

For Love of Civilians

Is your perspective warped?

by 1stLt Jacob Bridge

“# \$%*^! civilians.” “Silly-civilians.” “Lazy civs.” “Fat, nasty, unmotivated civilians.” “I hate working with civilians.”

We’ve all heard remarks like these before. I hear them from peers, junior Marines, and more disturbingly, from senior members and commanders, too. I used to make these jabs and laugh at them myself, but they’re not so funny anymore. When I hear this condescension now, I think about my mom and sister, both civilians. I think about all the people I love and who support me who are civilians. Our wives, husbands, children, parents, aunts, uncles, and friends are all civilians, yet we’re constantly putting civilians down. Aren’t they the reason we sacrifice so much? Civilians are quick to thank us for our service, yet we’re equally quick to say nasty things behind their backs. We rationalize our insults by imagining that civilians we personally know are good ones; it’s the others we don’t know who are lazy slobs. This ignorant logic is the same kind that fuels racism and homophobia.

The things we’ve accomplished and the hardships we’ve endured have developed the mindset in some of us that we’re superior to civilians. But our job is to serve civilians and protect them; in fact, they pay us to do just that. If this attitude was an anomaly, it wouldn’t be so worrisome, but it’s not. Just last week, a high-ranking officer was complaining about “long-haired people” (i.e., civilians) walking around on base with their surfboards going “God knows where.” This officer lives on a Marine Corps base where almost all the places he goes to eat, drink, and shop are staffed by civilians. Not only that, but the base is in Hawaii and has some of the nicest beaches the island has to offer. The “long-haired people” have every right to enjoy the base’s benefits, yet this of-

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TECOM civilian of the year and quarter awards were presented during a ceremony at Camp Johnson, NC, March 2015. (Photo by LCpl Amy Nassar.)

ficer would prefer that these civilians stay out of his neighborhood, and off of his beaches. He forgets that, as servicemembers, we serve the long-haired surfer dude just as much as we serve our dependents. Entitled attitudes are not what a life of service is about. If we look down on the people we serve (and who, in some cases, serve us), then our perspective is truly warped.

Calling civilians “lazy” and “unmotivated” totally misses the point of serving our country and its people. Civilians’ lives are *supposed* to be easier. We work really hard and make sacrifices so they don’t have to. Sure, there are lazy civilians. There are lazy civilians

just like there are lazy Marines. Before joining the Marines, I was a waiter and worked with some pretty unmotivated people. The majority of the waiters and waitresses I worked with, however, were incredibly hard workers. Some of them worked harder than any Marine I’ve ever met, and for much less money and almost zero benefits. Most importantly, they knew that in order to do a good job serving people, you have to treat them kindly and with respect. With the disparaging attitude many Marines show toward civilians, they probably wouldn’t make much in tips.

Like it or not, we serve all Americans. We may swear our allegiance to

the Constitution, but the Constitution only exists to safeguard the liberties guaranteed to all Americans. Without the American people, the Constitution is just another piece of old, yellowed parchment. Tom Ricks, author of *Fiasco*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2007) wrote about Marines' condescending attitude toward civilians nearly 20 years ago when he wrote *Making the Corps* (New York: Scribner, 2007). Even then, before the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, he saw the growing divide between the Marines and the people they serve. To some extent, the difference is understandable. When we graduate boot camp or Officer Candidates School, we've changed. Our priorities and values have shifted, and naturally, so do our relationships with friends and family. But our being different does not make us better than civilians.

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tions is determined by the way we talk and act. We've been doing a poor job of moral leadership if the atmosphere in the Marine Corps permits such wide-

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spread disdain for civilians. True leaders are humble people who serve their subordinates, and this humility spreads by way of example. Humility is so crucial for a life of service to country that there ought to be an H added to JJ DID TIE BUCKLE,¹ because every good leader

knows that he is nothing without the people who support him.

To conclude, a profound quote from Dwight D. Eisenhower, one of the most venerated and modest men in U.S. military history, "Humility must always be the portion of any man who receives acclaim earned in the blood of his followers and the sacrifices of his friends."²

Notes

1. Marine Corps Leadership Traits: justice, judgment, dependability, integrity, decisiveness, tact, initiative, endurance, bearing, unselfishness, courage, knowledge, loyalty, enthusiasm.

2. GEN Dwight D. Eisenhower, Guild Hall Address, London, 12 June 1945.



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