Overcome pride, innovate, embrace positive change ...for Dr. Semmelweis

By Chaplain Mike Anderson

Humanity has a prideful stubborn streak. We have seen it at work, at home, and in our communities. "Sea Lawyers" know it all, and automatically fear and ridicule change. Family members complain about change because "that's the way we've always done it," routines are disrupted, and comfort zones feel invaded. Communities shun the effectuation of change out of fear of the unknown, a fear of failure, a fear of public humiliation, financial fears, or a fear of extremely adverse repercussions after an innovative concept is noticed (Mark 6:14-29).

The story of Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis is a compelling example of a prideful community shunning innovation. Dr. Semmelweis was a Hungarian physician and professor of the maternity clinic at the Vienna General Hospital in 1847. While on the job, he noticed that mothers in the medical students' ward had a six times greater chance of infection than mothers in the midwives' ward at the hospital. Since infection often proved to be fatal to both mother and child, these statistics were disturbing. As a result, he set out to learn what he could do to lower the rate of infection.

Upon review of each ward's practices, Dr. Semmelweis realized that midwives practiced hand-washing and area cleaning before and after births occurred. The medical students, on the other hand, were desensitized to the gore inherent to 19th Century medical practice and viewed hand hygiene as a waste of valuable time.

Dr. Semmelweis instituted a procedure that required everyone who came in contact with a patient to wash their hands in an antiseptic solution. The rate of infection for patients treated by his students dropped immediately. We religiously practice hand sanitizing at USNH Yokosuka 165 years after this innovation. It works.

You would think that the medical community at the time would treat him as a hero, but, to the contrary, the medical community largely ignored, rejected or ridiculed his findings. He was dismissed from the hospital and shunned by his professional peers.

Doing the right thing is counterintuitive when you know that disruption – or even obliteration - of a socially-constructed homeostatic equilibrium will likely occur. Especially while operating within a culture of fear, where our collective future story is at times uncertain, innovative thinking is imperative and requires great determination and courage. You may even receive negative feedback from those seeking to preserve the status quo. It's normal given our human brokenness. Dr. Semmelweis' experience spawned the expressions "Semmelweis reflex" and "Semmelweis effect" as metaphors for knee-jerk rejections of innovations that contradict entrenched norms.

As PCS season, deployments, turnover/increased OPTEMPO, and school vacations are upon us, remember Dr. Semmelweis when facing potential changes, innovations, or improvements to the way things are done at work, at home, and in our community. We operate within very successful, carefully-constructed, and highly-structured systems, but there is always room to innovate. We've proven we can overcome an unprecedented 3-fold disaster last year through a strong community spirit and support for one another and our host nation. We have a collective resolve that a stagnant economy and fear of the unknown cannot destroy. The Hoover Dam was built during the Great Depression. Conquer fear. Be brave. Think big.

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Efficiencies are always being identified, evaluated and improved upon, said Santos.

It is the job of a select few highly trained sailors, which are tasked with routing the mail, to ensure FMC Yokohama is moving the mail expeditiously and efficiently to the customer.

"Our mail routers utilize secure technology to review ships operations, which provides them an up to the minute picture of current ships schedules and future movement to include upcoming Replenishments At Sea (RAS) schedules," Santos said.

This real-time knowledge aids situational awareness and enables delivery of the ships mail at sea instead of only when the ship makes a port visit, said Santos.

"Tracking all the mail actions keeps everyone very busy, said Logistics Specialist 2nd Class Randy Justice, FMC Mail Router. "We draft up the plan to ensure the mail makes it to the ships on time."

Reestablishment of a postal supply depot in early 2012 is another initiative that has put FMC Yokohama in the pole position with respect to servicing all Military Post Offices in the 7th and 5th Fleet.

The advantage of having the postal supply depot as a ready source of updated postal supplies in the immediate area is that it can provide a 2-3 day turnaround on requested supplies instead of ordering from a CONUS source that may take up to 35 days, said Santos.

"Supplies are my main thing," said Logistics Specialist 2nd Class Alex Montelbano, FMC Logistics Specialist. "I like when I am able to expedite the customer supply request and provide that quality service."

Providing the best possible customer service is not only Montelbano's goal but is shared by the entire FMC, specifically providing service that is equal to, or greater than that provided by the United States Postal Service (USPS).

In a high-tech world of instant messages, tweets and emails, the act of receiving a letter or package in the mail still goes a long way in support of forward deployed fleet forces and their families. NAVSUP FLC Yokosuka's FMC personnel stand ready to deliver.

Sailors, Marines have new safety advocate

By April Phillips, Naval Safety Center Public Affairs

NORFOLK, Va. – In a Change of Charge ceremony at the Naval Safety Center (NAVSAFECEN) July 6 day, Command Master Chief (AW/SW) Susan Whitman took over for Command Master Chief (AW/SW) Dominick Torchia as the enlisted liaison to Rear Adm. Brian Prindle, Commander, NAVSAFECEN, and as the go-to safety advisor for all Sailors and Marines.

Prindle noted the important role of the command master chief (CMC) during the ceremony.

"In the person of the CMC, there is someone committed to the key responsibility of telling the commanding officer what he or she needs to hear, whether or not they want to hear it," he said.

In noting Torchia's unique accomplishments during his role, Prindle said the renewed focus on safety and risk management throughout the fleet tops the list.

"He has made this position and integral part of what the master chief petty officer of the Navy and the Fleet master chiefs think about on a daily basis."

In his remarks to NAVSAFECEN military and civilian staff members, Torchia, who is now the Navy Region Mid-Atlantic CMC, said the command's mission is an important one for the nation's defense.

"This command plays the most important role in saving the resources and lives that allow mission readiness and the preservation of our great nation's freedom," Torchia said. "It the mishaps that don't occur that show our impact."

Whitman, who reported to NAVSAFECEN after serving as CMC onboard USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72) said she is excited to be in the safety business.

"Safety is finally making headway," she said. "It's an important focus in the Secretary of the Navy's 21st Century Sailor and Marine initiative and this gives us the teeth needed to continue building a culture of safety throughout the Navy and Marine Corps."

Whitman said she is looking forward to meeting Sailors and Marines around the fleet and being their advocate in all matters regarding safety and risk management.

"I will work very hard to ensure safety is a part of every conversation I am engaged in," she said.