

Mission Ready

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Reaching Out to the “Other Half” of your Workforce, Part Two

Fans of this newsletter are well aware of the authors' admiration for the Marine Corps—as a fighting force and as a business model—but it is possible that one's image of this “blood and guts” organization may not incorporate such activities as day care, family counseling, and other concerted family-outreach programs. Of all the services, one may think of the Marines as the *least* concerned with family matters. Years ago, that may have been true. In fact, it was once unofficial policy that “if the Marine Corps wanted you to have a wife, it would have issued you one.” Things have changed since World War I, however, and the Marine Corps realized that, if it were to retain a core percentage of voluntary re-enlistments, it would have to deal with the “other half” of its membership—the families of the rough and ready Marines it wanted to keep in uniform. Marine Corps life was hard then, and it's hard now; but today's Marines re-enlist at a higher rate than any of the other services—in no small part because the spouse wishes it.

A vast network of volunteers has been created so that the warrior in the field need not worry about problems at home, such as medical care, rides to work, social activities for the kids, and emotional support from neighboring wives for those whose husbands are abroad, fighting the war on terrorism. Efforts are also made to ensure that the spouse has a clear idea of the important work the Marine husband or wife is engaged upon. Drill Instructors, for example, spend so much time on base, living with their soon-to-be Marines in Boot Camp, that the potential for resentment on the part of the spouse is high. That's why the *only* people invited to witness the private graduation ceremony that takes place a week before the public ceremony, are the wives of the Drill Instructors. After an intensive three day exercise called The Crucible, at the end of nearly three months of Boot

Camp, the exhausted, muddy recruits are about to enter the brotherhood. One by one, they receive the coveted globe and anchor from the person they have both feared and admired—their D.I. Only now, the D.I. isn't screaming in their faces; the emblems are passed out with a handshake, a look in the eye, and a grin of acceptance. The exhausted recruits—addressed for the first time in their lives as “Marine”—cannot trust themselves to speak; tears leak out of the eyes; throats are cleared; hands are gripped. In the background, the wives of the D.I.'s—witnessing the moving ceremony—are under no such obligations of control; they weep openly—and return home with an appreciation of the work being done by their spouse.

We are aware of some organizations which take similar pains to involve the other half of the workforce. Jet Propulsion Labs, for example, invited the families of its engineers to gather around the recently launched Mars Odyssey orbiter, and to sign their names on a scroll, which was then reduced to microfiche and placed inside the spacecraft, as a kind of interstellar greeting card. When Boeing debuted its 777 wide body, it invited the families of its workers, and spent over a million dollars on a Walt Disney-choreographed celebration of the finished product; over 100,000 people walked through the Boeing hangar on that Sunday, appreciating the work done by their loved ones. Turner Construction held a similar “in house” party, after it had completed the new Broncos football stadium, so that their workers could shine in front of the people that mattered most in their lives. These organizations realize the importance of motivating the “other half” of its workforce.

Does yours'?