

Bearings Class Creates Better Sailors

Story Number: NNS070327-17

Release Date: 3/27/2007 5:50:00 PM

By Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Patrick Grieco, Fleet Public Affairs Center, Atlantic

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. (NNS) -- Mid-Atlantic Sailors participated in the Bearings course offered by the Center for Personal and Professional Development (CPPD) at several locations around Naval Air Station Oceana, March 12 through 23.

Bearings is a two-week course designed for Sailors who are at-risk and need to build life skills to better their personal and professional lives.

"I give troubled Sailors the tools they need to become a better person," said Chief Damage Controlman (SW/AW) James Croyle, a Bearings instructor with the CPPD Naval Station Norfolk Learning Site. "The stress they experience in their lives carries over to work and can cause problems. We teach them to plan for life changes."

The Bearings program was initiated in February 2000 when then Secretary of the Navy Richard Danzig recognized the high attrition rate of first-term Sailors.

Seeing that many of these Sailors were being discharged for disciplinary reasons that coincided with a difficulty in adapting to military life, Danzig decided to create Bearings.

The course consists of personal growth seminars and individual counseling sessions on a number of topics including Navy benefits, alcohol and drug abuse prevention, trust development and team building. All segments of the program are designed to help Sailors by showing them how to make better life decisions.

"The problem is that we (the Navy) treat people like machines," said Cmdr. Roosevelt Brown, director for the spiritual fitness division at Naval Station Norfolk and instructor for the personal growth seminar portion of the course. "If someone is struggling, that doesn't mean they can't become a good Sailor; it just means they may need some help."

Croyle said he feels there is a misconception throughout the fleet about Bearings. He noted that because the program is relatively new, most senior Sailors haven't been through this type of program before and might not fully understand its goals.

"Most Sailors think this is like boot camp all over again," Croyle said. "Supervisors think Bearings is where you send your troublemakers, but it's not. It's a place where any Sailor can get the help they may need."

Croyle said that this program is unique because of the time instructors are able to devote to each Sailor who goes through the course. This is a benefit many who need that extra guidance may not be able to get at a command with a high operational tempo.

"I want them to recognize this is a lifelong event," Brown said of the impact the Bearings course can have on the future of a Sailor who successfully completes the course. "In the long run we'll have not just better Sailors, but better people as well."

Croyle agreed with Brown and added that the work he has done with the Bearings program is exactly what being a chief petty officer is about.

"Personally, this has been the most gratifying experience during my 21 years in the Navy," Croyle said. "I give these Sailors tools to succeed in their personal lives and watch it carry over into their Navy life."

The leadership at Bearings is not just interested in moving Sailors through the course and getting

them back to the fleet, but actually refocusing them and preparing them for the road ahead.

And it seems to have worked. As of December 2005, 1,464 out of the 3,452 Sailors who attended Bearings have been promoted. An even more telling statistic is that non-judicial punishments among those Sailors who attended dropped from 1,088 prior to Bearing to 240 after the successfully completing the course.

To track the progress of Sailors after they complete Bearings, instructors send a letter back to the Sailor's chain of command informing them that they will be keeping in touch.

"We check up on them after six months and then again at the one-year mark," said Quartermaster 1st Class (SW/AW) Rodney Blackshear, a Bearings instructor. "We get e-mails and calls all the time. There was one Sailor that was sent here and his command was sure that he was going to be separated. After he left, we got a call from his commanding officer that he was named Sailor of the Quarter."

Blackshear said he believes this course isn't just for at-risk Sailors because all Sailors, regardless of rank, can benefit from a course designed to reemphasize the reasons why Sailors serve.

For more information about the Bearings course visit Navy Knowledge Online (NKO).

For more news from around the fleet, visit www.navy.mil.