

The DoD Times (Redacted)



Expect to Self-Rescue – An Argument to Speak Up About the Abuse

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Did You Know: The Department of Defense often cultivates a leadership style which contains traits that mirror an [abusive relationship](#). These traits include: repeatedly reinforcing that it “won’t be better on the ‘outside’”; creating an environment in which you feel like you have little rights and/or autonomy; unnecessarily forcing dominance; lashing out at you if you express a feeling of being wronged; giving conditional rewards for “good behavior”; creating environments in which you are isolated from your friends and family; unreasonably forcing you to forfeit opportunities to grow, including educational opportunities; swearing at you or calling you names; overreacting about small problems with violent public outbursts and threats; and minimizing your experiences.

Here are some potential implications of these facts:

1. Current and former members of the DoD are susceptible to developing a [learned helplessness](#) in their professional and personal lives. This helplessness, which is viewed as a protective measure against further abuse, ultimately fails given abusers thrive in the chaos of abuse.
2. Due to likely [trauma bonding](#), current and former members of the DoD find themselves making excuses for their abuser with statements like: “Admiral X is just under a lot of pressure, that’s the only reason he threw his mug at me” (non-fictional example). Such excuses can create a perception that abuse is acceptable and risks creating generational abusers.
3. Victims of abuse who refuse to act (speak publicly) against their abusers, possibly due to the psychological traumas that still bind them to their abusers and the threat of reprisal and retaliation, implicitly allow perpetrators to continue to carry out their abuses.
4. Those who want to help – advocates, friends, and family – repeatedly encounter victims of abuse who refuse to speak out which begs the question: “if they refuse to act, were they really wronged?”
5. Victims of abuse who are unable or unwilling to speak up against their abusers are at risk of developing [sympathy for their abusers' beliefs and behaviors](#), a phenomenon akin to Stockholm Syndrome, and will aggressively demean, mock, attack, and isolate anyone who questions the abuser’s methods.
6. Victims of abuse will often feel like *they* have betrayed their team / organization / oath if they speak up.

A question to ask yourself is whether the DoD’s leadership model, or more directly, its leadership reward model, needs a closer look to change an environment that fosters learned helplessness, trauma bonding, and other dangerous Stockholm Syndrome-like symptoms. Further, each of us should relook our oath – “against all enemies,

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foreign and domestic” – gird ourselves for a fight and speak up about leadership abuse that we see and experience. Or as I’ve heard a mentor say many times, “Never walk past a piece of trash.”

If you feel that you have been a victim of this "Did You Know" highlight, feel free to reach out privately or share your story in the comments.