



If I Knew Then What I Know Now...

And Other Useful Tidbits of Wisdom



- **Don't Assume Your Subordinates Know.** Whether its maintenance or your Intent, there will be plenty of room for interpretation and that may or may not be consistent with your ends. During the deployment, we had some issues with people who thought they knew and – as close inspection, scrutiny and time proved – not only did they not know, but they were sorely deficient.
- **Train Your People To Be Prepared To Do It Without You.** You'll never know how important this is until it happens in training. The outcome may surprise you. If you don't prepare for it, it may be a bad surprise.
- **Ensure Your People Know What You Expect.** Get your message out – whether its proficiency, safety, leadership, etc. – hammer away at it and always ask Napoleon's Corporal (or PFC, 2ndLt, Capt or Major) to ensure that they understand what you expect. Also, at the risk of "flattening the cat" provide written guidance when you can. Otherwise, you'll let your people down.
- **Assume Nothing – Trust But Verify.** Always a difficult one for the pundits and experts of leadership and micromanagement (and there are many!) to comprehend. However, the time-tested and experienced leader must go and seek the truth to ensure the spirit of his will, instructions and orders are being followed, if not to the letter to the spirit. The natural corollary for this idea is that everyone is out to do something wrong and, for our Marines and Sailors; this cannot be further from the truth. As the saying goes inspect what you expect and you'll know where you really stand.
- **Don't Assume Rank And Seniority Means Competence.** All too often, we see a field grade officer, moderate to senior enlisted or CWO that we think - due to their rank and seniority - that they are competent. Nothing beats a close inspection or discussion over a cup of coffee to help you find out what makes them tick. The law of probability guarantees that you will be surprised.
- **Listen To Your Gut.** If you've got a feeling in your gut that something is not right, then you need to apply "due diligence" and confirm or deny your suspicions. This takes time to cultivate but is essential in the category of experience. All too often, a small indication can mean something is, in fact, a trend. Your gut will tell you this. While you may not always be right, you won't know if you don't check. Ignore your gut and you may regret it.
- **Do Your Homework.** Enough said.
- **Don't Assume Anybody Outside Your Command Cares.** Nobody cares about your unit more than you do. How many times have we seen this? Equipment, maintenance, individual awards or personnel management...if you don't do it or let someone know, no one else will.
- **The Rock Says, "Know Your Role".** There's a story behind this but, in the end, know where you fit in to the organization and work to that end as part of the team. More importantly, ensure that all your tasks and those of your subordinates are well defined. Otherwise, you'll be sorry.
- **Attitude Is Everything.** One of our favorite worn out clichés that can't be truer. This is contagious also...you've seen it, bad attitudes are, well, bad. With higher, your own unit and subordinates units, you run the risk of undermining your own direction, positive climate for growth, and generally infecting your entire command with a poisonous attitude.
- **Words Mean Things.** Think before you speak; don't send out an email when you are mad, take time to reflect on something or, better yet, verify the facts before you hit "send" or just pick up the phone. It may save you a "mea culpa" and preserve your hard-earned reputation.
- **Keep It Simple.** This can also be restated as "Be brilliant at the basics." Military units are generally complex organizations. While there is always a tendency to want to be able to do complex tasks with skill and grace, we get paid to recognize where our Marines truly are. Train your leaders to be able to do the simple things very, very well and through this, they will grow to be very proficient at the more complex muscle movements. Refrain from the natural inclination to execute complex tasks until you are sure your unit is ready or you may do far more harm than good.
- **Do The Right Thing.** Mark Twain said it best, "Do the right thing. It will gratify some people and astonish the rest." Most of our Marines and Sailors will always try to do the right thing...keep that in mind.