

Who Am I?

I was raised in a small community-centered Hispanic/Japanese section of Los Angeles. Since very young, those senior to me have both modeled and instilled in me their values of loyalty and cooperation, in the form of a cooperative hierarchy, with emphasis on benefiting and nurturing the community as a whole. One of the ways this cooperative hierarchy came into play was that we always referred to our church pastor and elders as “first among equals.” This was a way of reminding us all of our shared identity, experience, and history to which we were all held accountable to in order to encourage an environment of mutual respect and consideration despite any personal differences.

This model of cooperative hierarchy continues to influence me even into my professional career. I have at times often felt both the tension and temptation, within mainstream US society, towards a mostly individualistic mindset. Although individualism has its advantages, I have always recollected, as modeled by my home community, that the greater and most lasting benefits came about from a cooperative hierarchy model. In line with this model, there were proper divisions of labor in accordance with one’s abilities and authority, there was genuine commitment among members to each other and to the needs of the community as a whole, and there was an expectation of mutual accountability, loyalty, and trust in order to nurture a harmonious relationship for all community members .

Who Am I Called to Be Now?

Within the Navy, the Chaplain Corps, and the Religious Program Specialist (RP) rating, loyalty, commitment, cooperation, and trust are just as essential in order to benefit the unit, the Navy, and the nation as a whole. If Chaplains/RPs are unable or unwilling to maintain such traits among each other or with the line/staff community, we become perceived as ineffective, aloof, and obsolete by those we are called to serve. As influenced by my own early life experiences, along with the similarities in Navy/Chaplain Corps values, my calling as a Senior Navy Chaplain would

naturally utilize the model of a cooperative hierarchy (in tailored form) to effectively relate with military peers, supervisors, and subordinates in order to encourage a harmonious and cooperative working environment. One unfortunate truth I have continuously observed over time is that when we lose the ability to work in mutual cooperation, harmony, and respect, we lose our credibility as Religious Ministry (RM) professionals, we lose the confidence and trust of our service members, leaders, and their dependents, we lose our moral authority to speak truth to power, and we lose the willingness of those we serve us to ‘hear us’ at all to the point where we become dismissed all together. Furthermore, given current trends in US society, such damages to our professional image have increasingly become more difficult to recover from.

We live in a time where religious faith and clergy, with each passing year, have become more dismissed as ‘irrelevant’ and thus set aside by many US civilians and military personnel. Additionally, much of current US youth culture is also characterized by fragmentation, division, distrust, hostility, and narcissism. Thus, their sense of “place” or “community”, due to an ever-rising individualism, appears more elusive and foreign than with earlier generations. Consequently, current generations appear less likely to know how to cultivate lasting relationships of accountability, loyalty, trust to a community or command/unit as a whole.

Current entertainment/communication technology has also further discouraged many youth from mastering basic interpersonal skills with family members, neighbors, acquaintances, including their military peers/leaders. Many, also have trust issues with authority figures; and they transfer these issues onto their military leaders to include Chaplains. As a result, many such youth come into the military without a sense of true cooperation or community that is geared to serve the needs of the organization or community as a whole as opposed to their own individual desires/needs. The same seems to be true with some personnel who now serve in higher positions of authority. They are also reluctant to get personal with their subordinates (for fear of ‘right to privacy’ sentiments) and hold

them accountable to a basic standard of military core values, much less a basic sense of right and wrong.

As a new senior Navy chaplain, I feel that RMTs are perfectly poised to effectively set a relevant standard of a cooperative hierarchy model that can inform and encourage others to follow. However, before this can happen, Chaplains/RPs need to achieve, maintain, and model this first within our own community; and should remain relevant to current command mission requirements, before it can be effectively used to educate others outside of the Chaplain/RP rating.

Philosophy of Leadership and Model of Leadership

In order to meet the most profound needs of all service members and families entrusted into our care, and then to train subordinate chaplains to do the same; and in line with the “Navy Leader Development Framework”, under the headings of *Character*, *Competence*, and *Connections*, I believe this philosophy is in line with my model of a ‘Cooperative Hierarchy’ and should contain the following elements:

Character: We as Chaplains/RPs must develop and continually strengthen our personal character to be in line with our Navy Core Values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment. This will build a common point of reference, trust, shared identity, and shared expectation that will enhance our team effort in carrying out our command expectations.¹ We must also be people of indisputable personal integrity and elevated accountability in mastering our RM essentials in order to effectively enhance our standing and contribution in the eyes of our commands. We must also lead and operate by example; and we must understand the ‘power of example’ in order to maintain trust and credibility with each other and those we serve. Our personal/professional character enhances or compromises our ability to care and respond to the needs of our Sailors/Marines and their dependents. Few people, if any, will genuinely accept care or response from someone they have little or no confidence in.²

Competence: We must maintain proficiency in living out our Navy Core Values on a consistent basis. Those who do not, will risk creating an environment of distrust and disunity.³ The amount of command trust we are given in our competence is the sum of our personal motives and our leaders' perceptions of our individual/collective performance. In other words, we get the Chaplain/RP collective behavior we reward and thus high competence must always be insisted on! Thus, our outward competence, and command perception, speak volumes on our ability to provide effective Care and Response. To this end, regular training, accountability, and practice of our professional basics and core values are essential. Furthermore, ongoing education, training, and reading stimulates comradery and creative thinking to become our personal and collective best. We must always ask ourselves: what do we need to know beforehand from our command and from each other in order to be competent RMT members?⁴; and then progress from there.

Connections: We must develop and build upon our personal and professional connections through our common medium of our Navy Core Values. No one can provide comprehensive RM care by going at it alone; and We should NEVER give commands the opportunity to accuse Chaplains/RPs of being "aloof" or "doing our own thing." We all come from different backgrounds and life experiences that we all can learn and draw from to be better RM professionals; and all are deserving of respect and dignity. Through our 'Unity in Diversity' we will achieve our higher levels of creativity and performance by identifying our personal gifts and proficiencies and then look for ways to utilize them all to set each other up for success in meeting mission requirements and increase our overall influence. Furthermore, we will not always agree on everything, and not all command members will always appreciate us, but we should always be able to leverage our comradery, mutual respect, and our personal/professional connections to remain resilient and united. In sum, we are Toughest and most effective when we together face and support each other in times of privilege or adversity.⁵

On Mentorship. In order to remain tough and effective, we must also be proficient givers and receivers of mentorship. Another way to say this is we must be both good givers and receivers of care, accountability, and guidance in both good times and when times become challenging. As steel sharpens steel, “Mentorship strengthens both the protégé and the mentor. When we mentor, we devote ourselves to our protégés’ growth and success. We form productive mentor-protégé relationships when development comes from loyalty—from mentor to protégé and from protégé to mentor.”⁶ We will also leverage inclusion and our diversity within our teams to make the best decisions that make us more creative, more competitive, and more operationally effective.⁷

How You Will Develop Other Leaders

I have observed over the years that younger generations usually go on to express and model the same working environments and leadership styles of those from prior generations. Most of our Chaplains/RPs, now ever more so, tend to represent a good cross section of current US society. The implication here is that if we abuse, misuse, or neglect our younger Chaplains/RPs, they may likely go on to do the same with those who come after them. However, if we are faithful to model the ideals of Professional Naval Chaplaincy and hold them to a shared standard of accountability, discipline, and cooperation, we may positively impact the overall Chaplain Corps and RP rating, as a whole, in order to further enhance our relevance, influence, and trust with military leadership.

One of the unfortunate aspects of this however, is that some Chaplains/RPs will nonetheless continue to hold on to their own individualistic interests or personal agendas. We need to prepare ourselves for the reality that although most may be teachable in order to follow a path that will lead them to more responsibility and influence, others will neither be teachable, salvageable, nor a good fit for military ministry. The best favor we can do for them is to help them look for opportunities outside the military where they can thrive, regain their integrity, sense of call, and personal fulfillment. Realistically speaking, no one makes necessary changes in their behavior or way of thinking unless they truly desire to do so.

In summary, I would like to quote Major General John A. Lejeune, Marine Corps Commandant (1922), who I feel best describes what a military-tailored cooperative hierarchy would look like: “it would do each of us well to remember what we are a part of, the efficiency, the good name, and spirit of the [Chaplain Corps and RP rating] is in our hands. We can make it or we can mar it.

We should never forget the power of example. The men and women we serve take their cue from us in areas of morality and conduct. If we conduct ourselves at all times as [Chaplain] officers [and RPs] should conduct ourselves, our moral tone will be raised, our reputation will be enhanced, and the esteem and affection in which we are held by those we serve will be increased.

As for those we mentor, be kindly and just in your dealing with your subordinates. Never play favorites. Make them feel that justice tempered with mercy may always be counted on. This does not mean a slackening of discipline or standards. Obedience to orders, regulations, and policy must always be insisted on, along with expectations of high moral conduct.”⁸

General Lejeune further goes on to say that “harmonious cooperation and team work, together with intelligent and energetic performance of duty are essential for success and that these attributes can only be attained by cultivating in your characters the qualities of loyalty, unselfishness, devotion to duty, and the highest sense of honor.”⁹

In conclusion, this is all to say that if one can correctly, model a working cooperative hierarchy, where accountability, trust and harmony can be consistently maintained, it may inspire current and future subordinates to do the same with those they lead. As a result, our moral standing and authority are more likely to be consistently maintained, thus enlarging our area of influence to those we serve. In the end, their collective testimony of us as Chaplains/RPs, whatever it is, becomes our lasting reputation as RM professionals.

Endnotes

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- 1 “Navy Leader Development Framework (NLDF) 3.0” Pages 4, 5, 6, and 9
 - 2 SECNAVINST 1730.7E Encl. 2 Sections 1 and 2. And I MEF Mission Statement
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 - 5 Navy Leader Development Framework (NLDF) 3.0” Pages 4, 5, 6, and 9
 - 6 Navy Leader Development Framework (NLDF) 3.0” Pages 8 -13
 - 7 Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority 2.0 Page 9, Item 9
 - 8 Major General John A. Lejeune, Letter 1, “To The Officers of the Marine Corps” September 19, 1922
 - 9 *ibid*