

Why Do We Need Outside “Experts”?

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During 26 years of naval service, I have been on the receiving and giving end of various surveys, assessments, visits, and certifications. Call them what you want: Each one equates to another set of trained eyes identifying problems that otherwise might have gone unchecked. Having thought about it a bit, I relate these visits to a doctor’s appointment. The doctor is there to identify “what ails you.”

Often the crew already has identified a problem area, and the outside expert only confirms it or provides a second opinion, based on inside knowledge or trends. Identify potentially cascading problems early, and you will avoid larger problems later. Some common shipboard problems identified through inspections include dead-ended cables, running rust, faulty hydrostatic hoses, and oily water in bilges.

An outside expert’s challenge, though, is not identifying deficiencies but being positively received when coming aboard. I can remember when I would build up a dislike for arriving teams before they even sat with me for an in-brief. The crew would be coached on how to respond to their questions. Sailors often are programmed to view anyone coming from outside the lifelines to inspect their ship as being the “enemy.” If we would change our attitudes toward these teams from one of being adversarial to being willing to assist them, then the visit would be more educational and, ultimately, more beneficial.

We often become so accustomed to our surroundings that we easily overlook, and fail to iden-



tify, common everyday discrepancies. We might miss the latest revision or advisory to a technical publication, which the outside expert will provide at no cost. Safety surveyors or assessors have the latest information because we continuously search for updates to information affecting the fleet’s safety.

Ample guidance is available to get ready for visits. Individuals and commands have their own ways of preparing. One little secret to being prepared is having current technical manuals, PMS data, Tagout Users Manual, and NSTMs—along with other required publications, whether administrative or technical—that are required by higher authority if we are doing our jobs correctly. It also should be no surprise that shipboard spaces always should adhere to high cleanliness standards; don’t field-day just before an inspection. Machinery should be maintained regularly to operate at 100 percent of manufacturers’ and technical-manual specifications.

Too often, a ship's crew gets angry when outsiders tell members they are falling short of the mark. The professional response should be to act on the results and to demonstrate a willingness to excel the next time outside eyes evaluate the ship. Sometimes, existing standards are unknown, so they cannot be met. Remember that varying degrees of meeting standards exist: Strive to meet the high expectations, far exceeding the minimum "satisfactory" requirements.

Remember also that, when a ship is built, it has all of the bells and whistles in place. We introduce the human factor: We remove nuts and bolts by making unofficial "Sailor-alts," which are not approved by the proper authority. We transform spaces designated for a specific purpose into comfort or stowage areas without questioning why that space initially was not designed for the alteration.

We need safety surveys because they offer a reality check for us when we become too comfortable and familiar with our daily routines. Such outsiders ultimately help to keep us focused on the job at hand, which is to work efficiently, safely, and to be battle-ready. Safety-survey results strictly remain within the lifelines of the surveyed ship. ■



Have you heard the one about the Sailor,
a fish and a few beers?

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Summary of Mishaps