



Talent Management 2030

November 2021

“The Marine Corps will only be able to practice maneuver warfare if its personnel policies are consistent with what maneuver warfare demands.”

- General A.M. Gray Jr.,
29th Commandant of the Marine Corps

BOTTOM LINE UP FRONT

Seven decades after its creation, the Marine Corps personnel system is overdue for a fundamental redesign. **Our organization, processes, and approach to personnel and talent management are no longer suited to today’s needs and incompatible with the objectives of Force Design 2030.** Transitioning to a talent management focus, and system, is required. Without profound improvements made at speed, the deficiencies in the current system will result in the failure of broader service modernization efforts.

This report charts a new course for our personnel system and is informed by a decade’s worth of studies, books, reports, and academic articles on military personnel reform, in addition to the significant body of literature on organizational leadership and the science of management. Like our force design effort, the redesign of our personnel system is a work in progress. This report explains why it is necessary and details some of the initial steps we are taking to create the information age personnel system required to continue winning the Nation’s battles.

YESTERDAY'S INDUSTRIAL AGE MODEL

Our current system of personnel management – like those of the other services – was designed in the industrial era and predates a host of cultural and technological developments that characterize today's world. Understandably, that model was built with a different set of underlying assumptions about human capital, many of which are no longer valid. Consider, for example, that when our industrial model was born, only about one-third of women were in the workforce, compared with approximately 60% today. College, and even high school education, was for the privileged: in 1950, just 34% of Americans graduated high school, while 6% completed college, compared with approximately 90% and 33% respectively, today. And business was exclusively analog; our manpower model was devised in an era before personal computers, mobile phones, and the Internet, when Marines received paper orders and paper paychecks.

positions above all other career experiences. Reinforced by the 1980 *Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA)*, this system has remained fundamentally unchanged to this day.

Within this 20th century context, the Marine Corps created an industrial age manpower model, the outlines and objectives of which have remained remarkably consistent over time, despite profound changes in the environment. Indeed, the very name of our personnel headquarters – Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA) – is indicative of our industrial age approach to personnel. A sampling of dictionary definitions for “manpower” includes, “the total supply of persons available and fitted for service”; “the number (or supply) of people working or available for work or service”; and, “power in terms of people available or required for work or military service.” In all cases, the definitional common denominator is a view of people as supply or available inventory – a core industrial age perspective.

“While our service never seeks change for change’s sake, we have always embraced it when change had the potential to improve our lethality and effectiveness.”

America's post-World War II national security priorities shaped the development of our personnel system. Focused on the threat posed by the former Soviet Union, we sought a force to fight principally in large, set-piece battles in Europe and along its maritime periphery. Our manpower model thus aimed to create and maintain an enlisted force predominantly composed of young troops (and primarily conscripts in time of war), prepared for the physical rigors of combat, but otherwise requiring little education or training. There were exceptions, of course, as all services prioritized technical skills among some specialties, but the overriding paradigm reflected our combat experience in World War II, which prioritized youth, physical fitness, and discipline over education, training, and technical skills.

For officers expected to command units of young men with minimal education, leadership ability was understandably the most important and sought-after characteristic. This led Congress to pass the *Officer Personnel Act of 1947*, instituting an “up-or-out” development model with rigid, time-driven promotion schedules that prioritized command (leadership)

While today's manpower system would be remarkably familiar to a Marine from the 1950s, they would be amazed by the social, economic, financial, cultural, and technological changes that have transformed our country and the world. And while that Marine would recognize today's global context of strategic competition, they would be surprised by its complexity and scope, as well as the Marine Corps' role in new domains of competition and warfighting, such as space and cyber.

THE URGENCY OF CHANGE

Let me be clear: I have the deepest respect for the hard-working men and women – both uniformed and civilian – who manage our personnel system. Over many decades, countless unsung heroes across the M&RA enterprise have kept the machine running, contributed to the readiness of our warfighting units, and made lasting, positive impacts on the lives of our Marines and their families, me included. And while our personnel model may have been appropriate in an

“Our modern operational concepts and organizations cannot reach their full warfighting potential without a talent management system that recruits, develops, and retains the right Marines.”

earlier era, it is no longer suited to our service needs or the expectations of the Americans who fill our ranks. The time for change is now.

The core objectives of all modern personnel management systems are to recruit individuals with the right talents, match those talents to organizational needs, and incentivize the most talented and high performing individuals to remain with the organization. Our current manpower system is not equipped to meet any of these objectives, except in the bluntest of ways. To use a rough analogy, our current manpower framework treats every Marine like a round peg and every billet like a round hole, while a talent management system recognizes that both Marines and billets come in different shapes and sizes.

While our service never seeks change for change’s sake, we have always embraced it when change had the potential to improve our lethality and effectiveness. As the Marine Corps refocuses on naval expeditionary warfare, we must undergo parallel changes to our personnel system to ensure we are able to recruit and retain the right Marines for today’s era of renewed global competition. It is essential that our personnel system supports the broader goals of Force Design 2030 and enables us to maximize the effectiveness of concepts like maneuver warfare, stand-in forces, expeditionary advanced base operations, and distributed operations.

Borrowing from ideas in the CJCS instruction, *Implementing Joint Force Development and Design*, we cannot create a modern talent management system by adopting a “force development approach” to change, seeking incremental adjustments to our manpower organization and processes so that it can do what it does better. Instead, we must embrace a “force design approach,” seeking change that will empower our personnel enterprise to do things differently to enable the competitive advantages of the larger force.

It begins and ends with preparedness for combat. Our ability to fight and win on future battlefields demands a personnel system that can recruit, develop, and retain

a corps of Marines that is more intelligent, physically fit, cognitively mature, and experienced. We need a system that can identify each Marine’s talents, help them develop those talents into skills and aptitudes, and assign them to billets and duties where they can apply their strengths to best support their unit’s mission. Without fundamental change to our personnel system, executed at speed, we risk undermining the larger goals of Force Design 2030. **Our modern operational concepts and organizations cannot reach their full warfighting potential without a talent management system that recruits, develops, and retains the right Marines.**

In 2019, Congress gave both Service Secretaries and Service Chiefs new and significant authorities to reform their personnel systems. My intent is to use these new authorities, exercise those we already possess, and seek support for any additional authorities required in order to bring our personnel system into the information age. Our initial changes will trace four broad categories, each of which will be described in detail in the body of this report:

- (1) Implementation of new models for recruiting talent;
- (2) Establishment of an assignments process consistent with our warfighting philosophy;
- (3) Introduction of new initiatives to increase career flexibility; and
- (4) Adoption of modern digital tools, processes, and analytics, consistent with industry standards.

While some changes will happen immediately, others will require significant adjustments to organizational structure and responsibilities. **This report provides the conceptual foundation for our approach to talent management and should be read as an action plan. I expect the Marine Corps to move at speed in developing and implementing the initiatives listed in this document, and others identified in the coming months, in order to achieve a full transition from the current manpower system to a talent management system no later than 2025.**

TALENT MANAGEMENT

Creating change begins with a common understanding of the problem, as well as universally recognized definitions. *What exactly is talent, and how should it be managed? What are the characteristics of our industrial age model and why do they matter? Why is change required today? What can we learn from the other services and private sector?* This report aims to answer those questions.

The business and management literature offers a number of useful descriptions for talent and talent management, but there is no standard, widely accepted definition and our sister services each define the terms slightly differently. As we move forward in the critical task of reimagining talent management across the Marine Corps, we will use the following definitions to guide our efforts.

DEFINITIONS

Talent is an individual's innate potential to do something well. A Marine turns their talents into strengths, aptitudes, and skills through dedicated study, repetition, and hard work – a process accelerated by their curiosity, passion, interests, and desire for excellence. A Marine may have a talent for foreign languages, writing, leadership, athletics, mechanics, accounting, or any other skill, and while the right formal training and education can help a Marine develop their talents, it is important to note that 'talent' is not a synonym for 'MOS' or 'training.'

Talent management is the act of aligning the talents of individual Marines with the needs of the service to maximize the performance of both. It describes a system of institutional processes and policies designed to attract, develop, retain, and incentivize the most talented and best performing Marines.

A talent management system identifies an individual Marine's talents, helps them develop those talents through education, training, mentorship, and experience, and assigns them to positions where they can best contribute to the success of their unit and the Corps. This system also identifies and rewards the most talented with tough assignments, accelerated promotions, educational opportunities, additional pay, duty station preference, and other incentives.

TENETS OF A TALENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

- **Marines are individuals, not inventory.** Whereas a manpower management system views personnel as inventory or a commodity to be managed, a talent management system views personnel as individuals with different skills, strengths, interests, and motivations.
- **Talents can be identified and evaluated.** Data, when properly collected and analyzed, can provide powerful insights about the talents and strengths of both an individual Marine and a unit.
- **Talents can be developed.** While a Marine may be born with certain talents, those talents can only become strengths, aptitudes, and skills through focused individual effort over an extended period, fueled by a Marine's desire to excel. The Marine Corps can help cultivate an individual's talents with the right education, training, and experience, but ultimately the responsibility for talent development rests with the Marine.
- **Matching talents to duties maximizes performance.** A Marine Corps that matches Marines' talents to their duties will perform at a higher level in competition and combat.
- **Incentives power the system.** While all Marines are motivated to serve and seek a challenge, they are also humans, and human behavior is driven by incentives. High performing Marines should be promoted faster and assigned to our most challenging and consequential billets. They should be further incentivized to excel and develop their talents with incentives tailored to their individual needs, be it duty station preference, prioritized school selection, financial compensation, or any other action within our power to affect.
- **There is always a boat space for talent.** High-performing Marines are identified and actively retained, regardless of military occupational specialty (MOS). Talented Marines can often apply their strengths in a wide variety of positions beyond their primary MOS. When provided additional education, training, or experience, they can readily satisfy talent shortfalls elsewhere in the system.
- **Data drives decision-making.** Successful personnel organizations rely on data and analytics to inform both institutional and individual personnel decisions.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND TALENT MANAGEMENT

The core ideas that underpin talent management reinforce what we all understand instinctively about our service: **Marines make the Marine Corps.** We have never defined ourselves by our equipment, organizational constructs, or operational concepts. Our identity has always been – and will remain – defined by the character, intelligence, courage, fitness, and talents of our people.

The Marine Corps draws its collective strength and identity from all its Marines, so it is critical that we prioritize policies that maximize the individual strengths of every Marine, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, creed, or any other marker. To that end, we will commit to prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion as part of talent management – not to satisfy abstract notions of political correctness, but as a very real means to recruit, develop, and retain Marines of varied talents.

How should we understand diversity, equity, and inclusion in the context of talent management? Beyond their accepted definitions, what do these terms mean, why are they important, and how will we prioritize them?

“...teams with diverse perspectives and modes of thinking solve problems faster and more creatively. In this way, diversity provides us a competitive warfighting advantage over our adversaries...”

• **Reinforcing diversity.** Every Marine has a unique personal background. Their upbringing and experiences shape their outlook, patterns of thought, talents, and strengths. The Corps benefits when it attracts, and remains attractive to, Marines from a range of backgrounds, and thus, diverse perspectives and talents. Research in behavioral economics illustrates that **teams with diverse perspectives and modes of thinking solve problems faster and more creatively.** In this way, diversity provides us a competitive warfighting advantage over our adversaries, particularly those who place a premium on uniformity of thought. To capitalize on the talents, strengths, aptitudes, skills, and perspectives of the whole force, our talent management system must reinforce a culture where the contribution of every Marine is respected and valued.

• **Promoting equity.** Together with leaders across the force, our talent management system should create a level playing field, allowing all Marines an equal opportunity to succeed and enabling our most talented to advance. With the field set, we ensure the game is equitable when all players have the right equipment and a thorough knowledge of the rules. Today, some Marines have the leadership abilities, intelligence, and fitness to succeed, but lack the mentorship, opportunities, or education that would enable them to take full advantage of their talents. Fostering equity in the force is about equal treatment, access, advancement, and opportunity for all Marines based on their individual skills, abilities, aptitude, performance, and merit. It also means identifying and eliminating structural impediments that limit our Marines from developing their talents into strengths and reaching their full potential.

• **Encouraging a culture of inclusion.** We are “The Few and the Proud,” known across the globe as an elite force with elite standards for leadership, intelligence, and fitness. Once an individual earns the title “Marine,” they have made the grade. There are no additional obstacles or barriers to entry – “Once a Marine, always a Marine.” Our talent management system will reinforce our leaders’ focus on building inclusive teams, where diverse perspectives and talents are valued and

respected, and where every unit, career specialty, and echelon of leadership is open to every Marine, based on performance. As a service, our culture will remain compelling to all segments of society when people see that others like them who earned the title are treated with dignity, fairness, and respect.

To be successful in competition and conflict in the 21st century, we must take full advantage of the talents, strengths, skills, and perspectives of every Marine. Our talent management system will support this imperative and our leaders in prioritizing diversity of thought, fostering inclusivity, and implementing policies that ensure equity across the force.

NEW MODELS FOR RECRUITING TALENT

The Corps continues to attract high quality Americans who are inspired to serve their country as Marines and our recruiters do an admirable job administering a recruiting program that satisfies the needs of our current manpower system. Unfortunately, our repeated successes in recruiting large cohorts of young Americans, year after year, has obscured three fundamental problems with the existing paradigm.

First, we have created a personnel model that is overly focused – and, in fact, dependent – on recruiting rather than retention. This is a consequence of service decisions made in the mid-1980s and reinforced by our sustained recruiting successes over the past three decades. To maintain both our end strength and the right talents in our workforce, we must carefully calibrate and balance service investments in recruiting and retention. Today we are out of balance, placing too much emphasis on recruiting new personnel to maintain end strength, and too little emphasis on identifying and retaining the most talented individuals already in our ranks.

Second, due to both our demanding recruiting goals and the absence of appropriate tools, we are not doing enough to screen and evaluate applicants before they enter service. A robust screening and evaluation, executed prior to recruit training, will allow us to better assess each applicant's suitability for service, while better aligning their strengths and interests to appropriate career fields.

Finally, our recruiting model is exclusively focused on, and optimized for, recruiting teenagers and those in their early twenties. **In this current era of heightened global competition, the Marine Corps requires a vehicle for rapidly recruiting mature, seasoned experts.** We can no longer afford the cost in time – measured in years, and sometimes decades – to train and educate all our technical leaders, particularly given the extraordinary pace of technological change.

REBALANCE RECRUITING AND RETENTION TO MATURE THE FORCE

For the last 36 years, the Marine Corps has been committed to maintaining a predominantly first-term enlisted force, composed of Marines on their initial service contracts. To maintain this bottom-heavy grade structure pyramid, we discharge approximately 75% of first-term Marines every year, recruiting roughly an

“A Marine Corps that matches Marines’ talents to their duties will perform at a higher level in competition and combat.”

equal number of replacements to fill the ranks (~36,000). The Marine Corps is unique among the services in embracing an enlisted force model that perpetuates this remarkably high turnover rate. Indeed, while the other services have matured their forces over the last few decades, the Marine Corps has remained committed to preserving its bottom-heavy grade structure and youthful character, maintaining the largest percentage of teenagers among the services.

The massive annual personnel turnover that the Marine Corps oversees is not the result of widespread disinterest or incompatibility on behalf of Marines who might otherwise reenlist. Instead, it is a consequence of service decisions made more than a generation ago to adopt a “recruit and replace” personnel model rather than an “invest and retain” model. While those decisions may have been appropriate in their day, the assumptions underpinning them are no longer valid. Given the considerable societal, economic, and technological changes that have occurred over the past four decades, and in the context of renewed global great power competition, it is time that the Marine Corps take decisive steps to mature the force.

In 2022, we will begin recalibrating our enlisted personnel model to better balance retention and recruiting, and in doing so, mature the force with three primary outcomes. First, this shift will improve the physical fitness of the Marine Corps. While conventional wisdom may hold that a young force is most fit, the data suggest the need for a more nuanced understanding. Aerobic and anaerobic athletic performance typically peaks in the mid-twenties, a scientific finding supported by our own PFT and CFT data. Marines in their mid-to-late twenties do more pull-ups, crunches, ammunition cans lifts, and run faster than Marines aged 17-22 (those typically in their first enlistments).

Second, a slightly older force will have better cognitive function and make better decisions in aggregate. Advancements in neuroscience since 1985 have significantly expanded our understanding of the human brain, which we now know does not fully develop until a person reaches their early to mid-twenties. Until that point, a person is psychologically at a deficit, more likely to make poor decisions and accept unnecessary risk, and less able to control impulses. Marine Corps safety data support this finding: our youngest Marines are responsible for a disproportionate share of the total costs to the service as a result of mishaps, both on- and off-duty. Our youngest Marines are also responsible for a disproportionate share of misconduct across the force. This simple fact of biology cannot be overcome by training, education, or leadership. **Maturing the force by retaining a greater percentage of qualified first-term Marines will improve decision-making, problem solving, and risk assessment among our junior leaders, with immediate positive effects on our performance in competition and combat.**

Third, maturing the force will increase the readiness of our warfighting units and stability across our MEFs. For example, today we accept as natural a personnel model that limits the ability of our infantry battalions to maintain a consistent level of readiness. Every eighteen months, the size and proficiency of an infantry battalion drops dramatically as it sheds Marines completing their first enlistments. While a battalion will always experience peaks and valleys in readiness based on its training schedule, our current personnel model amplifies the extremes. Moving away from a recruiting-centric personnel model will prevent such dramatic swings in readiness by increasing the aggregate proficiency of our units, and thus stability across our MEFs.

What about costs? After all, a first-term lance corporal earns a lower salary than a sergeant on their second enlistment. *Can the service afford a more mature force?* A simple salary comparison is a poor way to evaluate the overall cost encumbrance of a new personnel

model, as it fails to include a whole range of service savings associated with maintaining a more mature force (e.g., fewer recruiters, instructors, lower PCS and separations costs, lower mishap rates, etc.), not to mention improvements in training and discipline. A more apt question is, *can we afford not to mature the force?* **Success on future battlefields as a distributed stand-in force will require our Marines to be more physically fit and cognitively mature, with a higher level of operational experience.** The implications of a more mature force are profound and far-reaching. For instance, a more mature rifle squad (the aspiration of every Commandant since at least Commandant Gray), composed of second-term Marine sergeants, kept together over years, will be dramatically more capable than squads we have produced in the past. Recalibrating our current enlisted personnel model is the first step in producing this more mature force.

ENHANCING ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL RECRUITS

As Commandant Dunford noted in 2015, “there is room for improvement in our screening processes.” First, we need to put more energy into determining an applicant’s suitability for service. Approximately 20% of those recruited do not complete their first enlistments, a strong indicator that the service can do better to screen potential recruits. *The consequence?* Every year we separate thousands of Marines before they complete their initial contracts (“non-EAS attrition”), costing the service hundreds of millions of dollars annually, with significant impacts to readiness across the Corps. While we currently screen an applicant’s physical health and intelligence (albeit with a rudimentary tool – the ASVAB), our unacceptably high non-EAS attrition demonstrates that current screening methods are insufficient.

We will begin by placing more emphasis on data analytics across the recruiting enterprise. Employing analytical tools and using data already collected during

“Today we are out of balance, placing too much emphasis on recruiting new personnel to maintain end strength, and too little emphasis on identifying and retaining the most talented individuals already in our ranks.”

the recruiting process, we have been able to identify characteristics most indicative of non-EAS attrition. With this data, we can now forecast, with a higher degree of accuracy, which Marines are more likely to leave active duty before the end of their first enlistment. The implications are clear and powerful: employing better analytics can improve recruiting and conserve service resources. The service must also do more to evaluate each applicant's career interests, talents, personal and intellectual strengths, experience, motivations, and propensity to continue in service after their first enlistment. While an applicant's ASVAB results do provide some rough insights, they are limited. In 2022, we will adopt additional assessment tools to more thoroughly evaluate our applicants, seeking to better place these recruits in career fields where they will provide the most benefit to the Corps while achieving personal and professional success, and at the same time, identifying those who are unlikely to complete their first enlistments.

Second, to ensure we recruit individuals best suited for service in our Corps, and appropriately match their talents and strengths to requirements, we will introduce a comprehensive psychological evaluation for all applicants. This practice is common in other professional fields where psychological hazards and stresses are routine, including special operations forces, law enforcement, fire and emergency responders, and some industry. My initial review indicates that psychological screening can be completed affordably and with minimal impacts to an applicant's timeline for enlistment.

Third, **we will retool how we assign our enlisted recruits to military occupational specialties.** Today's process is mostly arbitrary, with MOS assignments being driven by recruit shipping dates (i.e., recruits are assigned career fields based on what MOS slots need to be filled in a particular time period). We need a new, data-driven model that assigns recruits to specialties where they can develop their talents, best contribute to

the success of their units, find career satisfaction, and re-enlist. In 2022, we will begin experimenting with a new process. I am confident that we can develop a model that leverages the power of artificial intelligence, while effectively managing entry level training pipeline restrictions and MOS-producing school requirements.

Finally, we will carefully review our waiver processes and policies with the aim of reducing the number of waivers granted for recruits with criminal histories of more than a minor nature. Specifically, I am instituting a blanket prohibition on waivers for any applicant previously convicted of sexual assault offenses or sexual related crimes and offenses, domestic violence, or hate crimes, effective immediately.

CREATING A PATH TO LATERAL ENTRY

Our current enlisted recruiting model is optimized for recruiting teenagers, and for officers, those in their early twenties. (It was not always this way: During the Interwar Period, potential enlisted recruits had to be over 21 and required a character reference from an employer, teacher, coach, or religious leader). While we will always seek to attract young Americans to our ranks, we do not have an effective vehicle for finding, recruiting, and onboarding talented Americans who already possess critical skills. In other words, there is currently only one way to join the Marine Corps – at the bottom.

While this model affords us a high degree of stability and predictability, it also incurs opportunity costs. We have no vehicle to recruit talent unless an individual is willing to start at the lowest paygrade and work their way up. Because the Corps "starts from scratch," providing every Marine with all the education, training, and experience they need to progress in their career, it takes time to build critical skills and expertise. For example, it takes 10 or more years to produce a mid-career expert (gunnery sergeant) in aviation maintenance.

“Success on future battlefields as a distributed stand-in force will require our Marines to be more physically fit and cognitively mature, with a higher level of operational experience.”

As a result of the significant lead time necessary to build expertise, we are unable to respond quickly to changes in the security environment that demand urgent course corrections. The rapid rise in importance of the cyber domain, for instance, has challenged us to find creative ways to quickly build critical skills at mid-career and senior levels. Unless we find a means to quickly infuse expertise into the force – at the right ranks – I am concerned that advances in artificial intelligence and robotics, among other fields where the speed of technological change is exponential, will force us into a reactive posture. **We should have an open door for exceptionally talented Americans who wish to join the Marine Corps, allowing them to laterally enter at a rank appropriate to their education, experience, and ability.**

In 2019, Congress granted the Service Secretaries authority to award career credit to highly qualified civilians, allowing them to enter as mid-career officers. I view this authority as a powerful tool to attracting talent – particularly in low-density, high-demand fields – and a potent vehicle for bringing fresh, private sector perspectives into the service. I will work personally with the Secretary of the Navy and senior Marine Corps leaders to create a process that takes full advantage of this Congressional authority. Additionally, we will create a similar model for awarding career credit to qualified civilians interested in joining the enlisted ranks.

To be clear, not every MOS will be open to lateral entrants. For example, it is difficult to imagine a scenario where a civilian would be permitted lateral entry into combat arms. The opportunity for lateral entry will be limited and primarily reserved for recruiting highly

ASSIGNMENTS

Our service culture and warfighting philosophy is highly entrepreneurial. We trust our small unit leaders, operating under mission-type orders, to creatively solve battlefield problems and accept necessary risks to accomplish the mission. Operating with a maneuverist mindset, we decentralize command and control, push responsibility to the lowest levels, and allow commanders closest to the fight to make decisions with as little interference from headquarters as possible.

Yet, when it comes to personnel management, we flip our warfighting philosophy and combat-tested model on its head. Here, we centralize command and control to the maximum extent possible, empowering headquarters at the expense of Marines closest to

qualified applicants in select specialties, not used as a means to recruit en masse.

We will also develop return to service options for Marines who have left active duty. One option will allow those Marines no longer on active duty, but who continue to meet our high standards, to return to their former rank. Another option will allow those who obtained critical career experience after leaving the service to return at a rank commensurate with their qualifications. For example, I can envision a Marine who left active duty as a captain or corporal rejoining our ranks as a lieutenant colonel or gunnery sergeant, respectively, after spending 5-7 years working in a cyber or IT field where the service currently lacks capacity. With the right education and experience, that same corporal might also be eligible to return as a mid-grade or senior officer.

SPECIALIZED RECRUITING FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH CRITICAL SKILLS

As we develop the mechanisms for granting career credit to qualified civilians, we will develop – in parallel – new ways for finding and recruiting talent. Drawing from our experience in recruiting exceptionally talented musicians for Marine Corps service, we will establish an office within Marine Corps Recruiting Command (MCRC) to exclusively focus on recruiting and assessing talented Americans with the skills that the service needs today and tomorrow. Rather than a brick-and-mortar facility, this recruiting office will be exclusively online and function much like the recruiting offices of major, cutting-edge U.S. companies.

the action. Commanders (particularly at the battalion and squadron levels) are largely excluded from the process – they have no real say in who is assigned to their units – and while headquarters actively seeks and values feedback from individual Marines, ultimately the individual has little influence on assignment outcomes. In a process with little transparency, Marines are told what job they will fill and when and where they will move their families.

Today's assignments process is an industrial age relic and more reminiscent of a centrally planned economy than a cutting-edge American meritocracy. It does not efficiently and effectively match the talent of individual Marines with available billets across our Corps. Further,

it hurts retention. Numerous studies indicate that the inability of a military member to affect their assignment more directly (when and where they will move) is a primary driver for them leaving service. To be clear, our hard-working monitors are not the problem – they are operating within the constraints of an outdated system. **While the needs of the Corps will remain paramount, there are better ways to assign Marines that are consistent with our warfighting philosophy, and more conducive to maintaining and retaining a talented workforce.**

CREATING A TALENT MARKETPLACE

Taking advantage of the initial lessons learned by the Army, Navy, and Air Force, we are developing a web-based “talent marketplace,” where units post job information about available billets, Marines apply for those positions virtually, and monitors serve as overall managers and arbiters. While much in the way of mechanics remains to be determined, I am committed to creating a process that places increased responsibility in the hands of unit commanders and individual Marines, employs cutting edge technology, and preserves a vital role for headquarters. Initially, our talent marketplace will be for officers, and eventually senior enlisted, while we assess options for changes to the junior enlisted assignments process.

For commanders, who have historically had little say in personnel assignment decisions, a digital talent marketplace will give them a higher degree of control over who fills their staffs, and at the battalion and squadron levels, who serves as company commanders or department heads. For the first time, commanders will have the ability to highlight and prioritize the specific professional and educational backgrounds they seek in their key leaders, detail billet descriptions and expectations, and articulate their command philosophies, family readiness priorities, and other information that might be useful to potential applicants, facilitating a much better match between Marine and commander. In the future, pending the development of suitable controls to eliminate bias, the system may even enable commanders to interview applicants to assess how an individual Marine’s personality and leadership style might impact the dynamic already at play in their units, and rank order those applying.

For Marines, a talent marketplace will increase available information about billet openings, improve transparency, and provide individuals with far greater

influence over their future assignments. Rather than reviewing a simple spreadsheet with limited data about available billets (sometimes no more than position title, MOS, and unit), officers expecting reassignment will be able to review the more detailed information posted by individual commands. This will allow Marines to match their talents and experience to specific billet requirements and ask questions directly to units. For the first time, the individual Marine will have the opportunity to apply for jobs based on their career goals, interests, and family situation, giving them far more agency in the assignments process.

Today, monitors are in the unenviable position of trying to match the professional experience and personal desires of their populations (often hundreds of Marines), with the staffing requirements of dozens of units across the Corps. That task would be herculean under any circumstances, but today’s monitors do it with only limited information – almost no input from units (we discourage it!) and only a questionnaire and miscellaneous correspondence from each Marine mover (we discourage excessive communications here as well!).

Further, our monitors have few digital tools for assessing the past experiences and talents of Marines across their populations or prioritizing and balancing the needs and desires of units and individuals. Limited to email, their own spreadsheets, the Official Military Personnel Files (OMPFs) of their populations, internal orders writing systems, and outdated analytic models, the work of today’s monitors looks too much like it did two or three decades ago. A digital talent marketplace will free monitors from the manual task of matching Marines to units, and instead enable them to manage the system,

“...a talent marketplace will increase available information about billet openings, improve transparency, and provide individuals with far greater influence over their future assignments.”

“The assignments process should build unit cohesion and create conditions that best enable our commanders to lead, train, and employ their forces for competition and conflict.”

serve as arbiters (e.g., when multiple Marines are equally qualified for the same position), and spend more energy identifying the most highly talented individuals in our Corps, ensuring they receive the most career enhancing billets.

REDUCE PCS FREQUENCY

While Marines are accustomed to the predictable frequency of Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves, this pattern is not replicated among high performing civilian organizations, or even among some of our closest military allies and partners. *Why? Does the annual PCS reassignment of approximately 25,000 Marines improve our lethality as a force? Does it enhance our ability to train or improve the skills of our leaders?* If the answer is not unequivocally “yes,” then it is time for a change.

The assignments process should build unit cohesion and create conditions that best enable our commanders to lead, train, and employ their forces for competition and conflict. Unfortunately, the scale of the annual PCS cycle serves to degrade, rather than enhance those conditions. Units are left with gaps in key leadership positions; stability is disrupted as leaders are in a perpetual state of “turnover”; and training quality is diminished when Marines, in transit or preparing to move their families, cannot participate or are otherwise distracted.

These dynamics have challenged the institution for decades and contributed to Commandant Gray’s 1990 assessment on the importance of building unit cohesion: “In combat, the most critical element of a unit’s combat power is its cohesion. Cohesive units are built by stabilizing personnel assignments so that Marines can work and train together over a relatively long period of time. Units whose Marines are in a constant state of flux and turnover will perform poorly in combat because they will not be cohesive combat teams.”

The frequency of PCS moves also puts enormous strain on our families, who already sacrifice considerably to support their Marines. In particular, moves are highly

disruptive to spousal employment (spouses experience high unemployment and underemployment), as well as the educational stability of dependents. Further, it hurts retention: the frequency of PCS moves is regularly cited as a significant factor contributing to Marines leaving service.

Beginning in 2022, monitors will seek to keep Marines and their families in the same geographic duty station as long as opportunities for career growth exist. In other words, monitors will make more regular use of Permanent Change of Assignment (PCA) orders, rather than PCS orders. The PCS move will continue to be a normal feature of Marine Corps life, and Marines should expect to move as part of their normal career progression. However, **the institution will no longer view “homesteading” as a negative practice to avoid, but rather a vehicle for improving training, increasing unit stability, and reducing the stresses we place on our families.**

360-DEGREE FEEDBACK

Selection boards seek to identify the best and most fully qualified candidates and base their decisions exclusively on the information contained in a Marine’s OMPF, with fitness reports (FITREPs) being the primary reference. Fitness reports, however, provide critically important but limited insights into a Marine’s strengths and weaknesses. At present, the FITREP captures only the positive views of two supervisors who, in some cases, are not co-located with the Marine reported on or only had limited observation of them. 360-degree feedback, by contrast, includes the perspectives of a larger number of seniors, peers, and juniors and can include unflattering feedback that is prohibited from inclusion in a Marine’s FITREP.

This feedback is thus an important vehicle for expanding our understanding of a Marine’s strengths and weaknesses, which are critically important as boards and service leaders select, form, and assign leadership teams across the Corps. Further, 360-degree feedback – already employed by various organizations within the

DoD – are a proven means for identifying traits of toxic leadership and can help reduce the incidence of toxic leaders advancing to senior levels within the service.

Beginning in 2022, we will institute 360-degree feedback for leaders, on a pilot basis. This feedback will be made available to the Marine and their Reporting Senior, with the aim of encouraging leadership growth. No later than 2024, we will incorporate 360-degree feedback into the selection board and assignments processes to ensure that this important input is properly considered by those selecting and assigning our future leaders.

INCREASING CAREER FLEXIBILITY

Rigid career paths are a natural consequence of our industrial age system, which places a premium on building common experience and producing Marines of similar, predictable quality. While this may be most evident in our officer ranks, it impacts enlisted Marines as well, with three primary consequences.

First, **the lack of career flexibility reduces the diversity of experience and education among our senior leaders**, evident in the remarkably similar careers of our general officers. To be promoted to the highest ranks, officers must strictly follow well-worn career paths on a set-timeline. Any deviation to pursue a non-standard educational, joint/interagency, or other career experience, including through the Career Intermission Program, is shunned, as it comes with tremendous risk to an individual Marine’s career path and could result in a missed career milestone, derailing an officer’s future promotion potential. The result is an unhealthy uniformity in experience among our senior leaders.

Second, our current system places all officers on the “command track,” which is profoundly wasteful of human capital. Some officers have the skills, interest, and disposition to serve in command leadership billets, while other officers are predisposed to serve in staff leadership roles. **The success of our warfighting units depends on good leadership in both command and staff positions, but our industrial age model only prioritizes the former, resulting in the inefficient allocation of talent and suboptimal performance of units.**

Third, the rigidity of the personnel system limits our ability to accommodate the changing career interests

SUBSTANTIATED ALLEGATIONS IMPACT ASSIGNMENTS

Convictions for sexual related offenses, and convictions or substantiated allegations of sexual harassment or discrimination will be prominently noted in a Marine’s record and impact the assignments process. Effective immediately, monitors will be required to communicate directly with a gaining unit’s commanding officer when they assign a Marine with a conviction or substantiated allegation. Further, Marines with a substantiated allegation of harassment or discrimination are disqualified from command selection or assignment as a unit’s sergeant major or senior enlisted advisor.

and family situations of our Marines – officers and enlisted – resulting in lost retention opportunities. Retaining talent requires meeting Marines where they are, not penalizing them for changing interests. As a service, we must keep doors open for talented Marines who desire to continue serving. There is always a “boat space” for talent.

PROMOTION OPT-OUT

Our current promotion model incentivizes officers to pursue conventional career paths that enable them to complete milestone billets and education on an established, rigid schedule. Officers are, in turn, disincentivized from pursuing unconventional career experiences or education that may yield long-term benefits, but which takes them off track for key billets. Even a small deviation in the timing of assignments can have significant consequences (e.g., an extra 6-12 months in school might mean a major misses the opportunity for a key fleet billet before their lieutenant colonel promotion board).

While the service will continue to value both key billets and professional military education, **we must also create paths that increase the diversity of experience in our Marine Corps leaders.** Encouraging diversity among our leaders is both a vehicle for improving service-level problem solving and a way to gain a competitive warfighting advantage over our adversaries.

In 2022, we will begin developing policy options and initiatives to encourage leaders to pursue career-expanding opportunities. At a minimum, we will increase

visibility of the Career Intermission Program, adjust promotion board precepts, and introduce a penalty-free, promotion board “opt-out” option. Much like an officer’s ability to remove their name by request (RBR) from a command or other selection board, this opt-out option would enable Marines to pursue opportunities otherwise deemed too “risky,” including extended educational programs. The Army and Air Force have instituted similar policies based on Congressional changes to the law in 2019, and we will seek to benefit from their experience. We will also explore opportunities to implement a similar system for enlisted Marines.

CREATING A PATH FOR TALENTED STAFF OFFICERS

For officers in our industrial age personnel system, all roads lead to command. By emphasizing, screening for, and promoting to command leadership skills and experiences, we necessarily deemphasize and deprioritize the leadership skills and experiences required of good staff officers, which are frequently more technical in nature. **Making all officers conform to fit industrial age notions of leadership inefficiently matches the talent of our officers with appropriate billets, impacting the effectiveness of our commanders and their staffs.** It also results in the early separation of talented officers who seek staff leadership roles but see no opportunities for upward mobility.

Our personnel system and service culture must recognize that superior performance and proficiency are not exclusive characteristics of commanders or officers seeking command. Marine Corps units and staffs will be most effective when led by officers with the appropriate skills and experience, and who derive personal satisfaction from their work. To that end, we will begin exploring new ways to better value our diverse human capital.

Possible changes may include: (1) adjustments to fitness reports for officers, to allow Marines to indicate a preference for command or staff roles; (2) adjustments to fitness reports for majors and lieutenant colonels, with reporting seniors and reviewing officers indicating whether a Marine is better suited to serve in command or staff leadership roles; (3) selection of some primary staff officers (G1, G2, G3, etc.) and technically specialized staff positions in conjunction with O5 and O6 command selection boards; and (4) creation of a board-selected professional staff officer track, modeled after the acquisition officer pipeline. We will investigate these

and other options, study the experiences of the other military services, and adopt a new model no later than 2023. The endstate is the creation of a career path for talented officers who do not seek command.

LATERAL MOVE RETENTION INCENTIVE

Exit surveys suggest that some top performing Marines leave service due to the lack of perceived opportunities in uniform. Unable to pursue a new and different career focus in the Marine Corps, they seek alternatives in the private sector or through advanced education. We should never fault a Marine for seeking new opportunities, but rather encourage them to find the most challenging and enriching opportunities available – in uniform or out. In my view, there are few vocations, if any, more challenging, enriching, and meaningful than service as a Marine, and I suspect that many Marines choosing to leave the Corps hold similar opinions.

For the truly exceptional Marine who wants to continue serving but who seeks a new career field, we will begin offering the option of a lateral move into another primary MOS as a retention incentive, regardless of the health of the Marine’s current MOS. Moreover, as long as the Marine meets eligibility criteria, we will place few, if any, restrictions on which MOS assignment they seek.

RETAINING HIGH PERFORMING OFFICERS

At present, company grade officers and majors are automatically screened for resident professional military education (PME), and at the rank of major, for recruiting station commanding officer (RSCO). Officers selected for PME or RSCO are among our best and their selection indicative of their future potential to the Marine Corps. Yet, if an officer chooses to decline the opportunity because the timing is bad for their family, or because they had alternate career goals, we require them to resign. In other words, we have a zero tolerance policy for our best young officers who decline this key career opportunity.

A talent management system relies on incentives, not coercion. While the needs of the Marine Corps are always paramount, we cannot afford to push the most talented young officers out the door after investing years in their leadership development, education, and training. We can do better. In 2022, we will give our company grade officers and majors the ability to remove their names from consideration

“Making all officers conform to fit industrial age notions of leadership inefficiently matches the talent of our officers with appropriate billets, impacting the effectiveness of our commanders and their staffs.”

by the Commandant’s Career Level Education Board (CCLEB), Commandant’s Professional Intermediate-Level Education Board (CPIB), and the RSCO Board. In doing so, we will extend to these officers the same opportunity afforded to lieutenant colonels and colonels, who are able to RBR from consideration by command and Top Level School (TLS) boards without penalty.

ENHANCING PARENTAL LEAVE

The life of a Marine is demanding, and the stresses it places on our Marine parents and their families is considerable. Unfortunately, too many Marines starting families – especially female Marines – decide to leave service, fearing that parenthood will be incompatible with their careers. The choice of a new parent to leave the workforce is not unique to the Marine Corps, and organizations across the private, public, and non-profit sectors have taken years to develop smart policies that both improve family outcomes and increase retention of talented employees. **Learning from the experience of other high-performing organizations, beginning in 2022, the Marine Corps will begin making several key updates to our parental leave program.**

First, we will seek to secure the necessary departmental and statutory authorities to increase the duration of parental leave for both primary and secondary caregivers. For the primary caregiver, we will seek an expansion of leave for up to one year in length. While I believe such an extension would benefit our Marine families, I am also familiar with recent studies suggesting that a shorter period of leave – 6 to 9 months – may be more optimal for the primary caregiver and sufficient to meet the wellbeing needs of infants. We will study the matter further over the coming months to determine the ideal length of leave, but remain committed to extending its overall duration. For the secondary caregiver, we will seek an expansion of up to 12 weeks of leave, in keeping with the duration of leave currently afforded other non-military federal employees.

Second, until those authorities are obtained, we will authorize primary and secondary caregivers to take additional parental leave when they agree to extend their service contracts. For instance, suppose a Marine mother who is also a primary caregiver elects to take the maximum amount of parental leave – one year, or 52 weeks. She is currently afforded 6 weeks of caregiver leave and 6 weeks of convalescent leave. So to take the additional 40 weeks, she would agree to extend her service obligation by 40 weeks.

For the secondary caregiver, we will expand caregiver leave from 2 weeks to 3 weeks, in keeping with the practices of the Army and Air Force. If the secondary caregiver elects to take an extended leave period of up to 12 weeks, he or she can do so by extending their service obligation by the requisite number of weeks. As a service, we will encourage Marine fathers and other secondary caregivers to take leave to bond with their newborns, a practice that research indicates results in more stable marriages, better health outcomes for new mothers, and improved educational attainment and emotional stability for children.

Third, we will implement a phased return program for the primary caregiver, allowing the caregiver to return to work gradually. We will initiate a pilot program in 2022, whereby primary caregivers will have virtual or in-person check-in days during their last two to three weeks of parental leave. When their leave is complete, they will return to work gradually over a four-week period, ramping up from two-days per week to four-days per week before returning to work full time in the fifth week. Based on the outcome of the pilot, we will determine how to optimize the program for Corps-wide adoption in 2023.

Finally, and most importantly, we won’t stop learning. We will carefully study the best practices of top performing American companies and institutions, always with an eye to enhancing our service parental leave programs as new research becomes available.

ADOPTING MODERN DIGITAL TOOLS, ANALYTICS, AND PROCESSES

The emergence of big data, coupled with recent advances in A.I. and machine learning, has changed the analytical landscape. We can interrogate data more easily and gain insights from it more readily than ever before, enhancing our ability to make impactful personnel and talent management decisions – both at the institutional service level and the individual Marine level.

Our personnel enterprise should be at the vanguard of service efforts to operationalize artificial intelligence.

Further, enabling the change we seek will require shedding or upgrading antiquated human resource (HR) data systems and investing in information age tools and processes consistent with industry standards. At the same time, we must refine standard administrative processes with the aim of simplifying and digitizing, empowering the digital natives who make up the vast majority of our Corps.

PRIORITIZING DATA AND EMPLOYING BETTER ANALYTICS

Modern, successful organizations in the private and public sectors prioritize data – both its collection and analysis – to inform decision-making. The Marine Corps is awash in personnel data, yet does very little to analyze the data we do collect in meaningful ways. **When it comes to data analytics, we have barely scratched the surface of the possible.**

The potential for better analytics to improve institutional decision-making cannot be overstated, and I am confident it can be employed to improve any number of personnel related functions. **To maximize the vast potential of artificial intelligence, we need both more data and better data, structured in a format appropriate for analysis.** To that end, the Deputy Commandant for Information (the service A.I. lead), working with the USMC Chief Data Officer, M&RA, MCRC, Training and Education Command (TECOM), and the Marine Corps Directorate of Analysis and Performance Optimization (MCDAPO), will develop a talent management data strategy, which will formalize standards for the collection and maintenance of personnel-related data, while exploring new sources of information that could be useful to talent managers and other analysts. Whereas we have often purged “useless” data in the past,

we will now preserve data to the maximum extent possible. For example, information from promotion and selection boards (currently expunged at the board’s conclusion) could provide invaluable insights on how a Marine’s performance, physical fitness, duty stations, demographic information, or any other factor, affect career outcomes. Further, while I am confident that overt, conscious bias does not currently distort our promotion and selection board processes, I am concerned about the effects of unconscious biases - stereotypes and beliefs that operate in the background, affecting our decision-making without our awareness. An increased emphasis on data analytics will help us identify, and root out, potential biases in the promotion and selection board processes, unconscious or otherwise.

DIGITIZATION OF THE REENLISTMENT PROCESS

Under our current system, when a Marine intends to re-enlist, they are met with a burdensome, time consuming, paper-driven process. Initiated by the Marine in conjunction with the career planner, it begins with Marines trekking from one program manager to the next to acquire physical signatures – a process required to overcome the deficiencies of a web of digital systems that do not share information. Once complete, the Marine must route a paper copy of their reenlistment package through their chain of command, with each level of leadership providing hand-written recommendations. The package is then routed back to the career planner for manual entry into a digital system.

The Marine Corps gains nothing by adhering to a cumbersome process that makes reenlistment difficult. **It is time to streamline and digitize to reduce obstacles to reenlistment and save leaders’ time.** No later than 2023, we will adopt digital mechanisms and tools to enhance the reenlistment process. At the same time, we will explore options to increase rates of reenlistment by reducing impediments to it (e.g., through automatic reenlistment for eligible Marines, who would only be required to act if they sought an EAS in lieu of reenlistment).

DECISION SUPPORT TOOLS FOR PROMOTION AND SELECTION BOARDS

While today's board members/"briefers" benefit from a digital boardroom, there are still too many aspects of the board process that are analog, human dependent, and prone to error – all challenges that can be mitigated with technology. For example, during a staff sergeant promotion board, a briefer might review the OMPFs of 250 Marines, dedicating approximately 60 minutes to each Marine's record. *Will a briefer reviewing their 250th OMFP see things in a Marine's record that they didn't notice when reviewing their first OMFP? Might a briefer reviewing a Marine's record at the end of the day miss something they would have seen in the early morning? Would two briefers looking at the same Marine's record come to different conclusions based on their different personal experiences?*

Further, while board members have digital access to the complete records of the Marines they are briefing, they have limited ability to query available data on those Marines and lack the decision support tools that could empower them to make more complete assessments. Today, a briefer cannot get answers to simple questions like, "How does a Marine's PFT score rank in comparison to their peers?" or, "How does this Marine's relative value compare to others in their MOS?" Instead of utilizing analytical tools that are ubiquitous today, we put the onus almost entirely on the briefer to conduct their own analysis.

Given the time constraints of the board process, the result is that little data-driven analysis is conducted during our boards.

While we will always value the judgment and experience of our briefers, today's process is too much 'art' and not

enough 'science.' It is time to equip our boardrooms with decision support tools to aid briefers in the critical task of choosing our future leaders. Powered by A.I., these tools will offer a wide range of options for interrogating, analyzing, and visualizing the tremendous data at our fingertips. In addition to saving a briefer time, these tools should enable board members to ask more sophisticated questions than we have in the past, and receive answers supported by data. Eventually, A.I.-enabled decision support tools might even recommend which Marines should be promoted, a useful baseline for a board president to reference during deliberations.

EXPANSION OF VIRTUAL BOARDS

The rapid expansion and improvement of platforms for virtual meetings, coupled with our recent experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, portends new possibilities for virtual promotion and selection boards. **The effectiveness of new communications platforms should encourage us to ask fundamental questions about our board processes.** *Must all boards be executed in person over short periods (i.e., a few weeks), or could a virtual board convene over a period of months? Can we execute a hybrid board in which some members participate remotely? Can the expansion of virtual boards increase the diversity of participant perspectives in the boardroom (e.g., distant MEF and MARFOR leaders who are often unable to travel to Quantico for extended periods due to operational and fiscal constraints)?*

In 2022, we will publish findings on the potential advantages and disadvantages – including a cost analysis – of using virtual platforms to execute some or all service promotion and selection boards.

"If Americans can apply for home loans and sign legal contracts using their smartphones, we can streamline our administrative requirements, use the types of standardized digital forms that are ubiquitous today, and simplify our Marines' lives..."

“A talent management system identifies an individual Marine’s talents, helps them develop those talents through education, training, mentorship, and experience, and assigns them to positions where they can best contribute to the success of their unit and the Corps.”

UPGRADING HR SYSTEMS

Our uniformed and civilian human resource professionals – those at headquarters, IPACs, and S1 shops across the Corps – are managing the personnel enterprise with outdated HR data systems. At the same time, our individual Marines lack effective digital HR tools to access and update critical career information, communicate within their commands and to headquarters, and manage their finances. **At a time when most of us manage our personal business on our smartphones, the service is stuck using antiquated tools optimized for desktop use and rarely updated.** For example, systems like *MarineOnline*, which may have been on par with other digital HR platforms when released in 2001, has basically retained the same functionality since its inception, with no mobile version, falling far behind market standards.

Sophisticated, cloud-based, mobile-device accessible HR software is the norm in the private sector. With focused study and investments, the same will be true in the Marine Corps. In 2022, we will commission a study to better understand how to develop and implement a modern HR data architecture, closely examining the experience of our sister services, as well as the private sector. We must be prepared to ask hard questions, including whether the Marine Corps Total Force System (MCTFS) – whose origins date to the 1960s and 1970s – remains the best fit for the current era.

REDUCING ONEROUS, PAPERWORK-HEAVY ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES

Many of our standard administrative processes are stuck in the analog industrial era, when paper was the key vehicle for processing information. As a consequence, Marines spend far too much time on administrative actions and processing paperwork – time better spent leading others and preparing for combat.

Consider the example of a Marine applying for a special program – the Marine Corps Enlisted Commissioning Education Program (MECEP) for instance. Like they would have 20 years ago, today’s Marine will type their application, using the proper memorandum format, combine it with various attachments, including hard copies of records that are digitally available, and route it for approval and endorsement, in hard copy. With approximately 65 individual pieces of paper, the opportunity for error and subsequent delays to processing is considerable. When the package is finally endorsed, by multiple levels of command, it is scanned and sent for analog processing at headquarters. While the MECEP application process is rightfully one of our most comprehensive, the fact that it requires 61 pages of instructions and templates highlights a problem in the system – one we can fix.

If Americans can apply for home loans and sign legal contracts using their smartphones, we can streamline our administrative requirements, use the types of standardized digital forms that are ubiquitous today, and simplify our Marines’ lives, allowing them to focus on what matters most – preparing mentally and physically for the rigors of combat.

CONCLUSION

The operating environment has changed dramatically since the Marine Corps personnel system received its last meaningful update in the 1980s, not just on the battlefield, but in the battle for talent. The Marine Corps must recruit more talented individuals, trim end-strength in favor of quality, increase standards at every rank, and develop more modern tools to compete in today's economy. Our doctrine of maneuver warfare places a premium on individual judgment and action, which also means we recognize all Marines of a given grade and occupational specialty are not interchangeable. To compete at peak effectiveness, we must bring into the service the right people with the right skill sets, measure their talents, and then match their skills to the duties they desire and are suited to perform. Once we invest in these individuals, we need to incentivize the retention of the right numbers of the most capable among them so they can continue to add value to our organization in ways that are necessary to achieve the requirements of the future force. We must do so in a sufficiently flexible manner that accommodates changing career aspirations over time. Organizations that do this well for a sustained period gain a competitive advantage.

Our historical and legislatively mandated role as the Nation's force-in-readiness remains a central requirement in the design of our future force. The most important element of this requirement is the individual Marine. Transitioning to a talent management system will enable us to better harness and develop the unique skills and strengths of our Marines, improve the performance of our units in competition and combat, and ensure that we remain "most ready when the Nation is least ready," today and into the future.

Semper Fidelis,



David H. Berger

General, U.S. Marine Corps
Commandant of the Marine Corps

