Introduction

Thank you for allowing me to be part of such an honored event. As a Senior Enlisted Leader with 18 years of experience in the Navy I will discuss why I chose a career in the military/Navy, the different types of training I’ve received, deckplate leadership, leadership and challenges during my career.

Why I Chose a Career in the military/Navy

Unlike most young adults who join the military right out of high school that was not the case for me. Reflecting back, I remember when the military recruiters visited my high school. I was impressed with the uniforms and I thought the military sounded like a good career choice. But, because of other choices in life and obligations I did not join the military until the youthful age of 32. I chose to marry and have a child before I joined the Navy, and I
waited until my son was old enough for me to go back to work full time before I joined.

After being employed with a clothing manufacturing company for 10 years, eight of those years as a supervisor, one day I realized upward mobility in the company was at a standstill. That was the motivating force that drove me to the Marine recruiting office. It’s funny because to this day I don’t remember the Gunny Sergeant’s name, but he is the reason I’m in the Navy today. He spent several weeks helping me to prepare for the written test you are required to take prior to joining. Then one day he stood up and told me I was ready to take the test and he sent me over to the Navy recruiting office. I guess he saw something in me that told him I was a better fit for the Navy. I do believe he made the right choice for me.

Training
After joining the Navy in 1989 and selecting the rate of Operations Specialist I was sent to Boot Camp in Orlando, FL. In this training phase instructors instill the basic tools that prepare you physically, mentally, and emotionally for military life. Upon completion of boot camp I was sent to “A” school in Dam Neck, Va. The training at “A” school was designed to help me understand what my job as an Operations Specialist entailed. As an Operations Specialist, also known as an “OS”, I would be responsible for monitoring navigation and safe operations of the ship, as well as identifying and reporting any threats to the ship. Further training in my rate as an OS was obtained in Puerto Rico, onboard the USS Kiska, USS Bonhomme Richard and will continue until I’m no longer in the United States Navy. Other commands such as Naval Training Communications Station in Hawaii and Navy
Personnel Command in Millington, TN just to name a few, supported the type of jobs and out of rate training needed to be successful as a deckplate leader.

As I moved from duty station to duty station, continuous training and varied job assignments as well as plain-old hard work were the keys to my steady promotion. What’s important to note from this part of my lecture is that all the training and jobs in the military are designed to cultivate Sailors into well rounded individuals with unique leadership qualities that can be fostered and brought out not only over the course of a Navy career but throughout life.

**Deckplate Leadership**

As I mentioned earlier, Sailors are trained throughout their career to be leaders. When you put on the rank of a Chief Petty Officer your job becomes “Deckplate Leadership”. Deckplate Leadership means: Chiefs are
visible leaders who set the tone. Officers are not the only leaders in the Navy. (Chiefs are leaders who have risen through the enlisted ranks and proven their ability to lead by working hard and earning their promotions). The rank of Chief Petty Officer was established April 1, 1893. As Chief Petty Officers, we have three main objectives: (1) To train and guide junior officers, to develop them into leaders, (2) To train and develop our subordinates into future leaders and (3) To utilize all fellow CPO’s experience and wisdom, in addition to technical expertise, when trying to solve problems and achieve the command’s mission. This is my job and what I strive to do on a daily basis.

Leadership

I truly believe that not all individuals are born to lead. Yes, leadership skills can be taught and most of us
will be great leaders because of our dedication and willingness to learn. Coming into the Navy at 32 gave me an advantage over most junior Sailors who have no work experience and join the military after graduating high school. I felt I had a slight advantage over my peers because I had honed my leadership skills as a civilian with 10 years of work experience at my back. What I recognized along the way in my Navy career is that I had acquired the dedication and desire needed to become a Senior Enlisted Leader but I had to adjust to the military way of doing business.

I remember walking into CIC as a Second Class Petty Officer onboard the USS Kiska and seeing my Chief sitting on top of the safe with his khaki uniform on. I looked at him with admiration and thought to myself one day I’m going to wear that khaki uniform. I remember so
vividly setting the stage for “deckplate leadership” in my mind and to make a long story short I became the Leading Petty Officer of Operations division onboard the USS Kiska shortly after as a Second Class Petty Officer.

**Challenges during my Career**

As you can see I continued my journey and I am now a proud Senior Chief Petty Officer who is committed to “deckplate leadership” as a Senior Enlisted Leader. I have to admit that just like many of you who may have faced challenges along the way whether personal or not I was no different.

I came into the Navy at a time when enlisted females were not onboard combatant vessels and shipboard life for females were practically non-existent. Some males believed females did not deserve to advance because we were not serving at sea and doing the hard jobs. I can’t say
they did not have a valid point but policy at the time did not permit females to enter combat zones. As an aspiring leader I could not allow myself to get caught up in opinions because this was the career I chose and there was no turning back. Of course those beliefs did not hinder female advancement rates and policy has changed. Females are permitted to serve onboard combatant vessels.

Another challenging issue I see as a leader constantly is balancing family life in the military. This can mean anything from when to start a family, who should be assigned to what billet to provide the best care for the family and time spent away from the family. When faced with these challenges I echo what was written by in the goatlocker by Thomas Yorty from “My thoughts on being a leader”, “I treat my Sailors as Sailors first, then individuals with their own needs, goals, desires and problems”.
One thing is certain; I will constantly be faced with challenges and issues to resolve. As a leader and a Chief Petty Officer I accept that responsibility because it’s the challenges that make me a better leader.

Conclusion

You may have noticed that I don’t spend much time talking about being a woman. That is because I consider myself to be a Sailor and a Chief Petty Officer first. The fact that I’m a female is not important. I am a leader.

As I look over what I have written, in conclusion I would like to emphasize that I believe that some individuals are born to lead and others learn to lead as they develop. Either way, anyone willing to work hard and stand up for what is right can be a leader. In the Navy, we teach people, both male and female, to be leaders. That is my job.
References

Goat Locker, Chief Petty Officer Resource Links

My thoughts on being a leader, Thomas Yorty, OTAC(USN Retired)

Leadership 101 for Chief Petty Officers, ATCS(AW) Patrick A. Nisley

MCPONS Guidance for 2007, Joe R. Campa Jr., Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy