

# Acquisition On The High Seas

## Pirate Principles For Program Managers

Capt. Chris "Bloody Pete" Quaid, USAF ■ Maj. Dan "Long Tom" Ward, USAF

**Editor's Note:** While digging through the Defense Acquisition University archives, we came across an old issue of *Pirate Acquisition and Technology* magazine. We are proud to re-print this interview, which was first published in 1725, during the Golden Age of Piracy.

**W**e are here today on board *PS [Pirate Ship] Radical Element*, flagship of the pirate fleet led by Captain Henry Morgan and Captain Bartholomew Roberts, two of the scurviest scoundrels ever to sail the seven seas. Morgan (a.k.a. Morgan the Terrible) is one of the most feared and respected buccaneers of all time and is often called the king of all pirates. He is best known for leading 2,000 buccaneers on 36 ships in a successful attack on Panama. Roberts (a.k.a. the Great Pirate Roberts) is arguably the most successful pirate ever. In addition to capturing 400 ships between 1719 and 1722, he is sure to be remembered for documenting the *Pirate's Code*, a code of conduct based in part on longstanding unwritten pirate tradition. Both captains are planning to retire from active piracy and operate their own management consulting firm, Scallywag Management, LLC, from the island of Barbados.



### Pirate Acquisition magazine

*To what would you attribute your remarkable success in piracy?*

#### Morgan

In a word or three: creativity and flexibility. A Spanish fleet that outgunned me once laughed at my order to surrender. But I loaded up an empty ship with gunpowder, affixed dummies made of pumpkins and wood to the battlestations, dressed them like buc-

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**Quaid** is assigned to the Technical Executive Office of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, and **Ward** is assigned to the Air Force Research Lab in Rome, N.Y. Both hope to be pirates when they grow up.

caneers so the ship would appear to be manned, and blew the whole thing sky-high in between two Spanish men-o-war, sinking them both. I was the one laughing then! Those belly-crawling wharf rats should have surrendered when they had the chance.

**PA**

*An innovative use of gunpowder technology, to be sure. Most of the time, gunpowder is used in guns, but you turned an entire sloop into a torpedo of sorts.*

**Morgan**

Aye! We always try to take an innovative approach to system development. I tell my crews, “We need to be as forward-leaning as a flying jib.” We’re currently investigating ways to remotely steer the UOVs—that’s unmanned ocean vessels—I invented. We hope to start development, test, and evaluation in fiscal year 1726.

**Roberts**

I would say that boldness and unpredictability are pretty important as well. I once took the *PS Intimidation*, a 60-man sloop with only 10 guns, into a Newfoundland port. We flew the Jolly Roger, beat our drums loudly, blasted some trumpets—and 22 ships fled from our advance. It helps to be the craziest, saltiest guy on the ocean.

**PA**

*Another innovation—you turned drums and trumpets into weapons of mass intimidation.*

**Roberts**

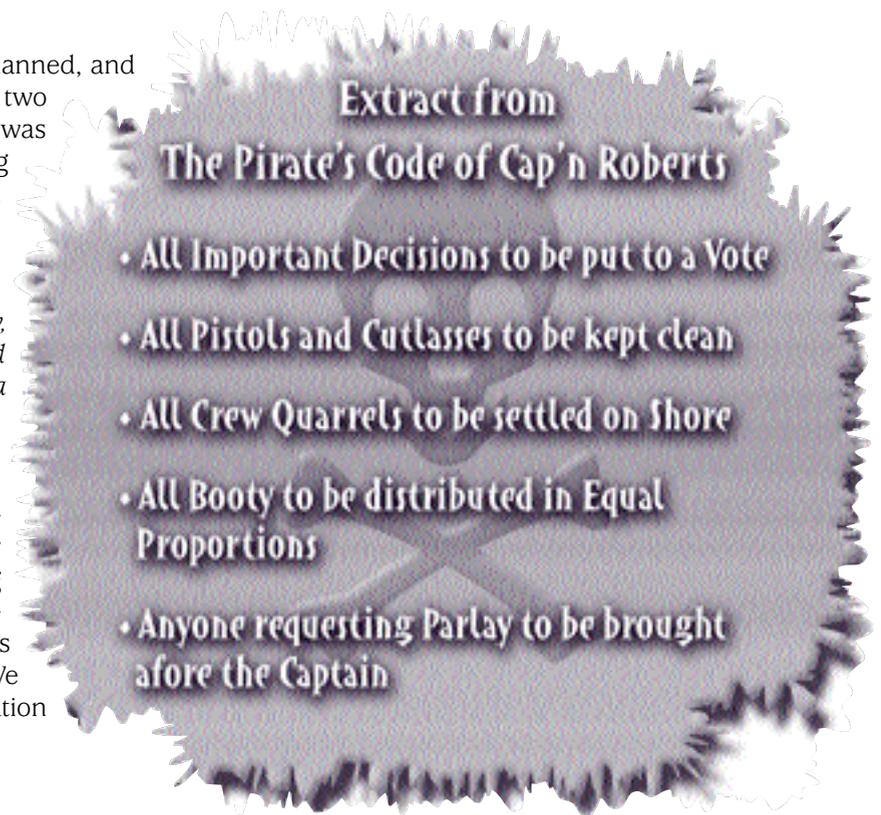
Ahoy! Interestingly, we acquired the trumpets and drums from a commercial music supply store on the island of Tortuga. A quick cost-benefit analysis made it clear that a commercial-off-the-shelf product was the best answer for our needs, although we did investigate a POTS (that’s “pirate-off-the-ship” to you landlubbers) solution as well. Turned out pirates aren’t very good at making trumpets.

**PA**

*Tell me more about your technology development principles.*

**Roberts**

Well, not many people appreciate this, but we’re not only captains, we’re program managers as well. We are responsible for keeping costs under control and programs on schedule. And of course, our lives depend on timely performance. One thing we’ve been focusing on lately is interoperability. For example, back when I was cap’n of *PS Intolerable*, we had three different types of guns on board. This caused confusion among the loaders and de-



*Landlubber PMs can check out a sample Pirate’s Code of Conduct and pirate injury compensation chart at <[www.piratesinfo.com/detail/detail.php?article\\_id=52](http://www.piratesinfo.com/detail/detail.php?article_id=52)>.*

creased overall firing efficiency. Standardizing our arms was unpopular at first, because even pirates don’t like change, but the more battles we won, the more the gunners recognized the wisdom of that approach.

**Morgan**

Horizontal integration is another area where we’re realizing significant returns on our investments. We’ve established a map exchange program among several buccaneering fleets; we stashed a large collection of maps at a central location and made them available to other members of the pirate community. When we update our maps from the central location, we have to make only one quill and ink change instead of trying to update thousands of documents. Everyone says information is power. We’ve found that the more we share information, the more valuable we become to our fellow pirates. By establishing ourselves as reliable, value-added data providers, we spend less time fending off other pirates and more time burying treasure.

**Roberts**

The other big problem area is excessive development timelines. We’ve wrestled with that for years. On my current ship, *PS Deplorable*, we actually put together a tiger team to study it. We found that lashing and keel-hauling our weapons developers increased development timelines, a surprising and controversial finding to be sure.

# LETTERS.

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[Editor's Note: See "The Relationship Between Punishment and Schedule Slippage," *Pirate Acquisition and Technology*, May-June 1722.] Once we stopped beating 'em, our development times dropped by half. That shivered me timbers and got me thinking about interpersonal relationships and team dynamics, which led directly to *The Pirate's Code*.

**PA**

*Yes, the Code was a transformational document for modern piracy. Tell us more about it.*

**Roberts**

We tried to take a democratic, results-oriented approach to shipboard operations. For example, the *Code* dictates that all important decisions be put to a vote. My success as a captain depends largely on the crew's performance, and if they have a voice they tend to buy in. Let me tell you, tyranny and dictatorship simply don't work, even on a pirate ship. You've got to respect your crew, and in turn they will respect you and work hard. The *Code* fosters respect. Savvy?

**Morgan**

Speaking of the crew, any time you put a bunch of buccaneers together, there is bound to be some friction. That's why the *Code* insists that crew quarrels be settled on shore. This keeps fighting to a minimum while we're at sea, where distractions and unrest can seriously interfere with the mission. It also provides assurance that disagreements will be dealt with in due time. I've found my sailors are willing to set their differences aside temporarily because they trust me to give them an opportunity to settle 'em with cutlasses when we're in port.

**Roberts**

It also gives the crew time to cool down. I once spent two weeks circling *PS Irish Rogue* in the open ocean to avoid landfall because I knew emotions were running too high. By the time we landed at Martinique, the crew could scarcely remember what they'd been fighting about.

**Morgan**

Perhaps the most important article in the *Code* is the Right of Parlay. It states that anyone seeking Parlay will be granted an audience with the captain, so it provides a direct path of communication to the top of the onboard hierarchy. Of course, once you've said your piece, the captain may decide to make you walk the plank, so you've got to be smart about it, but the key is that a captain needs to be accessible to his crew—and even to his opponents. I call it my "open hatch" policy, and it has truly made me a better listener.

**PA**

*What about worker compensation? The Code has an interesting approach to that, right?*

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it's important to set up environments  
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the initiative and be creative,  
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for their acts.

**Roberts**

We considered putting everyone on salary, but I think we came up with something a little more effective in terms of motivation. According to the *Code*, the booty is distributed in equal portion among the crew. Like the right to vote, this ensures buy-in by every member of the crew. Each pirate's reward is directly proportional to the team's performance, so there is a strong incentive to pull together, to deal with conflict rather than letting it fester, and to really work as an IPT—integrated pirate team.

**Morgan**

Of course, superior performers earn an extra share, lost limbs are compensated appropriately, and the captain and other officers get a little extra. But I think everyone agrees this is only fair. And if they don't, they can bring it up with Davy Jones—just a little pirate humor.

**PA**

*Very droll.*

**Roberts**

It is also worth pointing out that the *Code* is more of a guideline than a law. We're pirates, after all, and laws aren't exactly our forte. So we maintain a bare minimum set of requirements, thus enabling—in fact, demanding—that our crews use their own creativity to implement their own solutions. It facilitates flexibility, which (as Cap'n Morgan said) is one of the keys to sea power.

Why are we so successful as pirate captains? Well, it's simple. Morgan and I create an environment that encourages and rewards those who are creative and take initiative. Natural selection is alive and well on the high seas. Failure to be creative and failure to be flexible will eliminate you from the Sweet Trade—and ultimately from the gene pool. How many stories d'ye hear about unsuccessful pirates or sea captains of the Spanish Armada? None, and you know why? Because they failed. Their bodies and their ships are in Davy Jones' locker—and no one remembers 'em.

**PA**

*Good point. Do you have any final advice for our readers?*

**Morgan**

We invite them to internalize and benefit from the best practices identified during our years before the

mast. How does *The Pirate's Code* of minimum requirements apply to their businesses? On the high seas of business, it's important to set up environments that empower our subordinates to take the initiative and be creative, rather than squashing enterprise by bringing them up on charges of treason and making them walk the plank for their acts. Our new consulting practice, Scallywag Management, LLC, stands ready to help interested enterprises get to the next level, as it were.

**PA**

*Gentlemen, I thank you for your time and for sharing your insights with us. May yer sails stay full and yer powder dry.*

**Morgan**

Our pleasure, me hearty. A following sea to ye as well.

**Roberts**

Now hand over that Rolex.

The authors welcome comments and questions. Contact Quaid at [quaidc@nima.mil](mailto:quaidc@nima.mil) and Ward at [daniel.ward@rl.af.mil](mailto:daniel.ward@rl.af.mil).