

SMALLTALK

about big ideas

Lead with Intent

By Jennifer Boykin

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I'm inspired by historic leaders like George Washington and Alexander Hamilton who overcame incredible obstacles with dedication, perseverance and a vision. They had no rule books, and no one before them who could provide guidance on how to establish a new world. Instead, they leveraged their own experiences and the expertise of others to blaze new trails.

At Newport News Shipbuilding, we have created a 133-year-old legacy of "Always Good Ships" on the shoulders of the shipbuilders who came before us, and those who have continued to work for decades behind our gates.

As we transform our business, the expertise and lessons learned over the past century will continue to be critical to our success. Equally important are new ideas, opinions and experiences, which is why my team and I decided on an engagement action plan this year focused on establishing a courageous, intent-based leadership culture within NNS.

Intent-based leadership enables people by giving them authority to make decisions and execute. Too often, our leadership team directs what needs to be done instead of asking our teams for solutions and giving them the freedom to act on ideas that may be different from our own. I know I have been guilty of this behavior.

I admire our leadership for their willingness to solve problems and get the job done. But it is our responsibility – in fact, it is a cornerstone to success – to grow and develop our next generation of leaders and give them the opportunity and flexibility to lead in a way that allows growth through mistakes.

I have always felt more satisfaction in watching my team members succeed than by solving the problems myself. George Washington exemplified this. As his second term in office came to a close, he chose not to seek re-election. Instead, he decided to step down and let others lead, setting the precedence of a two-term limit that would later be formalized in the Twenty-second Amendment to the Constitution.

Our country carried on – and thrived – under the example he set.

Here at Newport News Shipbuilding, parts of our core business require a risk-averse approach. And while that can be necessary, we too often fear making mistakes or giving up control to someone less experienced. What we miss is that mistakes serve us as long as we collectively learn from them and improve our business—and ourselves. Repeat mistakes mean we are not learning, and learning is how we will blaze new trails of our own.

In the words of George Washington, "to err is nature, to rectify error is glory."

My ask of you – when you see me or the other members of my team not exhibiting intent-based leadership, let us know. It's still a new muscle we are learning to exercise.

My team's engagement action plan is built upon the belief that it is our duty to leave this shipyard smarter, and in the capable hands of those who will follow us. If our knowledge leaves with us at the end of our final shift, we have not succeeded in creating the culture our shipbuilders deserve.



What's Next:

By now, all teams should have established their own 2019 engagement action plans. If you don't know your team's action plan, ask your supervisor. We need everyone to know what their teams are focused on – whether it's on leadership, your work space, or better teaming with partners. And for our leadership team, I expect you to talk with your teams regularly about how their action plans are going, just as my team and I are doing. Communication and transparency will only help improve teamwork, trust and engagement across the entire shipyard.