



# SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE MARINE CORPS

# MEMORANDUM



SMMC Non Negotiables Memo 19 November 2020

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**Who We Are.** The United States Marine Corps has a long and illustrious history of success on the battlefield. We are unique in the way we train and fight. Our culture is one of competing and winning with a time tested tradition of evolving to adapt to the current and future warfighting environment.

The Marine Corps is always evolving, but the foundation of who we are never changes. We have constantly reinforced the basics throughout our history. We know that in every battle and skirmish, the ingenuity, leadership, and ability of Marines wins the day. New weapons, new equipment, and new tactics have always been a part of how we fight new enemies in new environments, but the adaptability and strength of the individual Marine remains at our core. This is a valuable point when considering how we prepare the next generation of Marines for the next battle. To remain a certain force for an uncertain world our tolerance for change must increase, but we must never accept mediocrity or the lowering of our standards. We are all standing beside one another on the front lines of the future, to be "The most ready, when the Nation is least ready."

Our Commandant has laid out in his planning guidance his vision for the future of the Marine Corps. In it, he outlines our priorities as a Naval Expeditionary Force, the need to adapt to constantly evolving and complex warfighting domains, the perils of failing to outpace a peer threat, and the increasing reliance on the critical thinking abilities of the individual Marine.

As the Marine Corps evolves to meet this mission there are some aspects that must never change. I call these simply "Non Negotiables".

**Non Negotiables.** The following eight "Non Negotiables" are fundamental to our identity and success as Marines regardless of the battles being fought or the generation of Marines fighting them. Within them, there can be much debate, but in general they are time proven and lay at the heart of being a Marine.

**1. Core Values.** This is our foundation. They exist in order to make us better citizens, better leaders, and better warfighters. Our Core Values give us something to aspire to as men and women of honor. When we enter into uncertainty it is Honor, Courage, and Commitment that carry us through to victory. It is on these insoluble elements that all other "Non Negotiables" are built.

**2. Discipline and Good Order.** Discipline and good order are the hallmarks of a Marine. At its core, discipline is about self-control and a willingness to do the right things in the right ways for the right reasons for organizational success. Discipline is also the instant and willing obedience to lawful orders, respect for authority, and respect for each other. Living a disciplined life is what all Marines must strive to do. We cannot simply choose what orders to follow and which to disobey. Discipline is behind the unrelenting drive for perfection described in the NCO and SNCO Creeds. This discipline applies to seniors and subordinates. It applies to everything from uniform regulations to rules of engagement. From the moment we arrive on the yellow footprints or at OCS, we strive to develop in each and every Marine the commitment to live up to our Core Values. This takes discipline, and the result is good order.

**3. Professional Military Education (PME) and Professional and Personal Development.** There is a difference between the three. Professional Military Education (PME) develops understanding of the functions of our Marine Corps. Warfighting, ethics, and critical thinking skills are all honed within PME, regardless of an individual's Military Occupational Specialty or their unit's mission. Professional development is where we learn our craft and refers to those core elements associated with our service that apply to all Marines. Strenuous and demanding professional development schools, courses, and evaluations are the bedrock of our winning culture. Personal development refers to the education opportunities that exist through tuition assistance and other means. Each Marine should strive to accomplish excellence in all these areas. Off-duty education and other vocational programs that help to develop cognitive skills and problem solving capabilities are vital to developing enlisted Marines to operate in a competitive environment. There is no doubt the combination of PME focused on warfighting and Marine Corps common skills combined with the individual pursuit of higher education and advanced vocational certification makes the Marine Corps a more lethal and capable fighting force.

**4. Physicality and Expeditionary Mindset.** Those who have been in combat know it is a physically and mentally demanding

environment. We know physical fitness has bearing on a leader's ability to sustain their presence of mind during periods of extreme stress. To ensure we are able to keep a clear head during combat, we must demand the highest standard of fitness from ourselves and our subordinates. This focus on fitness leads to a competitiveness that fuels the winning nature of Marines. Fitness includes more than just the physical aspects. Physical, mental, and spiritual fitness all combine to form total fitness. These elements of fitness allow Marines to persevere in any clime and place. Developing perseverance is key to success on the battlefield and in truly mastering the ability to operate in expeditionary environments. The past has shown us we can expect to operate from locations where the most meager of infrastructure exists. We must prepare every day to be fit of mind, body, and soul.

**5. Training for the purpose of Warfighting.** As Marines we fight and we win. To be "the most ready when the nation is least ready" is the purpose of everything we do. In order to achieve this, we must be prepared to conduct combat operations at any time in any place. Our core belief that "Every Marine is a rifleman" is central to our identity and key to our ability to accomplish this mission. Utilizing available time and resources on training that is realistic and demanding while remaining focused on warfighting must remain a priority. In short we train hard to affect real outcomes in combat. We train as we fight, and we fight to win.

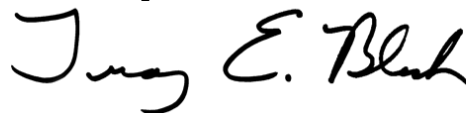
**6. History, Tradition and Protocol.** Starting with initial training, every Marine is indoctrinated in the Corps' rich history. By constantly reinforcing and reminding Marines of that legacy, we sustain the transformation from civilian to recruit and from recruit to Marine. As Marines we do not earn the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor, but the right to wear it. With the right to be called Marine, comes the responsibility to live up to the history set down by those who came before us. These traditions include seemingly minor things like the celebration of our birthday, the use of naval terminology, our manner of dress, our pride in physical conditioning, pride in our uniforms, pride in grooming and personal appearance, standing when a senior officer enters the room, saluting, administrative accuracy, and simply being respectful. Having respect for our Nation, the civilians we serve, and to each other are essential to our existence and as a Corps. Being a Marine means setting the standard and we must never diminish the importance of who we are, what we stand for, and the rigorous military bearing that makes the Marine Corps the world's finest fighting force.

**7. Leadership and Leadership Development.** Developing, sustaining and expanding the leadership skills of subordinates is the responsibility of each and every leader. There is no greater responsibility or better use of our experience. Consistent mentorship, coaching, teaching, and training is critical to developing the next generation of leaders. Our leadership principles and traits are time tested. The best leaders are those who are bold, take initiative, display fearlessness, have the ability to inspire others, and are worthy of emulation. Inspiration and emulation are two key elements that appear in both the NCO and SNCO creeds. The duty of every Marine, from one generation to the next, is to mentor subordinates. By passing on our knowledge, skills, and experience we are ensuring that hard won lessons learned in combat are being passed to the next generation of battlefield leadership.

**8. Drill and Ceremony.** Drill is more than just a show piece. Success in nearly every element of combat can still find a correlation with proficiency in drill. Seemingly routine tasks such as pre-combat inspections, pre-combat checks, first aid, and CBRN responses are learned behaviors that cannot be taught at the time of incident. The precision and attention to detail that drill and ceremony demands directly contribute to success on the battlefield.

General Carl E. Mundy, Jr. said it best when he published '*Leading Marines*' in 1995; "Our actions as Marines every day must embody the legacy of those who went before us. Their memorial to us – their teaching, compassion, courage, sacrifices, optimism, humor, humility, commitment, perseverance, love, guts, and glory – is the pattern for our daily lives."

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