



Blue and Gold? Sure, But What About Platinum?

An active-duty United States Navy Commander authored this article. The author wishes to remain anonymous due to concerns of additional reprisal and retaliation. The Commander has served 14+ years in the U.S. Navy and has served across multiple Navy domains. The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Walk the Talk Foundation and its members. (Published January 18th, 2025)

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The Navy's colors, blue and gold, symbolize the seas and a combination of honor, excellence, integrity, and valor, depending on the source. The Navy's core values—Honor, Courage, and Commitment—are ingrained in service members from the very first day. We are encouraged to internalize these ideals, to embrace them as part of our identity, and to see ourselves as inseparable from the Navy.

When we sign on the dotted line, we enter a relationship with our branch of service. Healthy relationships are built on trust, communication, honesty, and compromise. Yet, the Navy's disciplinary practices often undermine these principles. The relationship is inherently lopsided, prioritizing institutional needs over individual well-being. For example, the [2023 Annual Report on Suicide in the Military](#) revealed that 29% of active-duty suicides were associated with administrative or legal issues, and 24% stemmed from workplace difficulties. These statistics highlight the Navy's systemic failure to support its members during their most vulnerable moments.

The Navy's values align with the "Golden Rule"—treat others as you would like to be treated—a noble ideal that suggests universal respect. However, the Golden Rule assumes a universal standard for what people need or value, ignoring individual differences. This cognitive bias, known as the false-consensus effect, assumes that everyone shares the same values, morals, and expectations. It overlooks the importance of tailoring support to the unique needs of each individual.

During a Navy leadership course, I was introduced to Dr. Tony Alessandra's [Platinum Rule](#): "Do unto others as they'd like done unto them." The concept challenges us to step outside our own perspective and meet others where they are, providing what they truly need. For example, if your friend is on a diet, giving them cookies for their



The DoD Times (Redacted)



birthday—despite your love for cookies—is not supportive. Instead, you might reflect on what would best serve their goals and well-being.

As my Navy career progressed, I realized the institution frequently failed to embody the professed need to practice the Platinum Rule. The Navy and DoD proclaim that “people are their most important weapon system” and preach caring for their members, yet their actions often fall short. As organizational psychologist Adam Grant aptly put it, “The test of a relationship is not how much you enjoy each other’s highs, but how well you support each other’s lows.” My experience—and countless conversations with others—revealed that the Navy consistently fails to support its members in their lowest moments.

For years, I viewed my relationship with the Navy positively or at least neutrally. Despite the inevitable challenges of PCS moves and bureaucratic frustrations, I felt these were expected trade-offs. I was proud of the work I was doing and committed to nurturing my relationship with the Navy, even at the expense of relationships in my personal life.

That perception shattered when I crossed an unspoken line. After enduring 3.5 years in a toxic environment, culminating in an IG complaint, I openly expressed my frustration in a private text on a personal device, outside of work hours. My boss, leveraging their rank, demanded access to a colleague’s personal device to expose my venting. What followed was a swift descent into unfamiliar territory: I was yelled at, threatened, counseled, ostracized, and isolated while awaiting “papers.”

I struggled to understand what had happened. The isolation and lack of resources compounded my confusion. I reached out to MyNavyHR and JAG, seeking mediation or counsel, only to be told no services were available since I had not received formal paperwork. The Navy’s response deepened my moral injury. I was finally “debriefed” when I received a Non-Punitive Letter of Caution (NPLOC). During the debrief the “facts” were discussed and I repeatedly categorized them as inaccurate and false. After this occurred 3 times with the debriefing officer, my boss stated, “The details don’t matter. Let’s just move on.” Identical to the debrief, the “Facts” written in the NPLOC were categorically and demonstrably false, even down to the dates. I was NPLOC’ed under false pretense and hyped up “charges” because my boss’s ego was bruised. Raising concerns only led to repeated warnings to stay silent, further indicting systemic leadership failures.

Fortunately, I was near a PCS, which offered an escape. But what if I had been mid-tour? What about our junior enlisted members who may lack the resources or experience to navigate such situations? If I, an accomplished mid-grade officer with 14 years of service and an advanced degree, felt powerless, how much worse must it be for our junior enlisted?

The Navy’s disciplinary system is inherently lopsided, leaving service members particularly vulnerable to abuse. Unlike civilian workplaces, where employees have tools like HR, the ability to resign, or legal recourse, service members have no such autonomy. We sign away our agency when we join.

Reflecting on my career, I now see the indoctrination that led me to prioritize the Navy over my personal well-being. Mentors warned me: “The Navy will take its best and brightest and work them until they’re broken.” Yet I believed I could make a difference. Now, I realize the Navy sees its people as interchangeable cogs in a machine—a stark contrast to its rhetoric about valuing individuals.

To build a healthier force, the Navy must embrace the Platinum Rule. Leaders should prioritize resolving issues at the lowest level, acknowledge individual circumstances, and apply discipline judiciously. While systemic reform may feel daunting, it is necessary to foster genuine relationships between the Navy and its members.



The DoD Times (Redacted)



If the Navy continues to fail its people in their lowest moments, recruitment and retention will continue to suffer, if not worsen. The current recruitment crisis is not surprising—it is the natural consequence of treating service members as expendable. To heal, the Navy must confront these systemic flaws and rebuild trust. For those considering military service, my goal is not to dissuade but to provide a clear and honest understanding of what they are committing to. The Navy is a relationship, and like any relationship, it requires transparency, trust, and mutual respect. Without these, it becomes abusive, leaving its members isolated, disenfranchised, and broken.

The Navy must decide: Will it continue to operate under the Golden Rule, blind to individual needs, or will it embrace the Platinum Rule and truly support its people?

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