

USS Nimitz Athena Team



By DON Innovation

The Athena Team aboard the USS NIMITZ (CVN 68) created both an environment and a conduit for innovative ideas to be quickly vetted, approved, and implemented by senior personnel. Transformational ideas from any level of the workforce were acted upon within weeks versus months or years. Their initiative allowed the ship to re-allocate over 6,000 man hours to mission critical projects and a recycling project estimated to recycle 42,266 pounds of paper, plastic, and aluminum and returning the profits to Navy Base Kitsap Recycling.

THE PROCESS:

The USS NIMITZ Innovation Initiative allows Sailors of any rank and any rate along with civilians at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard to pitch their innovative ideas to improve the command or the Navy, in general, in an open forum to fellow Sailors as well as leaders of industry, academia and government; it is part of a larger Navy Project called Athena. Locally, it is a simple process. Quarterly, individuals are given a day off from their traditional duties to focus on the development of their big idea. In exchange for the idea development time, they present their concept in a five-minute pitch in a casual environment, followed by a five-minute question and answer session from the crowd. This is the first time the presenters experience in-depth

interaction with the USS NIMITZ Athena Team. After all the participants have presented their ideas, the audience votes on the top ideas based on three metrics: Idea quality, Actionability, and Presentation.

The winner receives the full support of the USS NIMITZ Athena Team and command backing for a small functional team to bring their idea to fruition leveraging the Athena Network, as well as the scientists, engineers and designers in attendance. The team maintains integrity of the individual's idea and allows for them to prosper through support. The winner of the quarterly event pitches their idea to the Commanding Officer and potentially receives the final approval for implementation.

Upon approval, the USS NIMITZ Athena Team switches into implementation mode to remove barriers and gaining resources for the Sailor. The whole foundation of the team is to provide a clear and quick path, bringing youthful ideas to old problems regardless of rank or rate. Through the Calendar Year 2015, the team held four meetings growing from four presenters to over 12 presenters receiving the ultimate blessing for two outstanding innovative projects onboard the USS NIMITZ.

THE OUTCOME:

Through quarterly events, the USS NIMITZ Athena Team implemented two innovation projects: a zone inspection program reorganization that significantly reduced required man hours; and a recycling initiative that changed the way USS NIMITZ and future pier side carriers recycle. Both of these ideas were cultivated by junior enlisted personnel and approved by the command within 60 days of origination.

Previous to the Zone Inspection Project, the USS NIMITZ procedure was for a recorder and inspector to inspect while a separate person stood by each space to present it for zone inspection. On average, there were 30 zone inspectors assigned five spaces, creating a requirement for 150 personnel to standby for approximately two hours to present their space, inefficiently using 300 man hours each week.

CTR2 Michael Alvarado presented a plan that removed the requirement for a presenter by making the recorder the presenter. The Athena Team provided CTR2 Alvarado with the support required to refine, brief, and implement the program onboard USS NIMITZ. Since implementation five months ago, USS NIMITZ has been able to re-allocate 6,000 man hours to mission critical maintenance projects.

Prior to ABF3 John Broussard presenting an especially innovative idea, recycling on USS NIMITZ while pier side was non-existent. Recycling not only benefitted Sailors, it was also aligned with the SECNAV's and CNO's push for greater sustainability, energy footprint reduction, and environmentally conscious decisions.

While onboard USS NIMITZ, ABF3 Broussard recognized that thousands of plastic bottles and aluminum cans were being thrown away on a daily basis. Through the Athena Team, ABF3 Broussard, developed a plan to use existing recycling bins that the ship used while at sea.

Whenever sailors took out the trash, they removed the recycling as well. There is ongoing coordination that allows the USS NIMITZ recycling goods were hauled to the Naval Base Kitsap Recycling Facility to be sorted. The ultimate goal is for the recycling product to be sold and the profits returned to the Naval Base Kitsap Recycling Team. Currently, the project is expected to produce 42,266 pounds of recycling to be sold over the remainder of the USS NIMITZ yard period.