

# Professional Reading Program

Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program



## *Sailing True North: Ten Admirals and the Voyage of Character* by Admiral James Stavridis (USN Ret.)

### Why Read *Sailing True North*?

*“Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are. – John Wooden”*

*“In the course of nearly four decades at sea, I learned that a handful of character traits were at the heart of both good character and effective leadership. I think they are echoed in the successes and failures of the ten admirals in this volume...”*

*“The test of character is taking the ‘hard right’ over the ‘easy wrong,’ and some of these admirals fail that simple test on more than one occasion.”*

*Sailing True North* is a study of the leadership skills and character traits of 10 naval leaders from ancient times to the present, examining how character relates to leadership. Retired Admiral James Stavridis is a highly respected leader who served for many years in the U.S. Navy, and is a product of a culture that highly prizes reading as a professional development tool. The traits, skills, and experiences, good and bad, that the author highlights are all valuable to new and experienced leaders, and demonstrate various ways character defines a leader.

There are several videos related to the book and featuring the author available online. Find some of them at the links below, or by using an internet search engine.

- **LIVE In Depth with Admiral James Stavridis (1 minute clip):**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qm6Grzrg8C4>  
**Full version of above clip found at C-SPAN (55 minutes):**  
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?466122-1/sailing-true-north>
- **Admiral James Stavridis on History's Great Admirals - November 2019 (10 minutes):**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cqxhlu13u5Y>

For more leadership ideas and to dig deeper, check out the Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program (WFLDP) blog, Facebook page, Professional Reading Program, and more at the links below:

**Blog:** <http://wildlandfireleadership.blogspot.com/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/WFLDP>

**Professional Reading Program:** <https://www.nwcg.gov/wfldp/toolbox/prp>

**Main WFLDP page:** <https://www.fireleadership.gov>

## *Sailing True North Discussion Questions*

### **Chapter One: The Power of Persuasion**

As you read this chapter, what are some things you can take and apply in your own setting? What is your vision as a leader, and how can you communicate that to others? Does your vision align with that of your superiors in the organization? How might you communicate your vision and persuade others to support it? How can you be aware of the ways that your vision might not be in alignment with that of your organization, and adapt if needed?

### **Chapter Two: A Sailor of the Middle Kingdom**

What kinds of challenges have you overcome as a leader? Have they made you more resilient? How might a Stoic approach to leadership (and life) benefit a leader in the wildland fire environment? What can you learn from the success of diversity in Zheng He's fleet, and how might you apply that concept in your organization? What are some ways you can give/take clear leader's intent and empower others to act in line with that intent? Why might it be important to learn about the diverse cultures found in various regions and organizations in the wildland fire setting?

### **Chapter Three: A Pirate and a Patriot**

What is your take on the difference between discipline and self-discipline as discussed in this chapter? How might the example in the book apply in the wildland fire setting? Are there potential drawbacks to being a leader that pushes yourself and others extremely hard? Why is it important for a leader to keep growing and changing? How can boldness be a strength and a weakness in the wildland fire environment?

### **Chapter Four: The Band of Brothers**

How can you foster a "band of brothers" leadership environment in your organization/crew setting, where individuals work well together as a team, but are also empowered to act independently if it's needed? How can you build teams among your peers, when you might be competing with them for promotions in often brutally competitive wildland fire organizations? How can you take care of your team as a compassionate leader?

### **Chapter Five: The Influencer**

Can you be a leader in the wildland fire setting without being a hard-charging "fire dog" with a red card full of operations qualifications? Why or why not? Can you think of any fire leaders that you know that have taken different paths in the larger organization? Are there any roles in wildland fire organizations for "intellectuals" or teachers? How does your work and your role in the wildland fire service fit in to the broader fire organization? How can reflection through "disciplined thought and writing" benefit you, or your organization? What do you think of the idea that "all leaders... are in some sense educators" as the author states? What might it mean to be intellectually courageous in the wildland fire culture?

## **Chapter Six: Rum, Buggery, and the Lash**

How does the example of determination in this chapter relate to the ideas of being physically and mentally prepared as a leader? What are some of the steps you are taking, or can take, to “lay the groundwork for a high level of energy” as the author describes? What are some ways to stay optimistic as a leader, even when facing adversity and challenges?

## **Chapter Seven: The Admiral’s Admiral**

How does the idea of a compassionate leader, as described in this chapter, fit with your view of an “ideal” leader? How can this compassionate leadership be combined with the ability to delegate effectively grow your team and the organization? How does the way you interact with people around you affect your leadership effectiveness? If someone on your team is proving to be a better fit in some other part of the organization, do you try to help them find their place, or do you push them out?

## **Chapter Eight: The Master of Anger**

How does your perspective of “hard work” align with some of the ideas in this chapter? As a leader or follower in the wildland fire service, have you ever had to make challenging choices about following what you love in the work? Do you have any individuals that you look to as examples of what can be achieved with hard work? What do you think about the idea that vision isn’t just something that you have, but something that you can train? How can you know the difference between long-term and short-term vision, when it comes to implementation? How can you know if your vision isn’t the correct one for your organization?

## **Chapter Nine: The Angel of Change**

What do you think of leaders who take a “great circle route” in their careers, that is to say, take “odd” routes to get where they want to go? Are there advantages? Disadvantages? Not everyone is a naturally charismatic leader – how can you refine your methods of communicating with those around you to best fit your personality and be an effective communicator? How does Zumwalt’s style of compassionate leadership strike you? Why might it be important to be a compassionate leader in the wildland fire service?

## **Chapter Ten: Don’t Go Near the Water**

Even in the wildland fire service, not everyone is a “fireline” leader. Leaders can be found in dispatch centers, equipment caches, research labs, and many other places. How can you, as a leader, develop your skills and make an impact in your chosen corner of the wildland fire world, even if it’s not a “traditional” leadership role? Why is it so important to mentor others, and to take the time to be good at being a mentor? How can you leverage curiosity as a leader?

## **Chapter Eleven: Resilience and the Modern Admiral**

How is resilience as a character trait viewed in the fire service? What are some things you’ve done to become more resilient, as a leader and a follower? How can understanding the importance of character as a leader and follower help you become more resilient in those roles?