



# SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE MARINE CORPS

# MEMORANDUM



SMMC "Meeting the Standard" Memo June 2021

SMMC MEMO 03-21

**"Demanding superior performance and enforcing high standards should not be viewed as draconian, but rather, should be expected by professionals." – Gen. David H. Berger, Commandant of the Marine Corps**

**More than a Catchphrase.** Saying that the Marine Corps is a "Standards" based organization is more than just reciting a catchphrase. Whether we are talking about the basic physical standards required to join, the moral and ethical standards needed to serve, or the individual and unit-training standards necessary to win our Nation's battles, standards are the foundation of what makes the Marine Corps successful on and off the battlefield.

**Standards and Performance.** Standards are instrumental to how we teach, coach, and evaluate performance. Our success as a Corps is dependent on this simple formula: use high standards to transform civilians into Marines, steadily increase responsibility, and continue to use standards to evaluate personal and professional proficiency in order to retain, promote, and assign talent. In this formula, it is important not to limit performance to meeting the basic minimum of the standard; rather, on pushing towards the high end. Arguably, The Marine Corps is not simply a standards based organization, but a standards and performance based organization.

**Organizational Standards.** The benefit of having codified standards is that they are not subjective. They provide the necessary ranges of proficiency, from which performance is measured. Standards are doctrine and policy; they are not up for interpretation. Adherence to standards preserves the integrity of the institution over time. They ensure that the actions taken today will equal success on the battlefield tomorrow.

**Standards of Conduct.** Enlisted Marines and officers are taught standards of conduct during entry-level training. This code of conduct is as important as our weapons safety rules and general orders, these tenets of personal and professional behavior are as integral to success as a warfighting organization as how to assault a position or how to call for fire. These standards must be maintained. Throughout the years, as the operational tempo of the Marine Corps has ramped up and slowed down, the same challenges arise, maintaining basic standards. This was true in the interwar period between Vietnam and Desert Shield/Desert Storm. To combat complacency, leaders rejected

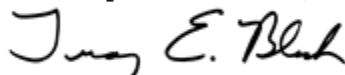
any "Individual" standard or behavior that was not rooted in Marine Corps doctrine, policy, order, or publication, getting back to basics. Our success, over the last twenty years, during the Global War on Terror, is proof that staying true to fundamentals is key to victory. This diligence continues today. The Corps continues to refine and improve our standards and guidance on conduct and behavior (see PAC order).

**Ceiling vs. Floor.** What we should not overlook is that the standard is not the ceiling it is the floor. The minimum end of the standard is the place where we get a foothold. It gives us a solid platform to stand on as we reach to the next rung. Marines need to be encouraged to exceed the minimum requirements and reach for the high end of the performance standard. This quote from the Senior Drill Instructor Speech makes the point loud and clear, "*A Marine is one who strives constantly to be the best at everything he/she does*". Whether it is a Squad Leader, SNCOIC, or commander, desire to exceed the standard is a consistent performance trait of all those who strive to achieve the pinnacles of leadership and expertise at all levels.

**Exceeding the Standard.** Meeting standards, helps maintain a well-organized, well-trained, well-led Marine Corps. Exceeding the standard's baseline rejuvenates esprit de corps in units and morale among Marines. Ultimately, meeting minimum standards equals readiness and exceeding the low end contributes to the greater legacy of the Marine Corps.

**Marine First.** The Commandant's #1 priority is developing the organization, training, and equipment the Corps requires for great power competition. To meet these challenges, The Marine Corps will continue to develop new concepts, capabilities, and ways to fight. Each new piece of gear, weapon system, platform, and tactic will have standards to employ them. What they will all rely on to be effective in combat, are Marines and Marine leaders who first, embrace each standard, and second, compel each Marine and Sailor in their charge to be the best. That is what being a Marine is, performing to the maximum extent of our ability in all tasks, both technical and tactical, meeting and exceeding minimum standards, and one who takes pride in being - a Marine first.

Semper Fidelis,



TROY E. BLACK

19th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps