

Operating Within Your Limitations



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As a senior enlisted leader who has worked in many different positions, including as a division leading chief petty officer and quality assurance supervisor, I have seen many instances when Sailors have injured themselves due to exceeding their limitations on and off duty. We demand a lot of them to meet mission requirements, and sometimes, we forget our limitations and capabilities. While some limitations are put in place due to policy or instruction, we must be mindful of our personal limits, conditions that can affect our limitations and areas where we need to either increase our knowledge or ask for help. I wanted to share my experiences with motorcycle riding and operating within my limits.



Recruit Training Command and Naval Station Great Lakes Safety hosted American Motorcycle Training instructors to provide a total of five sessions of safety-oriented rider training Aug. 22-24, 2022. Each three-hour session accommodated up to 12 riders. (U.S. Navy photo by John Sheppard)

My favorite off-duty hobby is motorcycle riding. I have been riding for over 10 years, and I can attest to the many similar factors affecting personal limitations when riding a motorcycle and conducting aviation maintenance. One factor is situational awareness. There are obvious dangers when performing maintenance, but mishaps typically occur when you fail to give a task your complete attention. The same is true for riding. As you gain experience, you increase your understanding, scanning for hazards and reacting to differing road conditions. Road debris, potholes or uneven surfaces pose different hazards when riding and must be handled differently. If my full attention is not focused on riding, I may overlook these things and open myself up to a potentially dangerous situation. Many motorcycle accidents could be avoided by eliminating distractions; similarly, many aviation maintainer mishaps could be reduced by doing the same. Another factor that affects one's limitations is proper personnel protective equipment (PPE). Yes, it is not the most comfortable, and yes, it will only be a quick ride or simple maintenance task, but we must remember that the risk of not wearing PPE could result in permanent physical damage. The protection provided by wearing a helmet while riding and wearing a cranial when working on an aircraft serve a similar purpose: protecting the wearer's head.

Additionally, there may be pressure, real or perceived, to accomplish a task or distractions that could impair one's judgment and decision-making. When mentoring new riders, I emphasize that when riding with more experienced riders, they should resist the pressures to keep up with the group if they must ride beyond their limits. I apply the same logic when assigning maintenance tasks. I must be aware of the maintainer's level of knowledge to ensure adequate time is provided so they are not pressured into deviating from maintenance procedures. There are many reasons a rider may pass on the opportunity to go for a ride, such as not enough rest. Just like riding a motorcycle for 18 hours straight is not a good idea, I stress the importance of getting enough rest before any significant maintenance evolutions so maintainers are ready to

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put in a full day's work. Finally, as the Basic Rider Course provides a foundation for new riders to continually increase their knowledge, formally administered maintenance training offers the same.

Understanding personal limitations is so important that it is included in the chief of naval operations' initiative "Get Real, Get Better." A key component to "Get Real" is understanding one's limits and capabilities, in and out of uniform. While limits differ from person to person, we must recognize limitations and how to address them. Simply asking, "What's different today?" allows us to assess our limitations in each situation. One moment of riding my motorcycle a little too fast for conditions could have disastrous consequences. Likewise, the moment we neglect to look out for ourselves and each other is when equipment gets damaged or worse. Understanding one's limits is accepting the responsibility for what could happen when we exceed those limits because things can turn from good to bad in the blink of an eye.



Cover: Aviation Machinist's Mate 3rd Class Christian Meyers, performs maintenance on an F414 turbo fan jet engine aboard USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76), while in-port at Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Sept. 7, 2023. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Kyree Rogers)