

The Importance of Good Governance



NATIONAL OFFICERS

NATIONAL PRESIDENT

CAPT G. Mark Hardy III, USN
E-mail: g.mark.hardy@ausn.org

NATIONAL VICE PRESIDENT

CAPT Douglas H. McDonald, SC, USNR (Ret)
E-mail: doug.mcdonald@ausn.org

NATIONAL VP-OFFICER AFFAIRS

LCDR Steven L. Rogers, USN
E-mail: steven.rogers@ausn.org

NATIONAL VP-ENLISTED AFFAIRS

NC1 Merna P. Jones, USN
E-mail: merna.jones@ausn.org

NATIONAL VP-RESERVE AFFAIRS

CDR Pamela S. Boyd, USN
E-mail: pamelaboyd@ausn.org

NATIONAL VP-GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

CAPT Paul A. Denham, USN
E-mail: paul.denham@ausn.org

NATIONAL VP-MEMBERSHIP

VACANT

NATIONAL VP-BUDGET & FINANCE

DKCM Charles E. Bradley, USN (Ret)
E-mail: charles.bradley@ausn.org

NATIONAL VP-RETIRED AFFAIRS

LCDR David M. Bradley, USNR (Ret)
E-mail: david.bradley@ausn.org

NATIONAL VP-COMMUNICATIONS

CDR Aaron G. Bresnahan, USN
E-mail: aaron.bresnahan@ausn.org

NATIONAL TREASURER

CAPT John E. Lindell, USN (Ret)
E-mail: john.lindell@ausn.org

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN

CDR Richmond E. Stoglin, CHC, USN
E-mail: rich.stoglin@ausn.org

NATIONAL HISTORIAN

CAPT David L. Woods, USNR (Ret)
E-mail: david.woods@ausn.org

NATIONAL PARLIAMENTARIAN

CDR Leo Hill, USNR (Ret)
E-mail: leo.hill@ausn.org

NATIONAL PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER

LCDR Joyce Zongrone, USN
E-mail: joyce.zongrone@ausn.org

IMMEDIATE PAST NATIONAL PRESIDENT

CAPT Walter K. Steiner, USN (Ret)

PAST NATIONAL PRESIDENTS (LIVING)

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RADM Ray B. Ackerman, USNR (Ret)

Effective governance is essential to any successful organization; it is the process whereby persons entrusted with the future of an organization exercise oversight. Closely related to governance is compliance — adhering to policies, rules, and regulations. Organizations stray into trouble (legal or otherwise) when they fail to execute these duties properly.

Compliance means more than just following the rules. It means adhering to the highest standards of ethical and honest behavior, proper and efficient management of the organization's resources, and maintaining accountability of leadership and workers. Thus, these two concepts — governance and compliance — are closely related. Governance provides the expectations for proper behavior, and compliance delivers on that behavior. This feedback loop works in the presence of oversight.

Oversight creates visibility into the workings of an organization. With it, leaders can be measured and evaluated; they are held to task for what they must accomplish. However, lack of oversight leads to lack of accountability. Knowing that one's actions will not be examined creates a tendency to act in ways that are easiest or most popular. The organization suffers a death by a thousand cuts, but no one is there to question the process.

When there is reduced or no accountability, individuals lose alignment with the organization's goals and future. Personal priorities begin to emerge as senior to organizational priorities. Failure to meet goals and objectives, if they are even established, no longer creates pressure to improve. People do what they want to do, rather than what they must do. Such a job can seem like the best job in the world, because when one succeeds, it's doing what one wants to do, and when one fails, there is no one there to keep score.

After a time, this loss of alignment leads to a sense of entitlement. Not being held accountable for results or stewardship of resources creates an insidious side-effect. That freedom to do what one wants becomes

a continuous expectation, which becomes an entitlement. People expect, and then demand, the latitude to act in a self-directed manner, fulfilling personal needs and wants, making a show of hard work, but never really making any true sacrifice for the organization. New habits form and become expectations.

Ultimately, that sense of entitlement results in persons acting with impunity. This is the culmination of a dangerous and fatal chain of events. Persons do what they want; they seek gain for themselves or friends at the expense of the organization. They spend freely, decoupled from any sense of financial reality or impending crisis. They court popularity with peers or subordinates rather than enforce the mission. In spite of their sense of self-worth and importance, they become the embodiment of the enemy within.

Leadership is a gift — a privilege to serve, not to be served with privilege. Never confuse political fluency with effectiveness. Never confuse celebrities with true heroes. They are very distinct — pursuit of one rarely yields the other.

True leaders must be visionaries; this is one talent that cannot be contracted out. True leaders do not state a goal unless they possess the vision to achieve it. True leaders never tolerate mediocrity. B-leaders tolerate B-players; they confuse being liked with being effective. True leaders never tolerate insubordination; they insist on mutual respect. True leaders are committed to continuous learning and improvement. True leaders generate assets, not consume them. True leaders embrace change and continuously experiment with possibilities. True leaders provide for their own succession planning. True leaders subordinate their ego to the mission.

Effective governance creates the demand for true leadership; it is the ultimate guarantor of organizational success.

G. Mark Hardy