

Borrowed Authority: The Weight of the Temporary Seat

The first time you act up as the Company Officer hits different. The opportunity to sit in that seat is exciting! There's always an energy shift the moment you walk in the app bay and drop your gear. The day just feels different. You move a little quicker, think a little deeper, and before long, you're just waiting for that first call to come in. You will have probably checked your phone a thousand times by lunch. Again, just waiting. You even catch yourself thinking, "We're going to get something today." That's the magic of the acting position. For just a short time, you're stepping into the seat that represents everything you've been working toward. And more importantly, you're excited to prove you can do it.

Acting up is a milestone. Envelop yourself in it. Whether it's for a few hours or a full shift, being given that opportunity means that the upper echelon believes you can handle the responsibility. As an acting officer, you finally get to do the things you've been watching, studying, and preparing for. You finally get to live it. Set the plan. Make the assignments. Manage the tempo. Absorb every minute of it. It's an opportunity to understand the balance between being decisive and being deliberate. Between leading with confidence and listening with humility. Between earning respect through your actions and maintaining trust through your consistency. Don't waste this opportunity hiding in the office. The admin side can wait. Spend this time with your crew.

But there is a darker side that needs your attention. You're still part of the crew, but you're not *one of them* in the same way anymore. The line between peer and leader starts to blur. Even if it is just for a few hours, or a full shift. Picture this: today you're in the gym with the crew. The Captain walks in and says, "We've got inspections at two o'clock we have to get done." Everyone groans. You even join in muttering something under your breath. And why wouldn't you? It's harmless banter. But the next day, the captain calls in sick and the BC says their bumping you up for the day. Guess what, inspections didn't get done. Now you're the one walking into that same gym to remind everyone that inspections are still on the schedule. Suddenly, the air feels heavier. The room gets a little quieter. You can sense it. Everyone remembers what you said the day before. And now they're waiting to see if you meant it. This the moment where many acting officers lose credibility before they ever get started.

The real dichotomy of borrowed authority lives in that shift between today and tomorrow. Today you're a peer, but tomorrow you're the supervisor. That's a hard balance for anyone to manage. One moment you're in the gym with the crew, joking around, part of the rhythm; the next, you're standing in front of the same group, setting expectations, and reminding them about company inspections. It's uncomfortable because it's unnatural. And that tension is what makes acting up so difficult and what makes it so invaluable. You will learn more about leadership in those moments of internal conflict than you ever could in a classroom. Lean into it.

If you want to succeed as an acting officer, or at least survive it, you have to change your mindset. But not on the days you're thinking. You need to hit your perspective and mindset on the days you are NOT acting. You can still be yourself. You can still joke. Still work out. Still be part of the crew. But your words and your silence carry a little more weight now. How you carry yourself on the regular days when you're not in charge will determine whether people trust you

when you finally are. This is the classic definition of leadership capital. It's the credibility you build from trust, consistency, and respect that accumulate over time.