



SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE MARINE CORPS

MEMORANDUM



SMMC Core Values Memo February 22 2021

SMMC MEMO 02-21

1. The great majority of Marines today live our core values on a daily basis and exhibit the true warfighting culture of our Corps. A few do not. This memorandum concerns them.
2. Americans are justly proud of their Marine Corps - not simply because of our battlefield successes, but because of the values our individual Marines embody: Honor, Courage, and Commitment. Living up to our reputation requires constant vigilance.
3. Sexism and racism continue to exist within our ranks in unacceptable "sub-cultures", resulting in corrosive behaviors, attitudes, and crimes, all of which degrade our ability to fight. Also, despite years of enlisted leader development and attempts to fully professionalize our enlisted leader ranks, we have failed to completely eliminate those from within our force who wrongly conclude physical abuse creates better or stronger Marines. Those willing to abuse the special trust and confidence that has been placed in them by encouraging or condoning sexism, racism, or hazing must be removed. There is no room in our Corps for Marines whose behavior, attitudes, or actions are inconsistent with our core values. I am not so naïve as to believe we can eradicate these attitudes completely or overnight, but as the Commandant has already said - I do believe we can do more.
4. It begins at recruit training and officer candidate school. The young men and women who join our Corps arrive with values based on their life experiences, and for the majority, their personal values align with our institutional core values. However, some arrive with mindsets and biases that are wholly inconsistent with our way of thinking. We must speak plainly and forcefully with our recruits and candidates from day one, and tell them that racists, sexists, bigots, homophobes, and bullies are not welcome. It is impossible to be both a good Marine, and be any one of those things at the same time.

5. Changing a mindset that allows corrosive or criminal behaviors to exist in our ranks is a varsity-level leadership challenge, yet one that our NCOs and SNCOs are prepared to conquer. Introducing an individual to our core values and explaining how they work in practice during entry level training is important. In fact, it is critical if we are to establish uniform expectations for every Marine. However, it is also insufficient. The battle to change a person's mindset takes time and consistent effort. An individual enters the Marine Corps with at least 17 years of life experience and potential biases that establish a foundation for that individual's mindset about race and ethnicity, gender and sexual identity, and the use of coercive power over subordinates. Thirteen weeks of recruit training has an impact on changing and overcoming potential flaws with these mindsets, but we need more effort to sustain the transformation.

6. We must recognize the type of effort it takes to make sure every Marine aligns with our expectations in these areas. Stand downs featuring lectures and presentations about our values and what is expected of every Marine have their place, but their impact on a person's mindset is limited. More important is the role of enlisted leaders in setting the example, indicating by their words and deeds that they adhere to a positive vision of what it means to be a Marine who values the service of every individual.

7. I expect leaders who see any sexism, racism, or other destructive attitudes in the ranks to step in immediately and intervene, just like you would to stop an impending safety mishap. In those instances when leaders see indicators of these "sub-cultures" they should address the problem head-on by engaging directly with individuals and small groups, reinforcing the teacher-scholar/senior-subordinate relationship advocated by our 13th Commandant, Major General Lejeune. I believe that through discussion, teaching, and mentorship, leaders can help replace destructive attitudes with a more positive vision encapsulated in the Marine Corps' core values and tradition, more in line with a true culture of recognizing the intrinsic value found in every Marine. Those Marines unwilling to accept our core values should be separated.

8. Our Hallmarks as Marines are discipline and spirit. We have been known for our willingness to hold leaders accountable for the malign actions of the individual. It is time for us to embrace this mentality once again; and hold ourselves accountable for failing to identify and hold responsible those

to our left or right that are failing to adhere to our core values.

9. If you are the senior enlisted leader of a unit and the "sub-cultures" of racism, sexism, extremism, or hazing exists within that unit, then I am looking to you to create the appropriate climate and to communicate your rejection of these attitudes and behaviors which are clearly incompatible with our core values. Failure is not defeat, and you can take the necessary steps to remedy the situation. This is your obligation... to treat all Marines with firmness, fairness, dignity and compassion.

10. I expect enlisted leaders and Marines at all levels to support one another as we collectively combat racism, sexism, extremism, and hazing. Enough is enough, help each other exercise the moral courage to look for signs of these negative behaviors and to intervene when necessary. We must eliminate the "sub-cultures" that give these behaviors life. Our Marines look to us for this positive leadership. They deserve nothing less.

Mission First, Marines Always!

Semper Fidelis,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Troy E. Black". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

TROY E. BLACK

19th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps