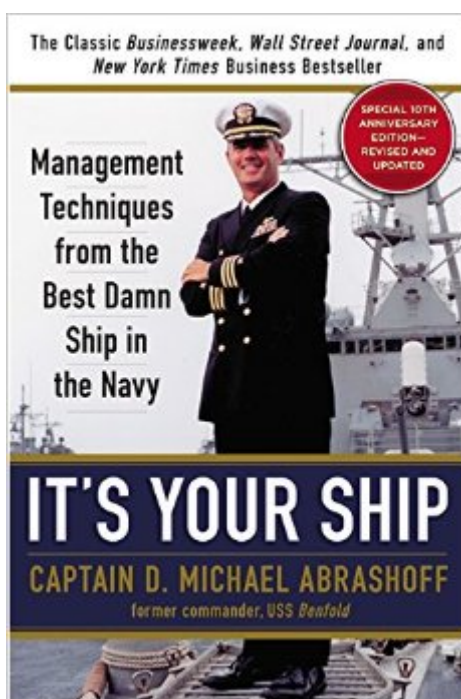


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# It's Your Ship: Management Techniques From The Best Damn Ship In The Navy, 10th Anniversary Edition



## Synopsis

The story of Captain D. Michael Abrashoff and his command of USS Benfold has become legendary inside and outside the Navy. Now Abrashoff offers this fascinating tale of top-down change for anyone trying to navigate today's uncertain business seas. When Captain Abrashoff took over as commander of USS Benfold, a ship armed with every cutting-edge system available, it was like a business that had all the latest technology but only some of the productivity. Knowing that responsibility for improving performance rested with him, he realized he had to improve his own leadership skills before he could improve his ship. Within months he created a crew of confident and inspired problem-solvers eager to take the initiative and take responsibility for their actions. The slogan on board became "It's your ship," and Benfold was soon recognized far and wide as a model of naval efficiency. How did Abrashoff do it? Against the backdrop of today's United States Navy-Benfold was a key player in our Persian Gulf fleet-Abrashoff shares his secrets of successful management including:

- See the ship through the eyes of the crew: By soliciting a sailor's suggestions, Abrashoff drastically reduced tedious chores that provided little additional value.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate: The more Abrashoff communicated the plan, the better the crew's performance. His crew would eventually call him "Megaphone Mike," since they heard from him so often.
- Create discipline by focusing on purpose: Discipline skyrocketed when Abrashoff's crew believed that what they were doing was important.
- Listen aggressively: After learning that many sailors wanted to use the GI Bill, Abrashoff brought a test official aboard the ship-and held the SATs forty miles off the Iraqi coast.

From achieving amazing cost savings to winning the highest gunnery score in the Pacific Fleet, Captain Abrashoff's extraordinary campaign sent shock waves through the U.S. Navy. It can help you change the course of your ship, no matter where your business battles are fought.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book and its author have received a lot of media exposure, so I decided to check it out. While Abrashoff espouses proven leadership techniques, the only really new learning is how one man applied the principles on a Navy ship with a complement of 311 sailors. This is more a story of one man's awakening to how leadership is considerably more effective than management; how getting out of people's way is wiser than micromanaging them. Leadership is emphasized in the book, and in every endorsement quote on the back cover. Yet, the subtitle says "management techniques," not "leadership techniques." Leadership did not come easy to Abrashoff; he had a lot of learning to do...and undo. As he moves through the chapters, this retired Navy Captain talks about his experiences in leading by example, listening, communicating purpose and meaning, creating a climate of trust, focusing on results, taking calculated risks, building people and unity, and strengthening quality of life. Good leaders can tell you all about these concepts and how they are applied in their organization. Aspiring leaders and those who have not yet seen the light will be awe-struck by what Abrashoff accomplished. Solid, experienced leaders will see this book as more of a case study and a reinforcement of what they're already doing. As I have observed today's military leaders-as a citizen and as a consultant who has had the privilege of working with military leaders, the "system" is not as counterproductive as the author would lead us to believe. Bureaucracy is still bureaucracy, but Abrashoff is not alone in his practice of leadership skills. Abrashoff applied leadership skills on his ship to achieve significant measurable results. I'm glad he documented his achievements so others might be inspired. I noted that he compared and linked his military experiences and perspectives to civilian applications. Through relationships with Fast Company magazine and other organizations, this author is now giving speeches and probably consulting. This book and the attendant publicity could be viewed as effective tools to position him as a sought-after speaker. In all fairness, while the leadership principles and anecdotes from the USS Benfold are certainly present, this book struck me as more of an autobiography of the growth of a leader. For a treatise about leadership and considering the title, I was surprised to see such heavy use of first person pronouns in the writing. Company owners and senior executives will find the book valuable as a case study of one man's experience. Managers will learn principles and techniques that can substantially improve their performance. Some readers will feel reinforced;

others will feel discomforted by the heavy sense of ego and rationalization. It's a shame that Abrashoff did not choose to stay in the Navy to effect those changes he says are so needed; instead he left the service to write a book focused on two years of his work and hit the lecture circuit.

I am a plankowner of the Benfold and admired Capt. Abrashoff's leadership. His superior leadership brought the moral of our ship from just ordinary shipboard life to a ship that many in the fleet wanted to become a part of. Our ship was a show-piece and we were proud to carry out his orders. What could have been a horribly desolate six months on deployment, including the holidays spent in the Gulf in 97-98, turned into a memorable experience for all, thanks to Capt. Abrashoff who even made UnRep a grand event! We learned from him that although we had a VERY important job to conduct, we were rewarded with pride in our accomplishments. Capt. Abrashoff was a very approachable Commanding Officer, an experience I had never encountered in the military and has been rare while employed with state government. He made an effort to see that his crew not only did their jobs exceptionally well, but that we enjoyed the festivities he provided for the ship while in port. I have read his fantastic book, reliving all the memories of my Benfold life and have used his leadership knowledge to become a successful professional in the "civilian" world. To the readers who feel Capt. Abrashoff is "arrogant" in his leadership style--I think if you had as awesome a ship as the Benfold to be a part of, you would be extremely proud of it and the leadership that made it such a fine place to spend a few years of your life.

As Yogi said... De ja vu all over again. D. Abrashoff graduated the USN Academy in 1982, I graduated the USAF Academy in 1983, a contemporary of mine then. Reading his book reminded me of all the things I suffered through my tour of active duty. It also reminded me of the basics I was taught at MY academy. On a theoretical level, nothing new here. On a practical level, this book is a gem, and I have just recommended it to my process improvement team. The book is packed full of some ones learning on how to implement what a lot of other books explain in theory. The author doesn't plot out checklists, but gives meaningful anecdotes to explain his experience and point he is making. His key points are the chapter headings: Take Command, Lead by Example, Listen Agressively, Communicate Purpose and Meaning, Create a Climate of Trust, Look for Results, Not Salutes, Take Calculated Risks, Go Beyond Standard Procedure, Build Up Your People, Generate Unity, Improve Your People's Quality of Life. A key take away for me, and in my experience, it is one thing to "COPY EXACTLY" (stealing an Intel term), it is another to understand the principle. By his examples, he indicates that other ships copied techniques (benchmarking) and improved specific

areas of performance (all good), but failed to understand the principles involved. This allowed them to not extend improvements to other areas of their processes. This has been mimicked in business by all the failed initiatives that litter the highway, all good if you pay attention to their design, key assumptions, and core principles. I thought the book was well written, to the point, well illustrated with examples, all expressing key truths (though not new, well done). You can find other books that take each aspect (check the chapters) and dive deep into theory, but if you want a practitioners guide to how to get it done, this is a great book.

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