

PATHFINDER: Cmdr. Douglas Houser, USN (Ret)



Be an Engaged Leader

Provide the full context of events to advance your team — even while crossing a finish line.

Atrue measure of character is how you react when times get tough. No matter how personal the issue, you must take ownership of the problem. Leadership is that ownership. Something inexplicable happens when you feel ownership. As a leader, you cannot be a spectator because you are invested.

To me, as a former commanding officer, ownership has meant assuming responsibility for the command, mission, and sailors. All three are important, but above all else, I took a keen interest in my sailors' personal and professional lives.

Sailors, and likely all subordinates, want to have an authentic

relationship with their leaders. They want to be encouraged to pursue their goals. I invested myself in the people under my command because they were invested in my vision, leadership, abilities, and me.

The payoff from that mutual investment comes in the form of overcoming obstacles and meeting the mission. Given time, the mutual investment becomes trust, and it is the basis for teamwork.

It's important that everyone in the group understand they serve each other and not just march alongside each other. In this way, each person in the group intrinsically draws strength from others. As a leader, that strength

can help you through simple and mundane tasks or enormous challenges that, at the onset, can seem overwhelming.

The decommissioning of Fleet Combat Camera Pacific fell in the overwhelming category, so I had a difficult job to do. The first task was to put the mission in context. Providing comprehensive context is one of the most powerful ways an effective leader can help people through adversity.

For this mission, it meant developing career options and keeping information available; helping the sailors and civilians understand their alternatives, such as follow-on orders; and explaining new opportunities for career development.

Transparent communication was the key to success. I consistently pushed information through the command. This was vital in maintaining my command's trust of me and preserving the bonds and strength we had established up to that point. My staff noticed, and they remained inspired to contribute.

Show genuine concern for your people. It will pay off. Leadership isn't about being the best. It's about making everyone better, no matter the circumstances. ■■■



Cmdr. Douglas Houser, USN (Ret), enlisted in 1986. He retired after Navy Combat Camera was decommissioned in 2018.

Keeping a team strong requires a leader who holds up the network.