



If there's anything that 2020 and 2021 taught us thus far, it is that it's hard to predict what the world will hurl at us. From the pandemic, to climate change, to social unrest in several countries, to the galloping new advances in technology, it seems we're facing a perfect storm of complex challenges. As a leader, many times you feel like you're at the helm of a big ship in the midst of that storm, fighting to stay the course, gripping with all your might, hoping the rudder is effective and the mast holds. Good leaders are the ones who get after these challenges with courage and consistency using their moral compasses to find true north and stay the course. I want to share four leadership lessons I've learned over the years in the Navy, both at sea and ashore.

The first is that leaders must be able to "see around corners." While your teammates are focusing on today's challenges, you have to "play tomorrow ball," anticipating the issues your team must address in the coming weeks, months, and years. One of the ways I try to think ahead is by carving out time to stop, reflect, and write down my thoughts about the future – yes, I do believe in journals. Reading history is another important habit because you can always find lessons from the past to help you fight the challenges of the future.

Second, do your homework. When you have an important meeting or event you must attend, do your background research. Prepare to the best of your ability. When I worked for former Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, I saw firsthand someone who always did his homework and internalized every memo and background document. If you expect your teammates to do their homework, you must also hold yourself to that high standard.

Three, stay hungry. Never stop learning. Keep your curiosity, your passion, and your drive. As you move higher up the professional ladder, it's easy to rest on your laurels. Don't get complacent – strive to be better each and every day. I try to surround myself with people who continually push me to grow and improve.

Finally, every leader must build trust within his or her team, but in order to do that, you must first look in the mirror and ask yourself "who trusts me?" The only way for any team to get things done is if each teammate can look to the left and the right and say, "I trust myself and my team and I believe they trust in me." It's up to the leader to facilitate a culture of trust, empowering teammates to carry out their tasks with determination, character, creativity and gusto.

See around corners, do your homework, stay hungry and build trust. I hope that, in the storm we call life, this advice serves you well on your own personal voyage to help you sail true north.

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Faller". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Admiral Craig S. Faller  
Commander, U.S. Southern Command