

Turning 21—A Rite of Passage

For most underage Sailors—and college students, too—turning 21 is the last major rite of passage in their young lives—an important fact to consider, even in the case of non-drinkers. Most major social venues won't permit entry to underage individuals, and many enforce an early curfew. This situation denies access to a major portion of any city, regardless of a Sailor's drinking habits. Thus, even nondrinkers are likely to celebrate their 21st birthdays as a seminal event. Many of them will choose to celebrate this day by drinking to excess.

Given the disproportionate number of incidents caused by Sailors within a year of their 21st birthdays, mentoring and counseling as that date approaches is vital to any prevention program. *[Twenty percent of the Navy's alcohol incidents involve 20-to-22-year-old Sailors. One third of all DUI and DWI incidents involve 21-year-old Sailors.—Ed.]* Commanders should know the dates

when their Sailors turn 21 and incorporate such counseling into prevention programs. Effective counseling should include these topics:



Choice

Many young Sailors protest that they are treated like children. What they must understand is that the decision to drink or to drink excessively is theirs. Yet, it is important to emphasize that they will be held accountable for the consequences of their choices. Mentors need not resort to scare tactics to get this point across. A brief discussion of the Navy's and your command's policy on alcohol abuse, giving them the necessary information to make a risk analysis before drinking, will suffice. Many still will choose to drink excessively, regardless of our best efforts. The best we can do is to ensure they make an informed choice and enforce Navy policy if an incident occurs. In some cases, experience is the only thing that will help Sailors learn to moderate their drinking habits or to abstain.

Support

Knowing that many Sailors will choose to drink, commanders should seek to minimize the possible consequences of excessive drinking. Aggressive designated-driver programs and allowing Sailors to call their chief, LPO, or division officer without fear of punitive action when they have been drinking will reduce the likelihood of DUIs and other incidents. Letting Sailors know this support system is in place actually may deter some from drinking heavily. At the very least, it lets Sailors know the command is looking out for their welfare.

Relevance

Sailors should know that the concern with their drinking behavior isn't simply another attempt by an authority figure to control their lives. Let them know they play an important role in mission accomplishment, and you cannot afford to lose a single one because of an alcohol incident. While this fact seems self-evident, the concern for Sailors' well-being and their contribution to the command's mission often get lost in the prevention or disciplinary process.

Key Points to Consider

Your Sailors are adults. Talking to them at that level means stressing that drinking is their choice but that they will be held accountable for their actions.

Sailors want to know they're important to the mission. They should know you're not trying to control their lives, but, rather, you're trying to ensure their safety.

The command needs to be consistent in its alcohol policy. If Sailors see some people get away with incidents, while others get busted, they probably will ignore your counsel.



Sailors need to know that being a shipmate doesn't end at the pier. Stress the need for them to look after each other. If they decide to drink, it's better they do so around shipmates. Liberty is a chance for young Sailors to learn to act responsibly by policing one another.

Don't use gimmicks. Young Sailors know you're older than they are, so don't try to act their age to get your point across. Let them know you're responsible for their safety, and you want them to

have a good time in a safe way. Honesty is the best policy to follow; they'll see through you if you put on any airs.

The goal of any prevention program targeting young Sailors cannot be simply an end to alcohol incidents. By emphasizing choice and responsibility, mentorship will help develop Sailors who will make the right decisions on their own. As they advance in rate, they then will mentor those junior to them. **A**

A Model Prevention Program

What does it take to turn around a drug and alcohol problem? In the case of the amphibious ship *USS Nashville* (LPD 13), the answer is a top-down, sincere commitment to setting Sailors up for life and a successful naval career.

Nashville has accomplished this objective by establishing and enforcing standards, training the trainers, and implementing several people programs. Three of these people programs (command mentorship, alcohol and drug deglamorization, and the command urinalysis) are essential ingredients in the overall success. The ship also has developed

or improved the sponsor, advancement-preparation, physical-fitness-assessment, and advanced-education programs, all of which have the buy-in of the entire command. *Nashville* isn't just paying lip service to Sailor improvement. As one crew member noted, "We live and breathe it every day, and the results have been stunning—improved performance and morale across the board!"

Mentorship Program

Nashville has a robust, three-phase mentorship program that was established in November 2002. Its mission statement is "Using Leaders of Today to Form Leaders of Tomorrow." The command master chief and a program coordinator selected from the CPO mess oversee phases one and two of the program. The First Class Petty Officers Association and the surface-and air-warfare-qualified second class petty officers administer these two phases. All mentors are screened for their leadership attributes, positive attitude, and proven ability to advance and to develop professionally. None can be delinquent in their qualifications or physical standards.



Phases one and two share the common goal of providing young Sailors with proactive guidance and helping them choose a successful career path while minimizing risk of misconduct, substance abuse, and other problems. The goal is to have motivated and developed Sailors heading down the path of professional success, with increased retention rates of high-quality Sailors. The motivation is similar for phase three, but it's tailored for more seasoned Sailors.

Mentorship Program Best Practices

By attacking at-risk Sailors' problems head-on, phase one of the program has yielded early and measurable returns. Disciplinary cases have dropped dramatically, and the number of repeat offenders is nearly zero.

Nashville's mentorship program has merged with and directly enhanced all the ship's Sailor improvement and development programs. Specifically, the New Sailor Assimilation Course and the sponsorship, command-indoctrination, alcohol-deglamorization, and promotability programs synergize with the mentorship program. The combined payoff forms leaders of tomorrow by setting Sailors up to succeed today—in the Navy and for life.

The ship's mentor-training program is designed around group interaction, where mentoring styles and best practices are exchanged. The mentors emerge motivated and with a full bag of tools.

Alcohol and Drug Deglamorization

This program builds on and strengthens the foundation established with the mentorship program. It likewise has three phases:

Phase 1: Education. Every junior *Nashville* Sailor, age 25 and younger, attends Prevent, the Navy's alcohol-and-drugs-prevention and health-promotion class. Every junior Sailor also attends a day of training on such topics as anger management, sexual assault, and sexual-assault-

victim intervention.

Phase 2: Tough Love. *Nashville* took off the gloves in addressing alcohol incidents by holding a stand-down for all hands in October 2002. The ship's policy was spelled out in detail at that time. Sailors learned they face penalties for any alcohol-related incident, such as underage drinking, DUI, DWI, public intoxication, or public urination. Offenders receive a page 13 entry, have any recommendation for advancement pulled, and undergo legal process—at minimum, a disciplinary-review board.

Phase 3: Reward Program. This final aspect is based on positive leadership techniques built specifically on peer pressure. The timing of this phase's beginning was significant. As a negative leadership technique, phase two was effective in starting the command's attitude pendulum swinging. However, everyone knows that a negative leadership technique really is effective for only a short time. The net effect aboard *Nashville*, though, has been a positive program that keeps the ship's alcohol-deglamorization pendulum pegged to the right. Here is how the program works:

- Sailors (and, in some cases, embarked Marines) are divided into competitive teams of 20 to 30 people each. This size was chosen for equity purposes and because it seems to be a number that minimizes dividing or combining divisional work centers.

- Any team that goes 30 days without an alcohol-related incident gets a day off in port and



The goal aboard USS *Nashville* is to motivate Sailors like the one here toward professional success, so they'll want to reenlist when the time comes.

enjoys uninterrupted overseas liberty, to include overnight liberty when authorized on deployment. The ship actually schedules monthly alcohol-deglam days off in advance so Sailors can plan on them.

- If a single member of a team has an alcohol-related incident, the entire team and the chain of command, up to the XO, comes in on the scheduled deglam day off. Activities begin with a 0630 muster and end with a 1600 muster. The team spends the entire day in alcohol-deglamorization training. It is key here to differentiate between “punishment” and “process improvement.” The ship doesn’t bring in team members on these designated days off as punishment but as a means of process improvement. Specifically, the team is brought together to identify what placed the team member at risk and to talk about what measures are in place to ensure future success.

Think of the peer pressure this program builds. Junior Sailors from all departments talk about this subject to shipmates before they leave for weekends. The Sailors want all their days off, and they understand the cumulative effects of consecutive months’ performance. A status board is maintained on the mess deck, and you routinely find Sailors stopped and pointing to it. You might want to pass by the group, though, if they happen to be part of a team who just lost their day off because one member made a bad decision about alcohol.

Since October 2002, the largest number of teams standing in attendance at a 0630 muster aboard *Nashville* has been two. In other words, 80 percent of the ship’s crew routinely enjoys liberty on their targeted days off. The first words to those teams at a 0630 muster are, “This is a success story; more than 80 percent of the crew is off today.” The message continues, “We’re not here to talk to the couple of individuals who actually had alcohol-related incidents (remember, we took off the gloves with those folks in phase two). Instead, we’re here to talk to the team members—to find out if you involved yourselves in the process. If you heard the shipmates talk about tying one on or going drinking without a designated driver, were

you part of the solution or part of the problem?”

Aboard *Nashville*, most Sailors are part of the solution to alcohol and drug deglamorization. For more than six months, the ship hasn’t had a single alcohol-related incident. Why? Because Sailors make the smart decisions. With this success, the number of mast cases has dropped 50 percent.

Drug Positives

Nashville has had zero drug-related incidents since October 2002—not because the ship has a drug-deglamorization program. There are no second chances for drug use in the Navy today, which is what all hands are told, starting with the command indoctrination. During indoctrination, Sailors also are told to close their eyes and to visualize the one person who really was proud of them when they joined the Navy. Then, they are told to picture the same person when they have to pick up the phone and tell him or her they are being kicked out of the Navy with an “other” type of discharge for drug use. It’s a simple but effective message.

The ship exceeds urinalysis-testing requirements by conducting random tests on 25 percent or more of the crew every month and two or more unit sweeps each year. In a nine-month period, which included two unit sweeps, as well as the nine random tests, not one Sailor tested positive for drugs. It would be easy to say these results are the direct result of an aggressive drug-testing program, but that’s not the truth. The fact is *Nashville* uses the random urinalysis tool in a very overt way to let Sailors know they will be discovered if they use drugs. The Sailors also know they then will have to make what likely will be one of the toughest phone calls of their life. ■

The information for the preceding two stories came from the Navy Alcohol & Drug Abuse Prevention (NADAP) program website (<http://navdweb.spa.war.navy.mil>). Used with permission.—Ed.