

Mike Abrashoff

**Former US Navy Commander of USS Benfold, Author,
Leadership Consultant**

Please contact a GDA agent for information.

Topics

- Authors
- Employee Engagement
- Leadership
- Military & Veterans
- Navigating Change & Uncertainty
- Teambuilding & Collaboration
- Workplace Safety

About Mike Abrashoff

Mike Abrashoff was the most-junior officer in the Pacific Fleet when he took command of the near-worst performing ship. Twelve months later, the USS *Benfold* was the best ship in the entire Navy – *using the same crew*. The story of that stunning transformation has lessons for every organization: leadership matters – and culture is everything. Mike's written three books – his first, *It's Your Ship*, has sold over 1.3 million copies. His Leadership Roadmap offers clear, battle-tested, and actionable steps. Mike shows people at every level of the organization how to engage and take incremental steps toward change that can make a dramatic difference at work. Mike is clear, "I didn't turn the ship around – my crew did that. What I did was to create an environment where they felt safe, empowered and supported. When you do that, anything is possible."

In many ways, what Mike was able to do with the USS *Benfold* was an extreme example of the same problems facing many organizations today. That's why dozens of publications including *The Wall Street Journal*, *Harvard Business Review*, and *Fast Company* have cited Mike's story as an inspiring lesson for business. Leaders especially identify with Mike's being accountable for the results in an environment where he couldn't make the rules.

"When my crew came to me with a problem, I'd say 'It's *your* ship – how would you fix it?'" Mike focused on the one thing he *could* influence: his crew's attitude, because culture is the ultimate competitive weapon for any organization.

Mike's established a set of management principles that he calls The Leadership Roadmap. At the core of his leadership approach on *Benfold* was a process of replacing command and control with commitment and cohesion, and engaging the hearts, minds, and loyalties of workers with conviction and humility. "The most important thing that a captain can do is to see the ship through the eyes of the crew. The idea is to empower every individual to share the responsibility of achieving excellence."

By every measure, these principles achieved breakthrough results: turnover decreased to an unprecedented 1%; the rate of promotions tripled; and the crew slashed operating expenses by 25%. Regarded as the finest ship in the Pacific Fleet, *Benfold* won the prestigious Spokane Trophy for having the highest degree of combat readiness. This remarkable turnaround was accomplished by the very same crew that had performed so poorly just months before.

Mike is author of three books. His first, *It's Your Ship*, has a timeless message: don't use outside forces that stand in your way as excuses – control the things you *can* influence and amazing results will happen. His next books, *It's Our Ship* and *Get Your Ship Together*, showed how these principles have been put into action by business leaders in their own organizations.

A popular keynote speaker for audiences looking to ramp up organizational performance, Mike has spoken to every industry and kind of audience – from board retreats to front line personnel; from sales groups to universities; from Fortune 500s to startups. He inspires audiences to rethink their beliefs about leadership and organizational culture and tailors the message to focus on engagement, execution, change, safety, diversity, leadership, teamwork, innovation, accountability and more.

Prior to commanding USS *Benfold*, Mike served as the Military Assistant to Secretary of Defense William J. Perry. He also helped draft the air defense plan for naval forces in the Persian Gulf in 1990, coinciding with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait; and served as the executive officer of the Cruiser Shiloh, where he deployed to the Persian Gulf in support of United Nations sanctions against Iraq.



Mike Abrashoff is the founder of Aegis Performance Group, a consulting firm which works with and supports leaders as they address leadership, talent and performance challenges within their organizations. Mike and his team prompt leaders at all levels to re-imagine their leadership thinking and create new ways to elevate individual, team and organizational performance.

Select Keynotes

• IT'S YOUR SHIP – ACHIEVING BREAKTHROUGH PERFORMANCE

When Mike Abrashoff took command of the USS *Benfold*, morale was low, turnover was high and the ship's performance ranked near the bottom of the Pacific Fleet. Just twelve months later *Benfold* was ranked #1 – using the very same crew. The lesson was clear – leadership matters and culture is everything. This inspiring talk is for every individual and organization looking for practical and usable ways to take organizational performance to new heights. In Mike's case, he realized that before the ship's performance could change, he had to change his leadership style. Mike worked to create a culture of trust and empower his crew to take charge and use ingenuity and initiative to improve every aspect of the way things were done. Top down leadership is dead, so when the crew would present a problem, Mike became famous for responding "What would YOU do? It's YOUR ship!" Mike's presentation leaves audiences with the tools and inspiration to accomplish big goals.

• THE VIRTUAL LEADER'S ROADMAP

Mike Abrashoff had to change his leadership mindset when he took over the near-worst performing ship in the Navy. The situation was dire. If performance did not improve, sailors could have gotten injured...or worse. In response, Mike quickly adopted a new set of principles to guide a new way of leading. His focus was on building trust and authentic ways of engaging. It was about listening to and empowering his crew who then went on to make the USS *Benfold* the best ship in the entire U.S. Navy. These very same principles are the foundation of success for organizations that embrace working virtually. In the short term, many organizations have found virtual work arrangements actually increase effectiveness of employees. That effectiveness may not be sustainable if leaders and organizations don't master a new skill-set of how to lead people they can't see. It's about measuring results – not activity; and about finding ways to let people know their efforts are appreciated. Those who succeed in leading in the virtual environment will create a decisive competitive advantage.

• NO LIMITS – DON'T LET GOALS BECOME LIMITATIONS

Sometimes in our professional lives we might *think* we are in a battle to beat an adversary or a competitor when in actuality we are really in competition with ourselves but just haven't figured it out yet. When battling the competition, you want to come out on top, if only by one more sale or maybe a few percentage points. Other times, someone at a higher level gives you a goal based on some median expectation set for others. When Mike Abrashoff took command of a well below-average ship in the U.S. Navy, his goal was to get to average. He initially set average goals and expectations for himself and his crew until one day it dawned on him: his ship could be much better than just average. It was Mike's eureka moment: realizing they weren't in competition with anyone but themselves. To be their best they had to stop putting limits on what they believed was possible. That realization changed Mike Abrashoff's approach to leadership and led the same crew to accomplish one of the most remarkable turnarounds that was chronicled in the *Harvard Business Review*, *Fast Company* magazine and Mike's *New York Times*' and *Wall Street Journal* bestselling book, *IT'S YOUR SHIP*. This presentation will challenge audiences to think differently on how to set expectations while realizing the only limits that you have are self-imposed.

• GO DEEPER WITH HALF-DAY AND FULL-DAY PROGRAMS

Dive deep into the Leadership Roadmap with a half-day or full-day program. The sessions are most often used as a follow-on to Mike's keynote and provide attendees with powerful tools and strategies to apply in their work environment. Depending on the circumstances, these longer sessions are facilitated by a senior strategist from Mike's firm, Aegis Performance Group, or Mike himself. These sessions create an exciting interactive atmosphere where participants examine the key components of high performing leaders, teams and organizations. Inquire for more details and program descriptions.

Select Book Titles

- **2023:** Ship Happens
- **2012:** It's Your Ship: Management Techniques from the Best Damn Ship in the Navy, 10th Anniversary Edition
- **2008:** It's Our Ship: The No-Nonsense Guide to Leadership
- **2004:** Get Your Ship Together: How Great Leaders Inspire Ownership From the Ground Up
- **2002:** It's Your Ship: Management Techniques from the Best Damn Ship in the Navy

Select Articles

- [Mike Abrashoff – Landing Page](#)

Mike Abrashoff was the most-junior officer in the Pacific Fleet when he took command of the near-worst performing ship. Twelve months later, the USS *Benfold* was the best ship in the entire Navy – using the same crew. The story of that stunning transformation has lessons for every organization: leadership matters – and culture is everything.

Select Testimonials

"Everyone loved Mike. He got a standing ovation. First time I've seen a keynote receive one in my history with ADESA."

– *ADESA (Automotive Dealer Exchange Services of America)*

"... we really enjoyed your insights and perspectives on leadership. The principles and priorities you honed while commanding the USS Benfold resonated among all of us. Your commitment to the frontline has tremendous application to our business and lives ... and I greatly appreciate your sharing the experiences and enthusiastic passion that work so well."

– *CEO, Aramark*

"Your talk was inspiring to our sellers and your message clearly resonated with the group. The feedback from the meeting was overwhelmingly positive and we couldn't have done it without your involvement and enthusiasm."

– *Chief Growth Officer, Aramark*

"We have asked Mike Abrashoff to speak to our team twice now and he is in high demand for a third appearance. His message and coaching around leadership is perfect for every level of management in our organization ranging from the General Managers of our stores right up to our CEO."

– *Chief Operating Officer, FIVE GUYS*

"In the close to four years I have been here Mike's presentation was widely recognized as the best by far. He spoke for 75 minutes ...no notes... no overheads.... No podium...right out front. His Q/A was outstanding... our managers appreciated that we brought in someone that good. He does not try to impress people with any gimmicks or trendy expressions. I will call on him again and trust him with our most valuable asset... our people."

– *Chief Operation Officer, Atlantis Paradise Island, Bahamas*

"It was a pleasure working with you – and it's always the best news when our audience responds so well to a speaker. Your average score over 9 meetings was 4.9 out of 5.0 – wow!"

– *CoBank*

"You set the tone for the meeting and hit a home run with our group! The feedback was extremely positive. I had my meeting today at 17:30 and it took us 1 minute to report a job very well done! Thank you very much for starting the program on such a great note and providing the momentum for another very successful conference! It made my job as director for this conference a pleasure over these two days!"

– *Conference Director, American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers*

"The excitement you generated was overwhelming. All during your presentation, my chat was lighting up with how great it was and different people posting their different takeaways."

– *EVP & GM, Upland Software*

"Your message to the team was spot on! I received a lot of feedback from the team and universally they felt your message helped them think about leadership differently and help put them even more firmly in the Ownership Mentality. I thought you nailed it and helped 1) land the message of Own It 2) help them focus on their Leadership and 3) Help them think about managing through change. I am so glad that you were our speaker and I think it helped us at this critical point in time."

– *Executive Vice President, Retail | Office Depot, Inc.*

"We received great feedback on your presentation from the attendees at our convention - both franchisees and members of our Board of

Directors. Several franchisees told me afterwards that they found your talk authentic and down to earth - which fit nicely with our broader message. Many also told me they related to your story because they have been handed a bad situation at some point in their careers and had to overcome it. You clearly connected with them! Thanks for making our convention a success.”

– *Executive VP and Chief Operating Officer, Choice Hotels*

“HOME RUN!!! Mike Abrashoff was a bases loaded home run! I believe he is the best that we have ever had. Wow!!!!!! Wonderful feedback from the members. All future speakers will be judged against a very high bar that he set!!!”

– *First Financial Resources*

“Mike was everything we had hoped for when we booked him. He had instant credibility with our attendees due to his background and accomplishments. He did a great job of relating how the leadership skills he honed in the Navy translate to leadership in the business world. He does it all through a very laid-back style of speaking that is authoritative without being didactic.”

– *President, Pet Industry Distributors Association*

“Mike, you hit it out of the park, as I knew you would. Your message was on point and was exactly what I was looking for. It emphasized some of the things we were already working on and provided a good foundation for us to build on.”

– *President/CEO, Empire Caterpillar Southwest*

“He knocked it out of the park. He was so good and on point that it almost looked like we wrote his script. The group loved him and the parallels to managing a ship and mill are remarkable.”

– *Public Relations and Communications, International Paper*

“Mike was super! He was a great storyteller, funny, and tied the message to our business throughout. It was so relevant to exactly what our org needs right now—leadership at the GM level— and I have received nothing but rave reviews. In fact, several of our vendor suppliers and audience members from other companies have asked me for info about Mike to possibly speak for their organizations. It was awesome!”

– *SVP Marketing/Creative Director, Houlihans*

Select Client Feedback

No wonder he turned the USS Benfold from an under-achieving member of the fleet to being ranked #1 in only 12 months. He gets what it takes to create leaders and instill a sense of ownership at every level of an organization. He had the entire audience on his team in 50 minutes. In a world battling cultural changes, he provides hands on ways to overcome differences and create a successful outcome.

– **Kim Strange** *NAIOP Houston*