

Book Review for 02/09/03 by Terry Kinnear

Title: "It's Your Ship: Management Techniques from the Best Damn Ship in the Navy"

Author: Captain D. Michael Abrashoff

Publisher: Warner Books

Copyright: 2002

Length: 212 pages

Price: \$24.95

Reading time: 4 hours

Reading rating: 6 (1 = very difficult; 10 = very easy)

Overall rating: 3 (1 = average; 4 = outstanding)

"It's Your Ship" is an account of Captain Abrashoff's transformation of USS Benfold to "the best damn ship in the Navy." Through the convincing use of stories, and minimal managerial jargon, Abrashoff articulates how he turned a "dysfunctional ship" and "sullen crew" into a "tight-knit, smoothly functioning team."

The author's management lessons are offered for anyone focused on organizational improvement. Abrashoff presents a dozen fundamental beliefs for managing developed while commanding the ship for twenty months beginning in June 1997. These are offered to the reader with considerable reflection and discussion of their finer points.

The primary topics are identified on the disk jacket as "secrets"; the chapter titles, however, do not support this. Leading by example, facilitating trust in organizations, taking calculated risks, and others are neither secrets nor new.

The means by which Abrashoff implements these principles, nonetheless, are unique to his ship. Through description of his methods the reader benefits and easily grasps how this commander altered the Benfold culture such that the sailors experienced the ship as their own.

The commander's approach to bringing about change is consistent with the approach of others. Like Watson and Brown indicate in "The Most Effective Organization in the U.S.": "The first to notice [organizational purpose and actual practice] misalignment, even before customers, will be employees." Abrashoff recognizes the value of seeing the ship through the crew's eyes.

Captain Abrashoff operates outside normal military boundaries, but he is a realist and his actions are unquestionably practical and sincere. He recognizes, for example, the need for ship captains to possess autocratic power, yet values using that power to earn the respect and trust of others.

Noteworthy is how the author balances the discussion of the ship as both a closed and an open system. Not only does he exhibit leading as serving others, including the ship's

crew, but also demonstrates the need for individuals and organizations to make contributions beyond self-serving motivations.