

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Worksheet for Mike Abrashoff | It's Your Ship — Here's How to Shape It (Episode 231)

At age 36, Mike Abrashoff was the most junior commanding officer in the Pacific fleet when he was selected as Commander of USS Benfold. At the time, this was one of the worst-performing ships in the Navy. Morale was low, turnover was high, and the previous commanding officer was literally booed off the ship after leaving command. Just one year later, with the same crew under Mike's leadership, it was ranked number one in performance.

So how did Mike succeed where older, more experienced commanders had failed? That's what we'll examine [in this episode](#) as Mike lays out the foundations of his *New York Times* Best Seller, *It's Your Ship: Management Techniques from the Best Damn Ship in the Navy*.

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Trusting Me, Trusting You

At the time Mike took command, the USS Benfold had a reputation as being one of the fleet's worst ships. But in just one year under Mike's leadership — and with the same crew that had jeered his predecessor's departure — it became the fleet's best. While Mike has only kind words to say about the ship's previous Commander, he can pinpoint exactly where his leadership style failed: he never allowed his staff the freedom to make their own mistakes necessary for growth, which demonstrated a lack of trust in — and respect for — their abilities. This generated bad morale that only spread across the ship.

"He's a brilliant man," says Mike, "But he never left his comfort zone. He was an engineer his whole life, and so he focused on the engineering plant and tried to do everything himself. So his engineers folded their arms and said, 'Okay, you do it,' and they became the first new construction ship in the history of the Navy to flunk their first engineering certification. It's because, instead of becoming the Captain, he wanted to be the Super Chief Engineer."

Have you ever found yourself in a leadership position as the "reward" for a job well done? Is your instinct to take on more busywork yourself as the most "qualified" person for the job, or train and delegate your staff to create a potentially unstoppable legion of qualified specialists? If you tend toward the former response, in what ways can you step back and cultivate the respect and trust necessary to allow others to excel?

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Every Job Is Sacred

Unlike his predecessor, Mike understood the importance of making every crew member feel like a valued part of the overall team — that their contribution was worthwhile and made a difference.

“I tried to connect every sailor’s job to the completion of the overall mission,” says Mike, “even if they were running the sewage system on the ship, I wanted them to feel important and that we couldn’t operate without them. One guy, I went to see him every day to thank him, because he had a crappy job down in the bowels of the ship and I went down ladders, hand over fist, four decks down, to say, ‘Sean you’re doing a great job. I appreciate your hard work.’”

If you’re in charge of a group of people, it’s to your benefit — and the benefit of the overall project you’re trying to accomplish — to know the details of who each person is and what they’re doing to contribute. Even if you’re not a leader, you can put this into practice in everyday interactions — it can be as simple as learning the name of the person who bags your groceries, making eye contact, and thanking them. Showing respect is just a small way to build big trust and make positive changes.



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Organization over I, I, I.

Mike agrees with former guest [Jocko Willink's philosophy of extreme ownership](#) as the most efficient way to get the job done while strengthening and cementing bonds within a team. In short, if you remove ego from the equation and perform with the goal of the organization's success in mind rather than personal glory, you'll accomplish what you set out to do while earning the wholehearted support of your team. And when holding a superior accountable, make sure to do it in private and stress that you're operating from a place of mission integrity over getting anyone in trouble.

"They got the credit, and when something didn't work out, I took the blame," says Mike. "As a result, they became even more dedicated and loyal. When I stopped caring about my next promotion, they delivered the results that got me promoted four years to captain ahead of my classmates in the Naval Academy."

Whether you're a leader or just part of a team, in what ways can you take on responsibility for the good of the organization over self? When you notice others using this approach, how does it affect the way you work and how you feel about their contributions?

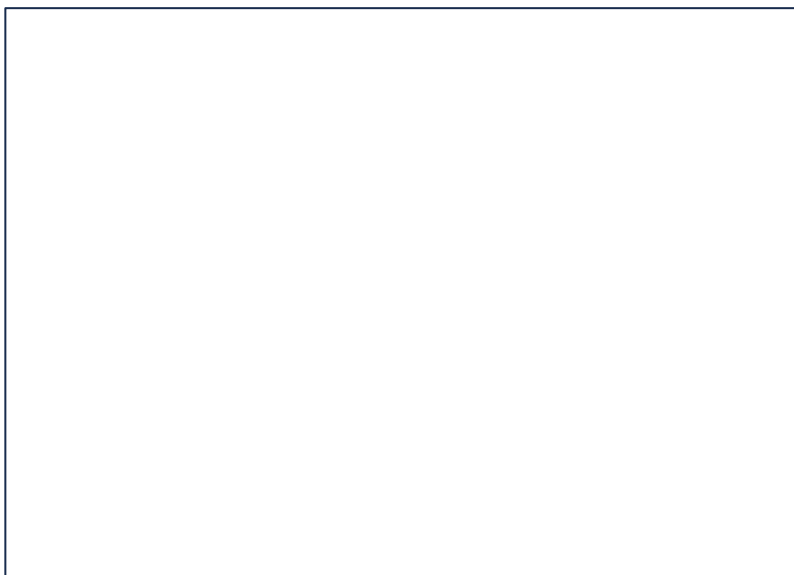
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Think Like a Boss

Mike believes most people's idea of the American dream is never having to hear from their boss, so he's always gone out of his way to understand how his bosses think — to the point where he once picked through his own rejected work from the trashcan of a boss who was seemingly allergic to offering feedback.

“If you're proactive in pushing information and doing things that need to be done, and if your boss doesn't have to worry about you, they'll leave you alone!” says Mike.

You may not have to resort to picking through your boss' garbage to gain insight into how he or she thinks, but what clues can you gather that will ultimately grant you the superpower of anticipating their needs before they do — and earn you the space you need to do your job optimally?



Full show notes and resources for this episode [can be found here.](#)

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About



Join us as we get deep into the untapped wisdom of the world's top performers – from legendary creators to intelligence operatives, iconoclastic writers to visionary change-makers.

We deconstruct the playbooks of the most successful people on earth – and learn new strategies, perspectives, and insights you can't find anywhere else. Then, take these valuable insights into your own life and live what you listen.

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