Power sharing in relationships

By Chaplain B. Allen Vaughan

Do you remember playing on the seesaw, or teeter-totter, on the playground when you were a child? It was so much fun going up and down, up and down, for endless hours of simple entertainment.

The teeter-totter was a great opportunity for socializing on the playground, because you quickly found out that it doesn't work very well all by yourself. It takes two (and sometimes more) to make the teeter-totter work.

Also, you and your seesaw partner had to match up closely in size and weight. But, this is where the fun and creativity of the child's mind on the playground kicks into gear.

If you put two small children on one end, to balance out one bigger kid on the other end, then you could have even more fun by including more of your friends.

The seesaw was also one of my earliest lessons in the laws of physics. In middle or high school science class, I learned about two objects known as the lever and fulcrum.

The teeter-totter board is the lever, and the fulcrum is the point upon which the board balances or rotates. If the fulcrum is in the middle, then both sides are equally balanced, and one child doesn't have more leverage than the other.

Imagine, however, a teeter-totter board that has one side longer than the other. The child on the shorter end would have a much harder time making his end go up and down, and the child on the longer end could raise and lower her end with much greater ease.

Once the fulcrum is moved closer to one end or the other, the amount of leverage, or power, moves to the advantage of the person who has the longer end of the lever.

Now, let's shift gears and apply this example of the seesaw to our significant relationships. Some idealists would say that, in order for a marriage to work, power must be shared equally between the two partners at all times - the "fulcrum" must remain in the middle, and the "seesaw" must be balanced at all times. That may be ideal, but it is not realistic. There will be times when one partner in a couple will have more power and influence than the other.

The spouse who is on active duty may have more power when it comes to deciding upon the next duty station, state, or country the family will move to, and therefore occupy the "long end" of the seesaw. However, the non-military spouse may have more power and influence in choosing a home or the kid's schools, once the family has arrived in the new location.

A mean prank that my friends used to pull on the playground would be for one child to jump off the seesaw at the moment he or she was on the "down" side, leaving the other child on the "up" side to fall suddenly, slamming their end of the seesaw to the ground.

When one person holds the power to make decisions that affect the whole family (in other words, sits on the "long end" of the seesaw), then that person must be trusted to use their power in the best interests of everyone involved.

If you are the one who is holding power, be sure to listen very carefully and be attentive to the needs of your spouse and family. If you are on the "short" end of the seesaw, then it is up to you to clearly communicate your needs and help your spouse make those difficult decisions.

Marriages and significant relationships last longer, and are strengthened, when power and influence is used lovingly and appropriately, and especially when power is not abused. Also keep in mind that, when circumstances in life change for either spouse, then the position of the "fulcrum" can change as well, and there can be a shift in power that occurs within the marriage.

Above all, keep talking to each other and building up that trust which is essential to any healthy relationship. Remember, a teeter-totter can be a whole lot of fun, as long you "play nicely" with others. God bless!

Navy embraces diversity with employee resource groups

By Lt. Erik Wells, Chief of Naval Personnel Public Affairs

The chief of naval personnel (CNP) has a goal to reach that is both lofty and obtainable - to demonstrate that the U.S. Navy is an organization ranked among the top 50 best employers.

Vice Adm. Mark Ferguson believes one way to improve the Navy's competitive advantage is by integrating a part of corporate America into the Navy mindset with the creation of employee resource groups (ERGs).

Chief of Naval Personnel Vice Adm. Mark Ferguson addresses military members and civilians during an all-hands call. Ferguson believes one way to improve the Navy's competitive advantage is by integrating a part of corporate America into the Navy mindset through the creation of employee resource groups.
U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Marc Rockwell-Pate

"Employee resource groups are widely used by top performing organizations in order to gain broader perspective on policies and practices desired by or affecting employees," said Ferguson. "The groups also serve as a means for employees to connect with peers and consider issues to stimulate positive change at the individual and management level."

The ERGs have support not just with military leaders, but with senior civilian leaders in the Navy as well. Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Manpower and Reserves Affairs Juan Garcia recently addressed a joint gathering of the Association of Naval Services Officers (ANSO) Washington, D.C., chapter and the Hispanic ERG of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations N1 (Manpower and Personnel).

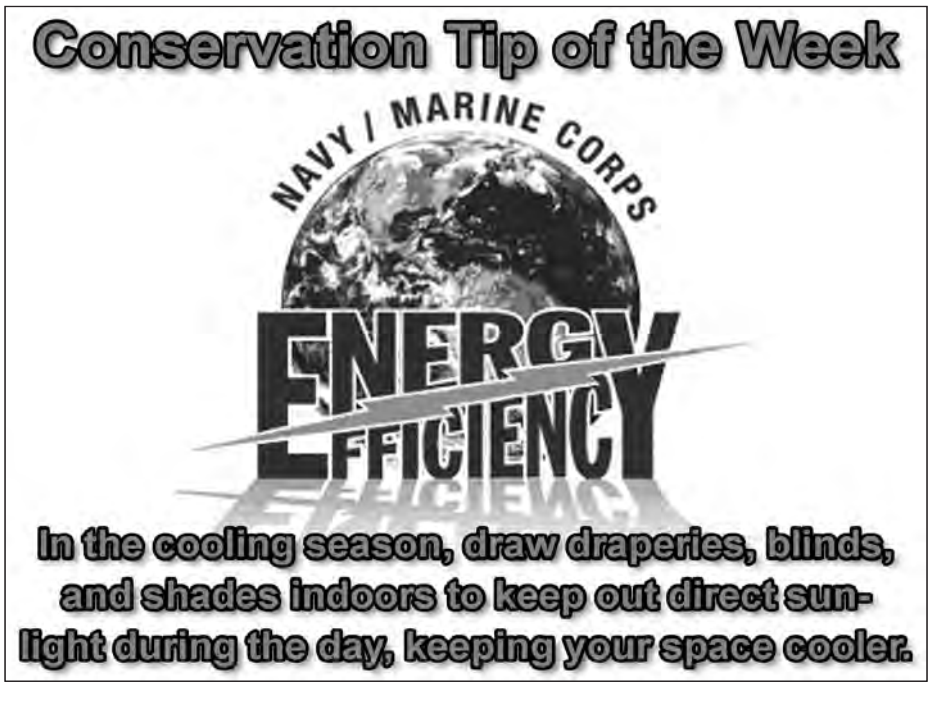
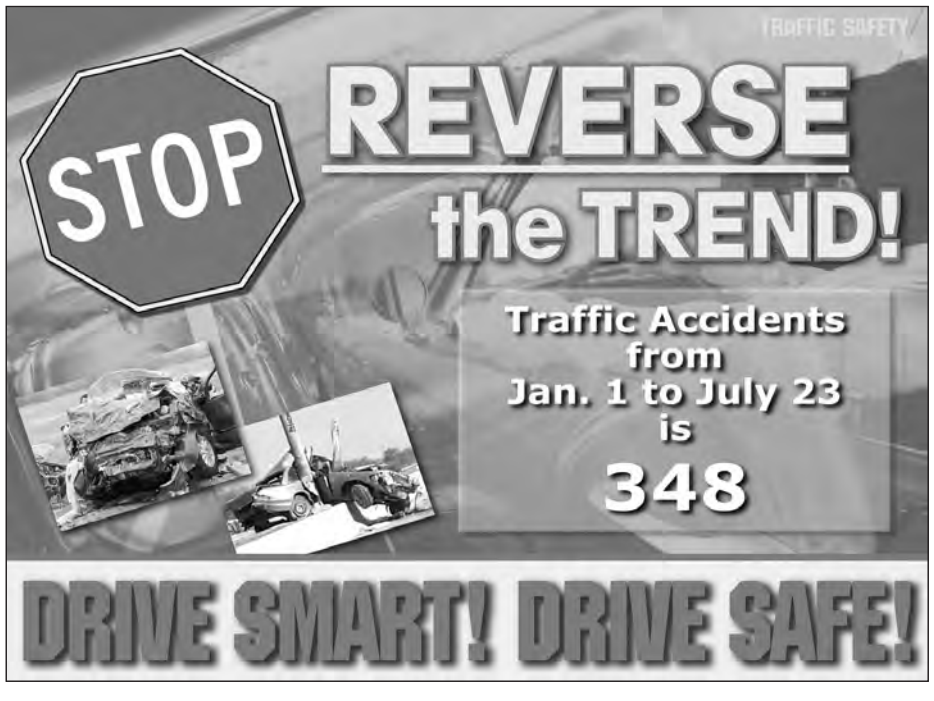
"By 2030, we set a goal of having a flag pool, that is, post-major command O-6 (captains), that looks like America," said Garcia. "ERGs are the engines that are helping us get there."

In the fall of 2008, Ferguson asked the Navy Diversity Directorate to create employee resource groups. The first ERG was soon established with a focus on women. In December 2008, the Hispanic ERG and Asian Pacific Islander ERG were formed. In 2009, an employee resource group for African Americans was established.

"We want to emulate the successful organizations to serve our Sailors more effectively and give our leadership a better understanding of the concerns of the entire Navy team - military, civilian and contractor," said Lt. Cmdr. Michael Files, special assistant to the assistant deputy chief of naval operations for manpower, personnel, training and education, and action officer for CNP African-American ERG.

While the ERGs focus on encouraging employees who are diverse to participate, all employees are encouraged to attend. The inclusiveness of ERGs is stressed because the issues they address affect every member of the Navy. Their primary goal to date has been to focus on professional development and mentoring.

Files said it's beneficial to have employees of like minds coming together and addressing issues that impact them.

"In a large setting that is more diverse, some employees may be reluctant to speak up, but if allowed to form ERGs, there is more support among peers to address issues that impact an employee's professional environment and development," said Files.

In the two years since the ERGs were formed, there have been successes and areas that need more focus, but the overall goals of improving diversity and giving employees a greater voice are showing progress.