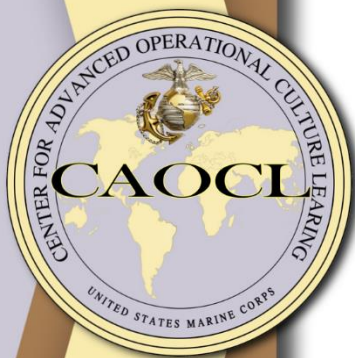




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**Insights from the Marine Corps Organizational Culture
Research Project: Elements and Antidotes for Disillusionment**

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MCOCR Quick Look Report: Elements and Antidotes for Disillusionment
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About the Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research (MCOCR) Project

What is MCOCR?

The MCOCR Project is a small, exploratory, qualitative research effort intended to gather Marine perspectives on a range of issues related to Marine Corps culture. The project resulted in 150 semi-structured interviews and 32 semi-structured focus groups with 267 unique participants (nine Marines participated in both an interview and a focus group). All participants were volunteers, and the project was conducted under a protocol approved by the Marine Corps Human Research Protection Program. The project was conducted under Marine Corps University's academic freedom policy.

How should the information in this report be used?

Because of the non-representative sample, data and analysis from MCOCR are intended to inform discussions in conjunction with other information sources. They should not be used to make broad claims about Marines or Marine Corps programs and policies.

Were Marine statements fact-checked?

No. The intent of the project was to gather Marine perspectives without regard to whether the perspectives were based on full knowledge of current Marine Corps policies and programs. In some cases, it was important to capture misperceptions, as they have implications for internal Marine Corps messaging.

What are the project's limitations?

1. The MCOCR sample was not designed to be representative of the Marine Corps population in terms of sex, race/ethnicity, MOS, or other characteristics. Therefore, the data cannot be used in statistical analysis designed to make claims about all Marines. Sample demographics are included in the March 2018 report from the project, available at <https://apps.dtic.mil/docs/citations/AD1079774>.
2. The project did not include reservists or recently retired/separated Marines due to Marine Corps interpretation of DoD guidance on information collections at the time the research was designed.
3. We did not actively seek volunteers above E-8s and O-5s; therefore, the senior voice is not strong in the sample.

Who funded and sponsored the project?

The project falls within the normal scope of work of CAOCL's Translational Research Group (TRG), and the majority of the project was funded out of CAOCL's existing budget. Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA) requested that the research be done, but the research design, conduct, and analysis were controlled by TRG. M&RA provided assistance with logistics, travel for research team members who were not part of CAOCL, and funding to accelerate transcription of audio recordings.

When and where were data gathered?

Between August and October 2017, the research team gathered data at the following locations: Pentagon, MCB Quantico, MCB Camp Lejeune, MCAS Cherry Point, MCB Camp Pendleton, MCAGCC 29 Palms, MCAS Yuma, and MCB Camp Butler (Okinawa).

What are the qualifications and characteristics of the research team?

The principal investigator is a cultural anthropologist with more than 20 years of experience working with and doing research on national security organizations, including 10 years leading research teams on projects focused on the Marine Corps. The composition of the MCOCR research team has changed between 2017 and 2020, but team members have possessed graduate-level educational backgrounds in the following disciplines: cultural anthropology, sociology, cultural geography, international relations, education, communication, and evaluation science. Data gathering teams included male and female researchers. To the maximum extent possible, participants were allowed to choose the sex of the researcher with whom they interacted. All team members thus far have been Caucasian. The data gathering team included two members with Marine backgrounds. One was a recently retired field-grade Marine officer, and the other was an active duty company-grade Marine officer. The research team also consulted with other social scientists and Marines during design and analysis.

MCOCR: Elements and Antidotes for Disillusionment

The purpose of this report is twofold. It is meant not only to convey certain concerns and ideas that were put forward by Marines, but also to illustrate the ways in which qualitative research and analysis can highlight the relationships between multiple seemingly unrelated topics and how those, taken together, impact the daily lives of Marines in the fleet. Talking to Marines about the various social problems the Marine Corps is dealing with and having the Marines discuss them amongst themselves in focus groups revealed detailed issues that the Marines themselves face in their day-to-day lives. These methods also solicited positive or clear-headed solutions to these issues. While the hard points of policy were not often discussed, Marine participants were sometimes exposed to alternative theories and perspectives on issues that they saw as set in stone. This exposure sometimes sparked new discussion on what could be going on, with Marines often eager to find and work toward a solution. This research, in its limited way across multiple reports, has shown that Marines can offer salient critique of the Corps, but amongst these frustrated attitudes, there are many good ideas that Marines have to improve their organization.

When examining an organization as large, complex, and varied as the Marine Corps, it is easy to forget that no topic that one might consider exists in a vacuum. While this research was designed to take a broad look into social issues within the Marine Corps, with a focus on issues of gender, leadership, and cohesion, researchers and Marines discussed countless other topics that are necessarily enmeshed, each topic having bearing on multiple others. Rather than initially looking more closely into one specific topic of choice, the topics in this paper emerged after many repetitive reviews and recursive coding of select interview and focus group transcripts¹. Taken together, these topics – generational misconceptions, differing perceptions of Marine Corps policy, and the idea of “setting Marines up to fail” – contribute to frustration, anger, and disillusionment among Marines. But examination of the problems also showed how other Marines have dealt with these issues and what might be done to mitigate these attitudes.

While there are some “bad apples” that make it through boot camp to become Marines, a larger threat to cohesion in the Marine Corps seems to emanate from otherwise well-intentioned individuals who perceive they are not getting what they were promised. Marine participants were generally optimistic that the problems the Marine Corps is facing can be solved and that many of these problems are “growing pains” associated with a changing Marine Corps. Good Marines are often the ones who catch the ‘bad apples’ in the first place, and there are Marine Corps policies in place that can deal with these problems when they arise. It is the smaller behaviors and attitudes that are not technically against any rules that can cause problems with unit cohesion and leadership. The weight of these attitudes can drag down command climates, leading to issues of “toxic” leadership and environments in which trust is a rare commodity. These factors are further compounded by other issues, such as different experiences with and expectations of the Marine Corps itself that are formed and transformed as new Marines join.

¹ For this project, I started coding using only interviews for which I was present and could best remember. Because of the sensitivity of the subject matter of this project, male researchers did not typically interview female Marines. As a male researcher, this meant that most of the Marines I spoke with were men. Because of this, female voices are not as represented within this piece as they are within other MCOCR analytical products.

“Generational Issues” in the Marine Corps

When discussing an issue as wide and varied as disillusionment, it is important to consider the population in question. While individual issues within a given population may be examined and understood with some success, researchers and anyone developing interventions must be intimately familiar with the nuances of the population in which these interventions are to take place. To understand the disillusionment experienced by some Marines, it is important to note the vast diversity that exists within the population already.

The modern Marine Corps has experienced multiple major paradigm shifts in the past few decades. Following the attacks of 9-11, the Marine Corps moved from the “peacetime” footing of the 80s and 90s into a rapid operational tempo combat force in the first years of Iraq and Afghanistan and then experienced another shift to counterinsurgency operations in those same areas. This shift from peacetime to wartime was not perceived by many who joined the Corps in the buildup following 9-11. The rapid operational tempo and deployment was all they knew, and this forged their idea of what the Marine Corps was supposed to be. Marines who have stayed in the Corps from this time are now senior Marines who in turn have set the expectations and standards for those who have come after them.

There have also been major changes in the lives of the individuals who join the Marine Corps today. Many of the older Marines the research team spoke to joined up during the groundswell of American patriotism following 9-11. Those young men and women joined as a reaction to an attack on their country, and they knew war was on the horizon. A gunnery sergeant at Camp Lejeune articulated this sentiment when asked if he had witnessed any change in what motivates young people to join the Marine Corps:

Absolutely. And I don't like generalizations, but absolutely. I think across the board, you know, you go forward to 2001, 2002, 2003 even into maybe 2004, 2005 when we were in the thick of the fighting in Iraq. People came into the military knowing they were going to deploy, knowing they were going to potentially see combat. At least it was, you know, even if you were joining a non-combat arms MOS, you had pretty good idea that you were going to go forward.²

This contrasts somewhat starkly with the more “logic-based” reasons that attract young people to the Corps today, such as college benefits, adventure, and getting away from situations at home.

I think in the more recent generation that's coming in, you're seeing a desensitization to the world we live in. This is what people have grown up in. This is the global war on terror since 2001. That's the new norm. That's what people know. So they're coming in with that understanding. It's not service. It's not based on a specific instance. They're not driven to fix a wrong because it's been 16 years. I think it's now- I don't want to say stabilized but I feel like that's the best way to describe it. You're not seeing the emotional anymore. It's more of a logical choice for a lot of people whether it's financial, whether it's to get out of the circumstances in which they were raised, whether it's a

² Gunnery Sergeant #046.

steppingstone to get to a future career. I think people are logically joining the military now versus emotionally joining the military immediately post-9-11.³

This does not necessarily mean that one generation is more patriotic or logical than the other. The Marines who joined long after 9-11 never had a large, earth-shattering event to cause them to join in a big wave, and as such, the reasons they expressed for joining are different. This mindset going into the Marine Corps is important, as it sets the initial expectations for the “Marine experience” for which they have just signed up. Whether the Corps meets these expectations sets the tone for the rest of their early experience and development as a Marine. These “generational differences” have less to do with actual generations and more to do with how they experienced the Marine Corps in their first years of service.

Other Marines were less reflective when talking about generations, rather choosing to blame the “new generation” of millennial Marines for problems within the Marine Corps. This sometimes occurred even when the Marine was a millennial themselves:

So, since I know I'm still what you call a, um millennial? So I guess I'm still in that timeframe. But how do I make this not political? How life's been and things have changed, government-wise, it's a lot of people think they- think the world owes them something. So with that, Marines going through boot camp- yeah, you go through boot camp, and actually boot camps got hit hard with DIs getting in trouble because they're offending them or they're yelling at them. Like that's what you're at the boot camp for! Boot camp's to shape you into a Marine. It's not there to hold your hand through every obstacle.⁴

These generational issues are often brought up as a quick and easy way to categorize and summarily dismiss the concerns of other Marines while not actually addressing the issue at hand, whether it be lack of motivation or feeling as if they are being treated unfairly. This is especially troublesome for young Marines who had recently joined, wanting an experience similar to what they saw on the news growing up during the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Marines who expected to go into combat and do “Marine stuff,” often described as kicking down doors and blowing things up, get frustrated when their day-to-day reality in the fleet consists of picking up trash, sitting behind a desk, or waiting for things to happen, or when new Marines are moved into a career field in which they have no interest. This starts Marines off on a sour note, and things often only go downhill from here if the unit in which the Marine lands has poor command climate. For example, when a male junior Marine is told “sorry, there aren’t enough spots in the infantry” but then sees the Marine Corps trying to attract women into the combat MOSs recently opened to them, that does not tend to sit well. While there are, of course, reasons to attract women to combat MOSs, those do not enter the logic of those who have not heard these reasons well-articulated. Marines have always had to put their own desires second after the needs of the Marine Corps, but this attitude wears better in the wartime Marine Corps rather than what Marines described as a “garrison-oriented” force.

Perceived Inconsistency in Policy

³ First Lieutenant #047.

⁴ Sergeant #007.

Some Marines were specifically bothered by what they thought was the Marine Corps twisting its policies and ideals to suit the desires of an external audience, especially when it came to integrating women into combat arms jobs. One sergeant at Camp Lejeune brought in printed pages from a Training and Education Command (TECOM) PowerPoint and a PFT calculator to make his point on policy discrimination within the Marine Corps:

Well, discrimination is the reason I came here today. I'd like to show you something. So I'm being recorded. Obviously, you can't see this. So this is printed out directly from the equal opportunity [EO] PowerPoint published by TECOM. You can't get more Marine Corps-sanctioned than that. So concept of EO violations – you've got racism, sexism, prejudice, discrimination. The one I'm talking about is sexism, okay? [Sergeant starts reading the excerpted PowerPoint text] "Treatment or consideration based on class or category rather than individual merit. Overt, direct, intentional, hidden, indirect, unintentional. Institution discrimination. Any systematic or functional practices that discriminate or manifest unequal treatment." [Sergeant ends reading excerpted text]

The Sergeant then went on to show how he put in the same number of pull-ups, the same run time, and the same number of crunches in both the male and female PFT calculators, but the female score was higher. He then stated that this increased score plays into promotion and retention of enlisted Marines, giving female Marines a leg up on males, which men resent. He finished off his point with:

If you want a quote [from the sergeant], Artificially inflating Marines' performance will artificially deflate that Marine's value. The Marine Corps has a culture of resentment toward women. Stuff like this is why. It's not just- this is on paper. It's in the system, it's official, but it's not just that. If a female Marine is crying at work, she'll be brought outside and comforted. A male Marine will be "a bitch." So the Marine Corps' gonna have to pick. Either we treat everyone like a Marine or you treat female Marines like female Marines. If you do the latter, you're gonna give them this distinct otherness. That's why they started calling them WMs in the first place – woman Marine. They're seen as separate. They have a different standard. So right here we've got two different systems for scoring PFTs. Tell me, how that does not violate the Marine Corps' own EO policy. It is [reiterating the excerpted PowerPoint text] "treatment or consideration based on the class or category rather than merit." It's "overt, direct, and intentional," and it's a "systematic or functional practice that discriminates or manifests unequal treatment." It's black and white. So this is where the culture of resentment comes from. Why are you treated differently than me? Why are you given extra damn near 50 points on your PFT and you get promoted before I do?⁵

It is important to note that many of the Marines who expressed anger or frustration at certain policies did not themselves actually know the specifics of the policies in place. Instead, they would rage against what they thought the policies were, how they made no sense, and how they were unfair and broken.

However, it is this perceived double standard or "mouth says one thing and hands do another" act on the part of the Marine Corps as an organization that frustrates Marines. This can be counteracted by clear and consistent messaging from Marine Corps leadership. In a focus group discussion, one Marine

⁵ Sergeant #49.

captain recalled a time that a general officer addressed the issue of changing military occupational specialty (MOS) standards and why the Marine Corps did it in the case of the aviation community:

I can offer up an example of how it works. So like females in aviation. So we got a brief from someone who came out to our unit and was talking to us about it. Um, shit, I'm trying to remember- it was a few years back. But it was plainly how like- oh man, I think General Brilakis when he was manpower- came to postgraduate school and talked to us. Uh, and he was explaining how they "primed the pump." He was like, you know, "The reality is they lowered standards initially to get women into aviation." That just was what it was. He was saying it had to do with like, they weren't prepped for it before. You weren't- they weren't actively seeking out- like the women who joined the military weren't offered the opportunity to go to aviation. So you didn't have a whole lot of people who were like, "Oh, I want to be a pilot!" It was just suddenly like, "Hey we're going to allow women in aviation now." Later you get the ones who were like, "I'm gonna be a fucking pilot!" And so they, you know, really crushed it all through you know whatever their training pipeline was up to that point. And so you get rock stars, no issue. Initially you're saying you've lowered standards, now that affected both males and females. They both got in, you know. It's just the lowering across the board and they had to bring them [the standards] back up. And the whole point was to get a certain surge of demographic population to kind of build the [idea of], "Hey, there are female pilots out there." And some of the capability and some of the people who got through arguably would not have gotten through before then and wouldn't get through nowadays. Umm and-and that's something that, he was like, "Look, the fact is it exists here. It's stupid to try to hide from this." So he was like, "This has to be understood. And, yeah, you got to deal with it."

At this point another captain in the focus group pointed out that the lowering of the standards in that case was for both men and women, to which the first captain replied:

Yes, but remember the perception. He was pointing out that, until you acknowledge it, the perception was that it was only for females. And so it's- because it's not talked about, 'cause it's hidden away. He was like, "That's reality." It's a- it's a statistics kind of thing, where it's like, you know, they had to get a certain number and had to- I mean, he called it "priming the pump." But getting the flow going and he didn't have a pool to work with. It just wasn't him. But there wasn't a pool to work with to begin with. So that is- and he was talking to us about it 'cause it was when they were talking about women in infantry and everything.⁶

Marines are very good at "this is how it has to be, even if you don't like it" when the order or directive makes sense to them. They excel at "embracing the suck," but perceived lies and deception are anathema to this population. Marines often pride themselves on seeing things as they are, as depicted in their folksy refrain "right, wrong or indifferent." But when told one thing when they very much feel

⁶ Captain E #105.

that they are seeing another, it does not align with the values that the Marines Corps generally stands for in their minds and breeds disillusionment.

Setting Marines Up to Fail

In some cases policy may change quickly, but the reality that Marines have to work with is often not on par with what the new policy directs. The burden of this disconnect often lands upon the shoulders of junior officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs), who often happily jump to the new task, only to find themselves woefully under-supported in both equipment and knowledge. This problem was highlighted in interviews when Marines spoke of integrating female Marines into their workspaces for the first time. This, of course, had logistical implications. For example, separate restrooms and billeting areas are necessary, but one Marine captain discussed a requirement in the field that was unforeseen by him and his all-male chain of command: the capability for nursing Marine mothers to pump and refrigerate breast milk:

You do- and when you make- I won't call it concessions, but you know, special treatment, uh, you kind of- you can create re-resentment in the unit. So totally anecdotal. Uh, I was the camp commandant for a large exercise last year. And I had to create a lactation tent for all the pregnant Marines that were out there to pump breast milk out there. And I probably spent three hours a day, running around, making sure the lactation tent was climate-controlled, sanitized, had to go find all the proper cleaners for it, we had to get a refrigerator out there for the milk to be stored in. When I was in charge of billeting for twelve hundred Marines, but six of them took up three hours a day, um, and y-you bet I was really, you know, like [chuckles]- I won't call it- my-my anger wasn't justified, you know, t-they have every right to do that out there. But, you know, I was at my wits' end, um, towards the end of that exercise.⁷

The captain in this case recognizes that it was not the women's fault that he had to go about setting up this lactation station and acquire the correct equipment: it was the lack of existing norms and policies around this situation that caused confusion and frustration for those who were told to figure it out or make it work.

As women are integrated into previously all-male units, unforeseen issues may make themselves known in ways that make life difficult for those on the implementation end of these new policies, including the female Marines themselves. American businessman Daymond John is credited with the quote, "Pioneers get slaughtered, settlers get rich." While he was originally referring to pioneers in the business world, the saying is very apt in the following case provided by a first sergeant in a focus group. He explained:

So I'm in a [sic] amphibious assault battalion right now we have the first ever 1833 full-blown MOS female. She's in my company right now. And she's already kind of been a little bit of a disadvantage because she went through MOS school during the whole testing process, so like two, three years back. And now she has- career path, lat move, and she's a corporal. So, a corporal 1833 is supposed to be a crew chief, right? "Here's your vehicle, here's your crew, we're going out to sea, like we've got business." But she's

⁷ Captain G #112.

been out of school so long. You know, she knows less than the PFC that graduated school last week. You know, so she's supposed to be in a leadership role and we can't put her in one. And, you know, it's a unique situation that I told the guys I would never happen to a normal 1833. "Hey, Devil Dog, you graduated 1833 school. You're going on security forces" – which doesn't happen to us – "for four years. Then you come back and you're a crew chief." So that doesn't happen. So she started kind of at a disadvantage that way. Uh, we haven't had to do any evaluations at this point because she has only been with the unit maybe two or three months, but that's going to weigh in on her proficiency and conduct, because is she really [a] proficient corporal? Like, she's not doing the job of a PFC. I don't know if that's what you're getting at, but I think that's something that-

At this point, the moderator asked how the first sergeant, as a leader, has handled that situation.

So you want to be fair. So right off the bat like, "Oh, well, you're definitely not hitting the long ball. You're not even going to hit the short ball, but you are trying." Uhm, how far does that get? What's the expectation? Right. Like we didn't get any guidance, just, "Hey, you're the first female 1833. Tee it up. Be good." You know, "Make sure we train and we're standard across the board." And that's what we did. And she's in a position where she's learning under a sergeant, a competent sergeant, and I don't know what a good answer is to that. Because you expect the corporal to be able to lead, not just in formation and when marching to chow, but, "Let me show you how to- let me show you how to pre-op this vehicle." But she can't do it. But I don't expect her to do it. I wouldn't expect anyone to do it that hasn't had the job for four years. But I guess the short answer to your question is I don't know how much time that will take, like we- I'm going to have to cross that bridge pretty soon, but I haven't had to across it yet."⁸

The first sergeant then went on to note that when it became known that a female Marine was joining the previously all-male unit, the Marines did not miss a beat, and things were business as usual. There was nowhere near the expected interruptions that the general rumor mill had led the unit's leadership to believe there might be. This highlights the fact that not all of the issues that women face with integration are based on attitudes of Marines around them. These pioneering women are often exposed to precarious and difficult situations simply because they are moving into new career territory and their Marine leadership at the ground level often has little guidance or ability to ease their way.

Difficult Discussions as an Antidote for Disillusionment

While these varying problems came up in the research data, we never would have acquired this insight if Marines had not already been giving these issues critical thought. While some did this far more than others, seeing Marines with opposing opinions interact within and after focus groups was interesting in and of itself. Many Marines who started the conversations off as frustrated came away from the focus groups with a more nuanced idea of what is going on. After the recorder was turned off and participants were leaving the focus group room, several commented on how glad they were to have had the opportunity to air these issues with other Marines and that they had learned a lot. The Marine Corps,

⁸ First Sergeant J #118.

like many large organizations, struggles with certain internal issues. While discontent exists within the ranks, it can often be countered by the arguments advanced by many Marines who often simply lack a productive outlet for their thoughts on what is going on in the Marine Corps and how to make the organization succeed.

For every male Marine who said that female Marines get special treatment was another Marine with stories of women who are doing 20 pull-ups. Many men were able to articulate and appreciate the unique challenges female Marines face in their day-to-day lives. One male staff NCO focus group in Yuma almost turned into a sort of masterclass on leadership, with three staff sergeants all listening intently as a master sergeant with 28 years of experience in the Marine Corps articulated how he deals with the gender issue among his own Marines:

My Marines are-are, you know, they try to tell me that females get different treatment. And I'm like [chuckles]- and right now, I don't have any. But-but they- that's their perception, that they get different treatment. And-and so you ask, how do you- how do you deal with it? You gotta deal with it on your level. And just like I said, when I explained to them like, "Man, this chick is out here doing everything you do! She's better than you! Don't try to say she's getting preferential treatment, 'cause she's fr- better than you! No! That- she gave birth and then came back, and was still better than you!" [general laughter] "So how the hell- and who- who do you think you are to say that she's getting preferential treatment?!" So you got to- you got to- you know. But I get in- I get in the weeds talking to Marines about stuff like that! And it has be- uh, and it starts as a staff NCO. You got to be like- you got to talk about the things that are uncomfortable. You got to ask the question, "How do you feel about female Marines?" When I check in to a new shop, I put all that crap on the line because I want to know the mindset of my Marines. And I'll ask that question, "How do you feel about female Marines? How do you feel about, you know, all the diversity that we're dealing with now in the Marine Corps, transgender, all these stuff?" I- I ask those questions, and I'm that staff NCO that, "Don't tell me what I want to hear. You tell me what you think!" Once they figure that out about me as a leader, they'll tell me whatever the hell they think. "I think it's bullshit that, you know, 'cause females get pref- preferential treatment." And then when I say, "Hey, dude, you're on the outside looking in. I'm looking at her SRB⁹, and I'm looking at yours. She runs a 285." "Oh, yeah, but she gets to do the dead hang." [snaps finger] "Come on, let's go outside. You do the dead hang." "Well, that's- that's pretty difficult." I said, "Now what do you think?" You know? Or, females doing pull-ups! "She's doing 15! You're doing 12!?" How do you, you know- so you have to, you have to do it- that small unit leadership is really bigger than the Marine Corps. That's big stuff. That small unit leadership, you put it out there. When you have your little interviews, you have your little counseling sessions, you got to put it all out on the line. And if it's a- if it quacks like a duck, walks like a duck, call it a duck! If the female is like kicking butt and taking names, you got to put it out there.¹⁰

⁹ Selective Retention Bonus.

¹⁰ Master Sergeant H #256.

As can be seen with the master sergeant, these perceptions are very real, but the solutions to counter them are also real and in the minds of some Marines already. Those Marines just need to be empowered to share their ideas and opinions with their fellow Marines in an environment that encourages open discussion and the free trade of ideas. Marines love to debate and argue random points, and what better topic for group discussion than the state of the Marine Corps? This type of discussion could not only help to stamp out misinformed ideas and incorrect interpretations of policy, but could also develop and sharpen good ideas to common Marine problems from within the ranks. A captain (captain D, in the excerpt below) in a focus group at Marine Corps Base Quantico shared one clever idea on how to handle the issue of appropriate versus inappropriate behavior in the office:

- Captain D:** *For- for one, like kind of going back with your question of-- At the place where I'm at now, I think it's a- it's a mixed environment. Umm all ranks from - what's the lowest rank we have? - lance corporal through colonel, all staying in a similar area. Now when you get any people of any rank together, they all seem to turn into lance corporals anyway. [background laughter] Like, with the jokes and stuff. It doesn't matter if they're generals or whatever. But being in that environment that's a lot more- you have to be a lot more politically correct. You can't have the dick and fart jokes and all that kind of stuff going all the time because it's not the right place. It's not appropriate. It's- so, I walked into this. Somebody came up with this idea. It wasn't me, and it has been- it has worked. And at everybody's desks they have football flags. There's a yellow flag and red flag. And as soon as somebody starts saying the wrong thing, you just see flags just start flying up, and the person knows to just-just shut up. And it's-it's-it's cleaned up everything, umm-*
- Major A:** *It's a great idea. Because, I mean, are they- are they more willing to throw a flag, you know? Like-like-*
- Captain D:** *Yeah. Nobody wants to, because nobody wants to be that guy to call somebody out, like, "I'm sorry that was inappropriate and you offended me."*
- Captain E:** *Well, it's a funny way to call them out.*
- Captain D:** *Exactly.*
- Captain E:** *It's like it lets them laugh at- it lets everybody laugh at it. It's effective. Probably last longer in the long course.*
- Major A:** *Because being that guy- I'm the guy that speaks right to it. If I hear something I'll walk straight up to that individual and I correct him. That's the way I've been. But I get- I do that, and there will be times where people are like, "You're peculiar." [laughs] You know what I mean? But to me I don't give a shit because that's-that's-that's the way I address. That's not always, you know, it may not always be the best approach. I really like that. I think that allows people to do it when they may not- otherwise may not have the courage.¹¹*

¹¹ Major A #101, Captain D #104, Captain E #105.

In recent years, the Marine Corps has hosted several technology and physical fitness innovation challenges in which Marines from all over the Corps submit their ideas on how to improve existing processes. This raises the question, what is to stop the Marine Corps from conducting a leadership innovation challenge?

Conclusion

As Marines deal with new challenges in the fleet, they learn lessons on what works and what does not work. Candid, open conversations could cross the generational, regional, and occupational rifts that divide Marines in the first place. They could also foster a sense of shared purpose in problem-solving and critical thinking. Lessons learned from these instances could be extremely useful to other Marines at other duty stations who may be dealing with the same sort of issue. This empowering of Marine voices would also allow the Corps to actively combat disillusionment within the ranks and address some of its most challenging problems. The Marines who participated in this study want to actively improve their Marine Corps. All the Marine Corps needs to do is offer them an outlet to do so.