**Episode 9 – Understanding Leaders Outline**

**INFORMATION:** From the bottom looking up – deciphering leadership’s intent, understanding their actions and deciphering their methods.

**History Segment:** Admiral Arleigh Burke

“Leadership is understanding people and involving them to help you do a job”.

15th Chief of Naval Operations, 17 August 1955 - 1 August 1961

Arleigh Albert Burke was born on 19 October 1901 on a farm near Boulder, Colorado. Appointed to the U.S. Naval Academy in 1919, he was commissioned in the rank of Ensign in June 1923. From then until April 1928 he was an officer in the battleship Arizona. Burke was next assigned to the Fleet Base Force flagship Procyon, in which he was Flag Lieutenant and Force Personnel Officer. Resuming his formal education in June 1929, Lieutenant Burke received a Master's Degree from the University of Michigan two years later, then served in the heavy cruiser Chester. He spent the middle 1930s on the Base Force staff and at the Bureau of Ordnance in Washington, D.C. In 1937 he joined the destroyer Craven and, in June 1939, took command of USS Mugford.

Between mid-1940 and late 1942 Burke was assigned to the Naval Gun Factory as an ordnance inspector. Promoted to Commander during that time, he next commanded two destroyer divisions and Destroyer Squadron 12 in the south Pacific combat zone. He was given temporary promotion to Captain in mid-1943 and in October of that year took command of Destroyer Squadron 23. Flying his flag in the destroyer Charles Ausburne, he demonstrated initiative and tactical mastery in a series of engagements. In March 1944, Burke became Chief of Staff to Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher, who led the Pacific Fleet's fast carrier task forces. With the temporary rank of Commodore, he served with Mitscher until nearly the end of the Pacific War, had a brief tour with the Bureau of Ordnance, and was again Mitscher's Chief of Staff in 1946-1947.

Now recognized as an officer of great potential, during 1947-1949 Captain Burke was assigned to the Navy's General Board, commanded the light cruiser Huntington, and was active in the debate over Armed Forces' roles and missions while serving with the office of the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO). He ended the decade and began the next with the Defense Research and Development Board. Soon after the Korean War began Rear Admiral Burke went to Japan to become Deputy Chief of Staff to Commander, Naval Forces, Far East. In May-December 1951 he commanded a cruiser division and participated in the Korean War's vexing armistice negotiations, then returned to Washington to direct the CNO's Strategic Plans Division. For much of 1954 Burke led a Sixth Fleet cruiser division and, at the beginning of 1955, became Commander of the Atlantic Fleet's Destroyer Force.

In May 1955 Rear Admiral Burke was selected as the next Chief of Naval Operations. Quickly promoted to the rank of Admiral, Burke took over as CNO in mid-August. His three two-year terms took the Navy through great operational and technical changes during a time of constant international tension. After retiring from active duty at the beginning of August 1961 he had an active business and civic life, as well as remaining closely involved with the Navy. Admiral Burke resided in Bethesda, Maryland, near Washington, D.C., and later in the Northern Virginia suburbs, where he died on New Year's Day 1996.

Navy Cross, Silver Star, Purple Heart, Presidential Medal of Freedom (after retirement)

USS Arleigh Burke (DDG-51), 1991-\_\_\_\_, is named in honor of Admiral Burke.

**I. Introduction**

A. Attention (If leaders didn’t care about you, they wouldn’t waste their time doing whatever it is that pisses you off. Think about it. Why would they bother?)

B. Motivation (Junior Sailors need to understand as a follower, it is important that you learn to understand your leadership. Oftentimes things that are received as negative are intended as positive – learning to decipher their messages and intent are key to your success.)

C. Overview (This is a skill you need to learn. All leaders are not great ones. So there will be times when their way of communicating their leadership style is received negatively by you, or everyone! That doesn’t make them BAD. IT MAKES THEM MISUNDERSTOOD.)

**II. Body**

A. Main Point 1 (Listen.)

1. Sub-point (What are they saying?) – What motivates you may not motivate others. So the style they use probably worked for someone at some point, and it’s why they stick with it. So if it DOESN’T work for you, jettison it. Don’t focus on how they are saying it – take the MESSAGE. WHAT ARE THEY SAYING? Learn to rise above the feelings you have for their communication style, and get the message. When they see you responding, it may change, it may not. But they will see they’re getting through and will positively respond to THAT.

1. Sub-point (How are they saying it?) – Now, that’s not to say HOW THEY ARE SAYING IT is not important. If they don’t ALWAYS say it that way, but when they speak to you they alter their delivery…WHY ARE THEY DOING THAT? Dig into it. Ask questions. Maybe you are NOT responding and they are either altering their style or escalating due to frustration. There IS something to be deciphered from HOW they say it.

1. Sub-point (Is it the same?) – Are they communicating to all of their charges in the same manner all the time? If so, and it’s a barrier for you, take it as simply they way they talk. Their leadership “tone”. I’ve encountered people from every walk of life imaginable and have learned to adapt to crazy accents, speech impediments, styles, etc. (Butler story…) Learn to accept that maybe it’s just they way they talk.

B. Main Point 2 (Communicate.)

1. Sub-point (Clarify.) – When given guidance, instructions, mentorship, WHATEVER…clarify their points by repeating it back. Ask questions. Make sure you FULLY UNDERSTAND IT. I may get frustrated a little in this moment, but if you make me feel like you fully grasp the concept and then go completely muff the execution because you “didn’t understand” my instructions, I’ll be LIVID. There is NO SUCH THING AS A STUPID QUESTION, so ASK THEM. Even if I shake my head occasionally, I WILL APPRECIATE YOU BEING THOROUGH AND ACCOMPLISHING THE TAKS THE RIGHT WAY THE FIRST TIME. Everyone hates re-work.

2. Sub-point (Speak up.) – If something is wrong, SAY SOMETHING. If a task is not being executed, is being done incorrectly, is being intentionally blown off…SAY SOMETHING. On submarines we call this “watch team back-up”. We’re human, and as individuals will inevitably make mistakes. THAT’S WHAT THE TEAM IS FOR. They let you know you’re straying. That your collar device is out of place. That you just manipulated the wrong valve. That you forgot to sign something. And when someone knows better, and intentionally does something wrong…bring it up. That’s not “being a rat”. That’s a defense used by people with poor character. It’s called integrity. Have it.

3. Sub-point (Compare notes.) – When you encounter a leader that presses your buttons, compare notes. With shipmates. Look around and find the person that has them figured out. Someone has solved this leaders puzzle and it getting the job done and keeping the leader happy. How are they doing it? Save yourself the stress of starting from scratch. The work was already done, so go ask some questions and figure out how they did it.

C. Main Point 3 (Understand) – This is probably the part I think needs the most work on the part of junior Sailors. UNDERSTANDING. Understand that your leadership cares about you. I stress out about taking care of you. I lose SLEEP. Over your evals, your awards, your training, your progression, your quality of life. The same leader you’re pissed at for being a jerk or “not getting it” is sitting in an office, with a Chief or a mentor, asking “why don’t they get it?” and “what am I doing wrong?”. There is so much that you don’t see. So don’t assume.

1. Sub-point (What you WANT vs NEED.) – We sit you down and we ask at your CDBs…what do you want to be? What are your personal and professional goals? And in YOUR mind you have a vision of how you WANT to get there. We have a vision in our minds of what you NEED to do to get there. You will not always get what you want from your leadership and based on not seeing or understanding everything from your micro-level perspective you will not understand why…but by and large you will get what you NEED. We will force you in directions you don’t want to go and jobs you don’t want to do because it’s what you NEED to progress. Trust us. We’ve been doing this for 240 years.

1. Sub-point (If you don’t know, ask.) – In much the same way as a leader I routinely reach out to people that know more than me and ask how and why, so too should you. As we talked about in mentorship, when you find that mentor…have the conversations at your level that we have at ours. Why is this happening? What are your leaders trying to convey? Why don’t I understand them? Why don’t they understand me? These questions are not new or unique. We have ALL been there. That’s why mentors are critical to your navigation of this process. Let them help you UNDERSTAND LEADERSHIP.

**III. Conclusion**

A. Summary – So we talked about…

1) LISTENING to leadership. Try to decipher the message from what can be a confusing or negatively perceived delivery.

2) COMMUNICATE with your leaders! Ask questions, even “stupid” ones until you understand what is being asked of you. Question things, and SPEAK UP. If something looks or feels wrong, IT PROBABLY IS. Bring it up, it’s a good practice to back-up your team.

3) Do what it takes to UNDERSTAND. Understand your leadership does care about you, that they are incredibly invested in developing you, taking care of you and making you integral pieces of the team. Regardless of if you see it in the way you think you should. It’s not always appropriate for you to see all of the inner workings. But I promise you they care.

B. Re-motivation (Junior Sailors need to understand as a follower, it is important that you learn to understand your leadership. Oftentimes things that are received as negative are intended as positive – learning to decipher their messages and intent are key to your success.)

C. Closing (Now, before we sign off I want to address the eye rolling. I sometimes mention it, but I feel like there is a cynical part of all of us if we made it more than a few years into this journey. The eye rollers are the ones that think none of this applies to them because they have a “bad leader”. Go back and re-listen to episode 4 (Junior Level Leadership). There are bad leaders out there. I got you. And if that’s the boat you’re in, take the message from that episode and apply it. Find a mentor and have them help you through that really rough situation. And if all else fails, REACH OUT TO US. I’m always available to help. But MOST YOU OF YOU ARE NOT IN THAT SITUATION. It’s a lack of perspective! Your leaders are learning to be leaders just the same as you are learning to be a Sailor. CUT THEM SOME SLACK. Help them be better instead of eye rolling. You’re going to be there soon and you’ll feel like you’re drowning too. So UNDERSTANDING is appropriate.)