

"Well, that didn't go as expected"

For a few months, LTJG Elrod had been waiting to catch up with her Naval Academy roommate, LTJG Jebo, who had just returned from her first deployment onboard USS BULKELEY (DDG 84). As much as she wanted to hear about the deployment, she really just needed a safe space to vent. Ever since she arrived at her second command, it had been different than what she signed up for.

She met her **Sponsor** a few days after checking onboard, who just said, "sorry I guess... they just keep us so busy around here that I didn't have time... and hey, I didn't even have a sponsor... and I turned out ok."

Her check-in with the Commanding Officer (CO) didn't go much better. "Hey, come here... we need to do this quick because I need to go brief the Commodore on the upcoming exercise." Ten minutes later, the check-in ended... with the CO checking email a couple of times throughout.

And then there was her Chief, "Another Junior Officer (JO) to break-in," he blurted as he shook her hand. From there, the folders, and requests for her signature began. When she asked questions, she always got, "Just trust me, and I'll keep you out of trouble with the CO."

The wardroom wasn't much better. There was definitely a power group, but it seemed less connected to leadership and performance and more to personality and fitting in. Sometimes the tone would change when she or others walked in. Other times, she would catch the tail end of a conversation, "Did you see the new Corpsman? I'd hit that."

It was just... not what she thought it would be. If this was the "Fleet," then she would count the months, days, hours, and minutes until she was done. She just wanted to feel a sense of belonging, so dinner with an old friend was overdue. As dinner progressed, it was like they were talking about two different navies.

Her friend raved about her **Triad**, though different in personality, they seemed to divide and conquer, effortlessly working around the ship to build **Connections** with the crew.

She described her **Sponsor**, who not only helped with check-in, but was her "**first onboard Mentor**," guiding her through every step of every process, always finding time to answer a question or connecting her with the right resource.

Jebo was especially fond of "lvls", which were a type of **Career Development Board**, where once a quarter, she'd meet for a half-hour with her Department Head. In the beginning, he took time to learn about her, her family, and her goals. From there, they started talking about her **Mind, Body, Spirit** wellness and how she was putting into practice **Warrior Toughness**. He was **transparent** about his own struggles to maintain **Healthy Behaviors** now that that he was in charge of Operations Department.

And it wasn't like BULKELEY was just a feel-good organization. At the same quarters where they were awarded the Battle E, the Commodore notified the crew they needed to surge and support an unplanned exercise.

"Didn't that tick you off?" Elrod asked. Jebo responded, "No... we live for this. Make it hard and we'll perform even better."

As the restaurant got ready to close, Elrod asked, "How did your command become this way?" Jebo said that she wasn't sure, and that it hadn't always been like this, but the command really embraced **Culture of Excellence (COE) 2.0**. The **COE 2.0 Placemat**, especially the front side, seemed everywhere, and every leader seemed to have a well-worn copy of the **COE 2.0 Playbook**, along with the **Warrior Toughness Placemat** and a copy of the **Mental Health Playbook**.

They knew what right looked like and used the guidance to transform their command.

Elrod remembered **COE 2.0** coming up once at her command, with her Department Head saying, "Here's another crappy initiative from Big Navy's good idea fairies. Now I've got one week to develop our "COE 2.0 Implementation Plan" and brief the Commodore next Friday. It would be nice if they trusted us every once in awhile."

As she went home that night, LTJG Elrod knew that she had a choice. Put her head down and remain cynical or lean in and help the command become something better. In doing so, she

thought about so many Sailors she had seen... where knowing glances conveyed the same dissatisfaction about where Big Navy had sent them.

So, she went to the **MyNavy HR website** and printed out all the COE 2.0 material and read it, cover to cover. Admittedly, it didn't take that long, especially when compared to the thick equipment manuals and PowerPoints that sucked up so much of her time.

"Wow, we have a ways to go," she thought, but she began to get excited. She was in the Navy because she was a **Warfighter...** and building **Great People, Great Leaders,** and **Great Teams** seemed based on "how to be a good human." A smile came to her face as she thought of the goodness to come.

Over coffee the next week with her Chief, she explained that things can be better. She was going to be more involved with the Sailors and how they, as a **Team,** were performing. He challenged her right back, and it became apparent that he was simply jaded, dealing over the years with "snot-nosed JOs," who "only cared about themselves." "OK, that's fair," she said, "so give me a few places to start." That night, she began memorizing the **Sailor's Creed.**

Up next was debriefing Third Class evals. Chief and LTJG Elrod started using the **Core Values section on the back page of the playbook,** talking about each Sailor's performance in terms of **Honor, Courage, and Commitment...** where some were bringing it to life, where some were not, and where some were *faking it.*

As she sat through eval debriefs, it became apparent that many of them were adrift, without a plan for personal or professional development. She discovered that **Career Development Boards (CDB)** were hit or miss, and so over the course of a month, performed one for each of her Sailors. Sometimes the Command Career Counselor got called off, but they executed anyway.

At the CDBs, they really began talking about strengthening their **Mind, Body, Spirit** wellness, and let every Sailor know that before the next deployment, they would be conducting a divisional **Human Factors Council** where they

talked about how everyone was doing... and if any of them found themselves struggling, a **Human Factors Board** was an easy way to pause, sit down, and get someone the help they needed.

It didn't take long for the first breakthrough. Petty Officer Myness admitted that things weren't going well at home. He had recently gotten into an argument with his wife and punched his hand through the closet door, and it wasn't the first time that had happened over the years. They signed him up for a **CREDO** retreat at Fleet and Family. A few months later, he was a new man... performing better than ever.

It really wasn't rocket science... it was simple, and better yet, it was effective. Any time that was "lost" by taking care of their **People** was more than compensated for by the energy and production of her **Team**. Within a few months, they were really humming along.

She'll never forget the knock at the door, "The XO wants to see you." These were rarely good sessions, as she got up, she immediately thought, "What are we late on? Is someone in trouble?"

When she walked in, he asked her to sit down and then offered that he and the CO had noticed that her division was really starting to do well, and wanted to know what she was doing. As she opened her notebook, she pulled out her folded copies of the **COE 2.0 and Warrior Toughness Placemats** and said, "it's really all just here."

He then went to his printer and picked up fresh copies of the same. The conversation continued from there...