member with unit if possible.

Warrior Toughness is the approach to both sides of the stress equation. It strengthens our minds, bodies, and spirit to leverage the beneficial aspects of stress to achieve optimal performance during complex and demanding evolutions. These same skills enable us to be resilient, to handle the stressors of everyday life, and to more effectively reset after a stressor.

There are many measures that leaders – LPOs and Workcenter Supervisors up to the Command Triad – can take at their commands to strengthen or mitigate stress and reduce the likeliness of stress injuries or stress illness.

Leaders can further mitigate Sailors' unnecessary stressors by discussing Mind, Body, Spirit wellness, along with balancing priorities, organizing daily tasks, and conducting training debriefs to reinforce continuous learning.

SEA STORIES: BRINGING CORE LEADER FUNCTIONS TO LIFE

Working against the clock late Friday afternoon on a challenging community bridge project near Gulfport, MS, Petty Officer Flaherty, a seasoned Seabee crew lead, noticed his team's usual banter replaced with tense silence and sharp movements. He **identified** these signs of stress, likely fueled by equipment delays earlier in the week and the push to secure the site before the weekend rain. When a junior Seabee fumbled handling some materials, causing a minor setback, Flaherty stepped in to **mitigate** the rising frustration, preventing blame. He pulled the Seabee aside briefly, calmly asking about the issue and offering encouragement instead of criticism (**Treat**). He then addressed the crew, acknowledging the tough conditions and reminding them of their shared skills and adaptability, framing the final push positively (**Strengthen**). By ensuring the junior Seabee was immediately given a clear task to help recover from the fumble (**Reintegrate**), Flaherty used Warrior Toughness Core Leader Functions not just to manage stress, but to reinforce the team's "Can Do" spirit and finish the day's critical work effectively.



GETTING STARTED

STEPS COMMANDS CAN TAKE TO IMPLEMENT WARRIOR TOUGHNESS

- 1 Great Leaders build their people and teams by incorporating Warrior Toughness concepts – Mind, Body, Spirit; performance optimization; stress management; Warrior Mindset – into their command or leadership philosophies.

- 2 Leaders should discuss their own values and ethos during the onboarding process to illustrate how they shape behavior and drive optimized performance.
 - ▶ *Leverage Sailor development opportunities such as Career Development Boards, Human Factors Boards, evaluations and counseling to discuss personal values and ethos to connect Sailors with something greater than themselves. Use these sessions to help Sailors develop S.M.A.R.T goals as part of your routine.*

- 3 Broaden the view of the Physical Fitness Assessment cycle by consistently emphasizing Healthy Behaviors and building the body through proper nutrition, sleep, and Goal-Setting.

- 4 Institute a “Mindfulness Monday,” or other similar approach to spend 3-5 minutes each week emphasizing or practicing a mindfulness skill.

- 5 Incorporate Emotional Intelligence into your khaki leadership training sessions. Use while conducting FITREP and Eval debriefs and counselings.

- 6 Use Planning Board for Training to build winning teams by deliberately planning which skills you will incorporate into your normal training routine.
 - ▶ *Make sure your Wardroom, Chiefs’ Mess, and integrated training team understand and use Mental Rehearsals and Recalibration.*
 - ▶ *Set the standard by making Mental Rehearsals and Recalibration skills a part of your most high-risk or complex evolutions.*

- 7 Practice Recalibration at quarters or in a group setting. Practice it during simple, routine evolutions such as stores on load, cleaning stations, or working parties.

- 8 Use the language of stress management in your everyday conversation. Are you feeling ready (green zone)? Does a particular Sailor seem to be idle (blue zone)? During a particular drill, discuss how you will deliberately engage (yellow zone) to improve your performance and then return to ready (green zone). Make talking about stress a part of the operational battle rhythm to normalize rather than radicalize.

- 9 Use the Stress-O-Meter to understand the stress level within your command. Do you have a big inspection or certification coming up? Run a pre- and post-event Stress-O-Meter to give leaders tangible data to help their personnel and possibly prevent harmful behaviors.

- 10 Make effective AARs part of your routine. Avoid “top-down” AARs. Leaders are transparent which enables all Sailors to self-assess and self-correct.

WARRIOR TOUGHNESS SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

	GOOD	BETTER	BEST
AWARENESS & UNDERSTANDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Sailors have heard of WT. Content may be posted or mentioned at quarters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Sailors can name several skills. > Some leaders apply WT tools during check-ins or evolutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > WT skills are common language. Sailors at all levels can describe, apply, and teach them.
USE IN HIGH-STRESS ENVIRONMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > WT concepts are used informally. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Sailors are encouraged to apply WT skills (e.g., Recalibration, Performance Statements) during key moments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > WT skills are routine before, during, and after high-pressure tasks. Reducing mistakes and enhance performance.
LEADER INTEGRATION & MODELING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Senior leaders are aware but may not actively reference or model WT. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Triads, Divos, and LPOs integrate skills into leadership conversations and set the example. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > WT is embedded in leader development. Leaders consistently model, reinforce, and coach it across the command.
SUSTAINMENT IN DAILY ROUTINE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Skills used occasionally during evolutions, quarters, or debriefs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Some WT tools are included in Standard Operating Procedures, Planning Board for Training, or development sessions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > WT is built into evaluations, training plans, watch turnover, and team development—sustained and expected.
IMPACT ON CULTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > WT is seen as helpful but separate from mission or identity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Sailors see real-world value. WT contributes to a culture of resilience and performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > WT is part of who we are enabling sustained readiness, strengthens trust, and builds belonging.

ASK YOURSELF

Are we modeling Warrior Toughness **all the time?**

Who's growing because of Warrior Toughness and how do we know?

Have we made it **easier for Sailors to talk** about stress and performance without stigma or fear?