

Substance Abuse

Correspondence to and from the Commandant addressing a problem that all Marines should be prepared to handle—both personally and in their role as leaders.

Marines,

As Commandant of the Marine Corps, I have occasion to receive correspondence from a great many people on a great many subjects. Some of it comes from the powerful and influential leaders of our society. Much of it comes from Marines, prior Marines, or the friends and families of Marines. I recently received such a letter from a Marine whom it has been my honor to serve with in the past.

I want to share his letter with you. It is powerful, insightful, and pertinent. It is one officer's commentary on his personal battle with a most destructive force in his life . . . alcoholism. In this letter, the author draws an enlightening parallel to the traits that make a good Marine officer and those that make it difficult to admit defeat in one's personal life.

This letter may be of some encouragement to you if you are facing a personal crisis. It may simply provide you the wisdom with which to help a fellow Marine. Alcoholism causes casualties. Just as in battle, we must not allow ourselves or our comrades to fall needlessly.

Read the letter.

Gen Charles C. Krulak

Dear Gen Krulak:

It was indeed a pleasure and an honor to see you and Mrs. Krulak again after all these years at the Marine Corps Ball. The years have treated you both very well.

On 20 November I will celebrate my seventh year of sobriety. Seven years ago I walked into the office of my reporting senior and asked to be sent to alcohol rehabilitation. This decision marked the beginning of the end of what had been 19 years of alcoholic drinking.

The past 7 years have been a journey. Needless to say it has sometimes been difficult yet always interesting, and above all rewarding. Out of over 10 million alcoholics in the United States, no more than 5 percent are ever sober. I enjoy being in that top 5 percent.

In the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous we speak of sharing our experience, strength, and hope. Understanding the general's position on alcohol abuse in our beloved Corps, I wish to

share with you my experience, strength, and hope.

Ten months after my last drink an article appeared in the *Marine Corps Gazette* [Aug90, p. 49]. While the article is short in length it is long on wisdom speaking to and about the alcoholic and the disease of alcoholism. The key point of the article is simple. The very things that make us good Marines are the very same things that keep us drinking. The qualities of being a self-starter, self-reliant, and self-motivating are requisite for being an outstanding Marine. However, when employed alone against the cunning and baffling enemy of alcohol, those same qualities work against us in this fight. The first and most fundamental step in combating alcoholism is admitting that you are an alcoholic, that you are powerless over alcohol, and that your life has become unmanageable. To ask a Marine to admit that he or she is powerless over anything often runs contrary to our teachings.

One can easily see the dilemma that arises.

I found myself confronted with a similar dilemma. This self-confrontation was devastating, yet provided the necessary circumstances required to cause me to want to turn my life around. Recovery most often requires a series of terrible events to provide the necessary wake-up call. One must reach a point where the concern for his or her life far outweighs the concern for their career. My story is no different than any other recovering alcoholic and very similar to the one described in the article. My life reached that critical point. But not before numerous counseling sessions from friends and seniors over the years, a double-signed fitness report, involvement with authorities, and a failed marriage. In retrospect I am truly grateful for these terrible events. While embarrassed, humiliated, and not proud of them, their cumulative effect is what caused me to realize that: I was powerless over al-

cohol, my life had become unmanageable, and that I am an alcoholic.

I keep the *Gazette* article close at hand and reflect upon it often. It appeared in my life at the most appropriate time, serving as a source of insightful understanding to my own baffling dilemma. It continues to serve as an ever-present sign post along the road of continued sobriety. As a former commander, but above all as a recovering alcoholic, I firmly believe commanders at all levels can benefit from the sage counsel provided by this short and obscure article.

John E. Lee

>For those readers who might be interested in obtaining a copy of the August 1990 Gazette article, please write or call the Marine Corps Gazette, Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134. Telephone 800-336-0291, ext 309.