



## Coast Guard HR Flag Voice 177

### FUTURE FORCE 21 -- WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH ANYWAY?

**As I depart the Coast Guard upon my retirement, I thought that I would focus my last Flag Voice on the future vision of our human resources.**

**I am sure many have been party to vigorous debate about how to characterize FF21, and may have asked the other big question, "What are you trying to accomplish?"**

**Context.** A little over four years ago, ADM Loy asked me if I would accept the challenge of this job. Considering it was the job I had sought, my response was quick and certain. To ensure alignment with his goals, I described my thinking in a paper I called *Team Coast Guard for the New Millennium*. You can read it on the FF21 web site at <http://www.uscg.mil/ff21/docs/g-w/millennium.doc>.

I began with the assumption, which I still believe, that we have the very best people the Coast Guard has ever had, in every dimension, in every force (active, reserve, officer, enlisted, civilian, auxiliary, and contractors). But we face a challenging future, not only in continuing to recruit and retain the best, but to make the best use of the tremendous talent our people bring to the Coast Guard. Increasing complexity in missions, regulations, technology, and the expectations of society, coupled with our more sophisticated optimal crewing philosophy, all conspire to increase the need for investment in, and the value of, every single person in the Coast Guard. Events like September 11<sup>th</sup> and the near term growth to increase our maritime security, and projects of the scope of the Integrated Deepwater System (IDS), only increase the pressure on the HR system to adapt.

**The very pace of change means the Coast Guard has to be more flexible than ever before, and that means the workforce must be flexible and managed that way.** There are plenty of opportunities "out there" for such talented people, and the competition is fierce. Add internal shifts in marriage, diversity, families, spouses' careers, and values about the balance of "work and life" and the need to do things differently becomes absolutely urgent. We cannot treat people like cogs in a vast machine, or interchangeable parts, and the idea that one policy can meet the needs of all units, for all missions, for all people is bankrupt. **One size does *not* fit all.**

Our HR systems were designed to produce an army of people, but we no longer need an army of people. We've been wrestling with our HR systems for years in an attempt to compensate for their outcomes that are not meeting our needs very well, but we are losing. It's sort of like the definition of *insanity* -- "doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results!" **We need a new vision, new concepts, and new systems to lead the way into this millennium.** We need to make decisions about *what* course to take. Only then can we aim the efforts of our superb HR professionals, in HQ and the field, toward figuring out how to get there.

**What are some of the elements of this vision?** I urge all who read this to review *Is the Coast Guard Ready for Petty Officer Ryan?*, published in Naval Institute *Proceedings* in June, 2000. You can see it on the FF21 web site at <http://www.uscg.mil/ff21/docs/proceedings/ryan.htm>. What kinds of changes are likely? With IDS it will take a while to see new ships, boats,

and aircraft, but the Systems Integrator (prime/lead contractor) may take over or significantly change some of our major logistics functions early on, which could have major implications for the workforce. With increased Homeland Security, there are a lot of new capabilities being added such as Marine Safety & Security Teams that will require new and additional training, and will cause us to take a fresh look at a law enforcement specialty. Transforming our HR information systems has and will continue to affect us all, from self-service to electronic orders. We've become used to PERSRUS in the past 25 years--the change will be difficult.

**The urgent challenge to our HR organization will be growing the workforce in the next few years, and this would be difficult even if we were not trying to simultaneously transform our HR systems.** I know that Coast Guard people will do phenomenal things to meet these expectations, but we *must* provide them (you) with the systems and processes that enable, not thwart, success.

**So what is FF21?** The opening argument is that our HR systems are working just as expected, but the pieces of the system, designed decades ago, can't handle the demands of a 21st Century Coast Guard or workforce.

**First and foremost, everyone in G-W is working hard to create and sustain our 21st Century CG workforce** ... with some near-term efforts necessitated by operational requirements and other long-term efforts necessitated by an identified need to change some of our fundamental systems. Within the G-W Business Plan, FF21 is firmly imbedded in the "System as a System" strategy, acting as a change agent and system integrator, working to align and coordinate efforts across the G-W landscape. Simultaneously, FF21 is spearheading a limited number of what are considered high payoff "solutions" or projects, which compel the commitment of all G-W (and our partners) to implement and which also require timelines, resource requirements, deliverables, and other obligations (e.g. Joint Rating review (JRR), Officer Corps Management System alternatives, Skill-Based Assignments (SBA)).

**Everyone in G-W is contributing to the "future force" ... FF21 itself isn't just a project, but more of a *mind-set*.** FF21 is a collection of ideas, high leverage actions, and in some cases, projects. And the small FF21 staff that I carved out of existing G-W resources has no particular corner on the "solution market." But I have made investments in this staff in the form of billets, matrix team involvement, leadership time and effort, visibility, and funding taken from other G-W priorities to ensure they have the capability to act as the integrator.

**FF21, viewed as an *improved HR capability*, has no timeline itself.** However, as noted above, there are noteworthy projects within the FF21 umbrella that do have timelines, resource requirements, deliverables, and other obligations. We should -- and are -- building and displaying timelines and milestones for the projects that fall under its purview, and the relationships and dependencies among those projects -- but the content of all that together will be pretty fluid as specific "projects" enter (new starts) and leave (implemented) the FF21 umbrella.

**So FF21 is our banner, our convenient catchphrase for systemic improvement.** Over a year ago I refined the vision above in more detail, added workforce trends, took some recommendations from a forward looking study by the Department of Defense, and called it Future Force 21. As I look back, **perhaps just by *naming* it we may have created the impression that FF21 was a specific *project* with a defined end--that we could *arrive* at Future Force 21 and declare victory. This just isn't so.**

**Now ... what are we trying to accomplish? Depends on whose lens you look through ... that of the individual, the unit, or leadership:**

**Member/employee perspective** ... "People will have ...

... better information on which to make career decisions

... more choice, more control over personal destiny

... greater responsibility for career management

... an increased sense of being valued for their professionalism.”

**Unit commander perspective** ... “Unit commanders will ...

... have greater ability to adjust resources to optimize readiness

... see lower turnover, more experience, higher skill levels

... work with a single G-W ‘point of contact’

... be the source of requirements and qualifications.”

**Leadership perspective** ... “Leaders will realize ...

... a flexible, responsive HR system

... an HR system that enables rather than constrains opportunities

... a more efficient HR system

... and HR system that measurably contributes to readiness.”

I hope that this helps a bit in clarifying this very complex undertaking.

**As this is my last Flag Voice, I want to thank all of you for reading these messages for the past four years.** One of the goals I set for myself as the Assistant Commandant for Human Resources was to better communicate HR issues throughout the Coast Guard. One of the many initiatives in this area was reestablishing/redesigning the “FLAG VOICE” that was instituted by then RADM Loy, Chief, Office of Personnel and Training, back in 1992. My FLAG VOICES were intended to be often and very informal personal email notes from me to all Flags & SESs, for further forwarding down to the “deck plate” levels. I attempted to keep them relatively short with no attachments - so they could be easily and rapidly digested. I asked that you help me in this endeavor by ensuring they were given widest dissemination. I know that many of you have done so & used them in your unit training, development, and education programs. I am sincerely grateful for that & hope in some way these have helped make a difference for you and your people and their families -- a better workplace environment for us all. I came to this assignment with a passion for improving the Coast Guard for our people, and this has been my single purpose and focus. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity ADM Loy has given me these last four years. As I transition to a new career and leave the Coast Guard, I know this Service remains in very good hands. **We have the very best people at all levels performing our missions -- support and operations -- to keep us the "World's Best Coast Guard." Goodbye for now & remain *Semper Paratus!***

My best regards to all, FL Ames



[Flag Voice Contents](#)

This page is maintained by [HR Webmaster \(CG-1A\)](#)