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# CHANGE COURSE: THAT'S HIS MESSAGE TO THE NAVY



**PROFESSOR BARRY FREW HAS BECOME ACCUSTOMED**

to the dropped jaws and double takes from first-time visitors to the Navy's Center for Executive Education. In other parts of the legendary Naval Postgraduate School, in Monterey, California, classroom walls are painted chalk yellow, and prison-issue furniture is bolted to beige floor tiles. But Frew's center, on the third floor of Ingersoll Hall, has plush couches resting on mocha-colored carpeting against a backdrop of fine art.

The center looks that way for a reason, explains Frew, 52, the program's founder and a 15-year faculty member at the school: "If I want people to think differently, if I want them to understand that this place is different from anything they've experienced, then it has to look different. You can't serve up the same old thing and then expect people to rethink their approach to the world."

And that's exactly what Frew expects of his students—who primarily are top-ranking naval officers and civil-service executives. The center, which has been around for two years, gives students the tools they need to reinvent the Navy. So far, 70 people—including about 45 one-, two-, three-, and four-star officers—have attended Frew's classes, which

BARRY FREW IS TURNING HIGH-POWERED ADMIRALS INTO MAVERICKS. HIS COURSE AT THE NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL COMBINES TECHNOLOGY, ROCK CLIMBING, AND "WAR STORIES" DELIVERED BY SOME OF SILICON VALLEY'S ELITE. **BY CHERYL DAHLE**

are a combination of technology, rock climbing, and in-your-face grilling. Frew also invites Silicon Valley's elite—including Larry Ellison, CEO of Oracle, and John Chambers, CEO of Cisco Systems—to deliver their "war stories" about change. These classes have created a group of high-ranking mavericks who are fueling innovations that would have been unthinkable a short time ago.

"Our organization, our culture, and our processes were bogged down with procedures that didn't match our long-term goals," explains Frew, himself a former naval officer. "If the future will bring even more rapid and unpredictable change, then we need to change the way that the Navy does business now—or else it will no longer be able to respond effectively to new kinds of threats."

The solution was to experiment with leadership, to reinvent business processes, and to envision the Navy's future in the context of the Information Age. Edward Moore Jr., 55, a three-star vice admiral who commands the

Naval Surface Force's 30,000 people and 82 ships in the Pacific Fleet, was a reluctant convert to Frew's gospel. "I had just started a new job and had come to the conclusion that unless change came from headquarters, I could do nothing," he says. "Frew's course taught me that I could effect change in my own area, no matter what goes on above me."

One of the changes that Moore made was to overhaul ship inspections. In the past, technical teams would inspect a ship 153 times during its 18 months in home port—a time-consuming process that took control of the ship away from its commanding officer. Moore eliminated outdated or redundant inspections, reducing the total number to 11. The result? Sailors now spend 40 more days of their home-port time with their families, rather than on duty for needless inspections.

The center's most recent experiment is a class called "30-Something," during which midlevel officers (most of them in their thirties) critique the Navy's current situation and

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## A NEW ANGLE ON CHANGE

**BARRY FREW INVITES PEOPLE FROM ALL** walks of life to lecture to his "30-Something" class. One such guest is Steve Uzzell, 52, a veteran photographer whose work has appeared in *National Geographic*, *Newsweek*, and *Time*. Uzzell offered this advice on finding a new angle on problems.

**Preparation lays the groundwork for magic.**

"The sun's location makes an enormous difference. I wanted to shoot a truck in the distance, silhouetted by a setting sun [pictured above]. It took me years to find a location that had a long enough line of sight. Then I had less than two minutes from the time the sun entered the frame of my lens to when it left. The result was spectacular, but it was no accident."

**Visualize a solution, then invent it.**

"One thing that I learned during my shoots for *National Geographic* was that no matter how difficult a shot was to take, we *could* find a way to do it. Whether that meant getting into a helicopter, or operating the camera remotely, there were always technical people to help out."

**Be open to solutions from unexpected places.**

"Once, I needed to photograph a flag blowing almost straight out in the breeze. I was knocking on NASA's door, trying to figure out how to set up a wind tunnel. Then I explained the problem to my wife, and she came up with a brilliant solution: Rig a flagpole to a friend's boat. That gave me the right angle with a background of a bright blue sky and clouds. I could use that 'wind' for as long as I needed it."

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STEVE UZZELL

outline its future. Then the class presents its recommendations to the undersecretary of the Navy. During the frenzied final days before the presentation, groups of students (dressed in khakis or jeans) huddle around flip charts and laptops, hashing out their proposal. Hanging on the walls are cartoon drawings by these sailors, depicting their impressions of the Navy at the outset of the program—before spending a month living with and learning from one another.

The class's roster of lecturers includes a filmmaker, a futurist, and a renowned photographer. (See "A New Angle on Change," this page.) Some participants are a bit shellshocked by the class's format. "Military officers are typically linear thinkers," says Jack Olive, 32, a lieutenant who participated in the class. "So working in an environment that encourages creativity and risk taking is a chal-

lenge." Bill Wilkins, 33, another lieutenant, agrees: "What's unique is having midlevel managers talk about these issues. That's never been done before in my 15 years in the Navy."

Two weeks after one such presentation, upper-ranking officers were still abuzz about the suggestions from those thirtysomething attendees. Frew was exuberant about the responses from senior officers.

But more important than whether or not those suggestions will be implemented, Frew says, is the dialogue that they have created. The course gave the thirtysomethings permission to say to their superiors what would otherwise never have been permitted. "We need to find a way to honor rule breakers in the Navy," Frew says. "That's how innovation begins—when rules that don't make sense are protested."

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**FUNNY BUSINESS** MICK STEVENS



"The mice in T-shirts appear to be having more fun than the mice in business suits."