It's OK to ask, "Why?"

By Chaplain Bruce Vaughan

One of the first questions a child learns how to ask is, "Why?" As a parent, I can respond in two different ways. I can see his question as an opportunity to teach, and I might respond like this: "You can't have a cookie right now, because it will spoil your dinner." To which he is likely to ask again, "Why?" Another way to respond is to get frustrated or angry that he won't take my first explanation, and I might respond with words like, "Because I said so, that's why! So stop asking!"

As we grow up, we never stop asking "Why?" But, as we get older, the questions that begin with the word "why" start to be tied more and more to our need for purpose and meaning in life. For instance, why am I here? Why am I staying in this job? Or, why do I keep doing what I am doing, day after day? When we search deeply for an answer to these questions, we will either learn something about ourselves and our sense of purpose in life, or we will be frustrated and angry and just stop asking.

In his book, "*The Purpose Driven Life*," Rick Warren writes, "When life has meaning, you can bear almost anything; without it, nothing is bearable." Families of our military service members are asked to bear a lot, and sometimes it may seem as though the burden of all that you have to bear is just too much. But if you have a purpose – if you know why you are doing what you are doing – then you will be amazed at your ability to bear even the heaviest load.

Do the responsibilities you take on as part of a military family serve a greater purpose, a greater cause? When you are feeling overwhelmed or overburdened, I encourage you to seek purpose and meaning in what you are doing. It is OK to ask yourself, ask others, or even ask God, "Why?" It can be the beginning of a search for greater purpose and meaning in your life. Hopefully, you will be led to seeking sources of greater wisdom. And, you may be surprised by the answers you get when you start asking the question, "Why?" May you be blessed in your search for purpose.

NCIS kicks off Crime Reduction Program

By NCIS Public Affairs

Military personnel, family members and civilian employees often face tremendous stress in their lives, and potential threats to their safety. Unchecked, this environment can impact military readiness and overall quality of life. To counter these stressors and threats, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) has implemented a collaborative Crime Reduction Program to proactively fight crime within the military community.

NCIS has partnered with the Judge Advocate General, Navy Public Affairs, Family Advocacy Program, Chaplain Corps and other Department of the Navy (DoN) entities, to facilitate a cross-cutting effort to help military communities reduce crime. The Crime Reduction Program organizes multiple crime reduction campaigns throughout the year, with each campaign focused on a singular theme; such as, domestic violence, narcotics, or identity theft. These campaigns will highlight the precursors of crime and victimization, while providing an outlet for reporting such acts. The focus of the Crime Reduction Campaign from January through March 2010 is targeted at the detection and prevention of fraud.

The Association of Certified Fraud Examiners estimates that U.S. corporations lose seven percent of their sales annually to fraud, waste and abuse. By applying this loss estimate to the DoN procurement budget of $65.3 billion for fiscal year 2009, the estimated loss suffered by the DoN would equate to $4.57 billion. That is your hard earned tax dollars wasted to fill the pockets of criminals. Results of NCIS investigations have revealed a higher estimated monetary loss impacting the DoN.

While the financial impact of fraud could be characterized as devastating, it can sometimes also threaten the lives of service members and civilians utilizing products and services procured via corrupt procurement practices. Every time an individual accepts a bribe from a company to award them a contract and every time a manufacturer utilizes substandard material or cuts corners, the safety of those utilizing the products or services is threatened. NCIS has conducted numerous fraud investigations involving the substitution of contract required materials for substandard and, or counterfeit materials. Typically, this product substitution has resulted in pre-mature equipment failure, endangered personnel, or worse.

So how does the Navy protect you and your tax dollars that are invested in its contracts and purchases? It takes you, in cooperation with your command and NCIS to identify and report suspected incidents of fraud. Fraud can occur at any stage of the process. Remain alert and you can detect fraudulent business practices, regardless of your level of exposure within the procurement system.

NCIS has identified several major categories of procurement fraud and key indicators to assist you with identifying early signs of fraud and corruption, which can lead to early remedies and drastically reduce impact.

• Subcontractor kickbacks occur when a subcontractor provides something of value, directly or indirectly to a prime or higher tier contractor in order to secure business. Indicators include poor or lack of established contractor procedures for awarding subcontracts through competition; poor documentation supporting such awards; non-award of a contract to lowest bidder and the same subcontractors working on contracts.

• Product substitution is the intentional submission of goods and, or services that do not conform to the contract specifications or requirements. Check substandard materials provided where the government is billed for premium material; or a contractor providing false certifications of inspections and testing. Product substitution can affect material and labor costs; equipment failure can be an indicator of safety issues.

• Antitrust fraud involves any practice that eliminates competition and restrains trade, which usually leads to excessive prices. Watch for contractor bids very close in dollar value, unsuccessful bid protests advising of collusive bidding and bids very close to government estimates.

• Bribery is a willful overt act directly or indirectly offering a government official something of value in exchange for personal gain or influence. Indicators of bribery are unexplained wealth, lack of supporting documentation in contract files, and lack of invoices for services paid by the government.

• A conflict of interest occurs when government personnel or immediate family members accept a favor or gratuity that affects the objectivity of the person serving the government. Watch for any government employee providing proprietary information for contracts awarded to the same contractor, poor or incomplete contract performance with continued payment and, or additional contracts and large payments to consultants who are former government employees.

• Cost mischarging is the improper allocation of costs or charging of allowable costs, directly or indirectly, to a government contract that can result in overcharges for goods and services. Question duplicate billing for labor and, or materials or billing of un-incurred costs; contractor passing commercial business expenses and continual cost overruns to government cost type contracts.

• Defective pricing is knowingly submitting false cost or pricing data to the government on negotiated contracts. Be aware of estimates where the basis for negotiation is higher than supporting documentation, with no creditable explanation; continued failure to correct known system deficiencies; and certification of false or misleading information.

These examples are just some of the crimes and indicators associated with fraud. NCIS can help you determine whether a suspicion or hunch you have might actually be fraudulent activity. NCIS provides fraud awareness briefings for your command and enables instant connectivity with NCIS offices and naval forces worldwide. Contact your local NCIS office for more information.

Improved force protection compound reopens

By Mark Elrod, CFAY Public Affairs

After a refurbishment project, Afloat Training Group Western Pacific (ATGWP) reopened its Force Protection Compound, on board Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka, with a cake cutting ceremony Jan. 4.

"The reopening of the Force Protection Compound facility makes it possible for FDNF (forward-deployed naval forces) students to have a much more comfortable and versatile training environment is which to master the requirements of the CSF (Center for Security Forces) self-protection curricula," said ATGWP Commanding Officer Capt. Curt Gilbert, during his remarks.

Having a comfortable and versatile training environment is key to providing essential training to personnel.

"The Security Reaction Force Basic and Advanced courses provided by CSF LSY (Learning Site Yokosuka) at the compound are the training foundation for the Auxiliary Security Force personnel and required for all master-at-arms personnel in CFAY," said Director of Training Support Detachment Western Pacific Rand Lee.

"The Force Protection Compound is important because it is the only location in 7th Fleet, other than going all the way to Camp Fuji, where ships' security reaction force personnel can get the training required to meet their mission certification requirements and maintain the level of qualification required by the type commanders. The Force Protection Compound also houses the annual basewide, multinational security drill coordinated by CNFJ," Lee added.

The compound consists of five training structures, some of which received refurbishment, and a tactical training area.

"Besides the refurbished classrooms and [bathroom] facilities, the indoor range has been relocated to provide better insulation throughout the year," said Gilbert. "The old [helicopter] firefighting area has been transformed into a tactical movement and takedown area, greatly enhancing the students ability to conduct real hands-on training."

ATGWP Commanding Officer Capt. Curtis Gilbert, accompanied by CSF Site Director AOC(AW/SW) Kent Schoeff, speaks prior to the cake cutting ceremony of the reopening of the improved Force Protection Compound Jan 4.

Photo by ITC(SW) Ben Tomlin

"The tactical area is where teams of students enrolled in the courses taught by CSF instructors learn and practice tactical maneuvers and movements associated with protection of their ship," Lee said.

According to Gilbert, the compound has undergone many changes, since it was built by Navy SeaBees in the 80s.

"Since 2000, when the force stood up as part of the ATG WESTPAC CNET (Commander Naval Education and Training) schoolhouse, force protection training has been part of the course offerings in Yokosuka," said Gilbert. "From the days of SSEW (Ship's Security Engagement Weapons) and FPFT (Force Protection Fundamentals Training) with use of live firing ranges at Camp Fuji, to today with the great addition of two, four-lane firing ranges and the second classroom facility, the Force Protection Compound has provided the highest quality training available to FDNF forces."