

Marine Corps Mentoring Program

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Marine Corps Mentoring Program

Contemporary Issues Paper

Submitted by Captain T. D. Watson

to

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"One must put himself in the place of those whom he  
would lead; he must have a full understanding of

their  
their  
their  
their  
and their  
must embody



thoughts,  
attitude,  
emotions,  
aspirations,  
ideals; and he  
in his/her own

character the virtues which he would instill into  
the hearts of his/her followers."

Gen John A. Lejeune<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>General John A. Lejeune, USMC, 13th Commandant, 18 January 1921.

Aside from past indiscretions and lack of formal reporting within the Marine Corps Mentoring Program, the Marine Corps has officially drafted guidance to implement an effective mentoring program. Guidance on this program which was drafted by the Commandant of the Marine Corps will provide privates through senior officers the opportunity to reach their full potential personally and professionally, help shape future leaders, increase unit cohesion, strengthen camaraderie, foster relationships of genuine concern, and better prepare Marines to handle the increased challenges of today's operational climate.<sup>2</sup> The program was inspired in part by recent cultural studies by the Center for Naval Analysis, Behavioral Science Technology, which identified gaps in Marine leadership effectiveness.<sup>3</sup> The Marine Corps and mentorship are steeped in rich tradition. They have stood the test of time, and similar to our civilian counterparts, mentoring is being taken seriously as an avenue for organizational development. Mentoring was, and continues to be, one of the most effective ways to pass on skills, knowledge and wisdom and to train the next generation of professionals. Many compelling bonds will arise through the sharing of

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<sup>2</sup>General Mike W. Hagee, USMC, 33rd Commandant, MCO 1500.58, 05 December 2005.

<sup>3</sup>Corporal J. Agg, Mentoring Program: Steel Sharpens Steel, MCB Quantico, 01 September 2005.

social, academic, career, and personal relationships with positive role models. With clear guidance, built-in flexibility, automation, and buy-in from junior commissioned officers and staff noncommissioned officers, the mentoring program will be successful.

### **Clear Guidance**

Recent Marine Corps Orders, All Marine Messages (ALMAR), White Letters, and guidance published by Headquarters Marine Corps have announced the initiation of the Marine Corps Mentoring Program. The Marine Corps Mentoring Program will provide an avenue for Marines to share hard-won leadership lessons learned in recent years. The clear guidance will explain that all Marines will be mentored by a Marine senior to them. For instance, a squad leader will be mentored by his or her platoon sergeant. A Marine may also be mentored by someone outside the chain of command. To assist in these efforts, the Marine Corps Order lays out tools to be used to articulate the unit, team, and individual goals, as well as presents tasks that will aid a Marine in meeting his mission.<sup>4</sup> Mentoring Marines will occur at least monthly. Additionally, mentoring sessions should occur if one of the following situations takes

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<sup>4</sup> General Mike W. Hagee, USMC, 33rd Commandant, MCO 1500.58, 05 December 2005.

place: preparing for or returning from deployment, major life changing events such as birth, death, permanent change of station, marriage, divorce, significant financial decision, intense combat, etc. This formal guidance approach to the Marine Corps Mentoring Program is different from the past. According to Commandant's White Letter No. 10-95 of 03 May 1995, the Marine Corps Mentoring Program was conducted formally or informally and was often confused with the Marine Corps counseling process.<sup>5</sup> This lead to its misunderstanding, demise, and fall to the waste-side. Clear guidance from the current Commandant of the Marine Corps, such as those listed above, will make Marines obligated to the understanding of this important endeavor.

### **Built-in Flexibility**

Combat cohesion and mission focus have never been stronger, and young leaders, arguably never better, are hungry for more responsibility.<sup>6</sup> The mentoring program will give Marines this chance of added responsibility. Mentoring will be more than academics. It will be a flexible program designed to provide hands on problem solving from Marines who are willing to demonstrate how to

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<sup>5</sup> United States Marine Corps, User's Guide to marine Corps Values, Mentoring. 03 May 1995.

<sup>6</sup> General Mike W. Hagee, USMC, 33rd Commandant, ALMAR Final, 30 November 2005.

succeed or progress to another Marine who is anxious to learn. The Marine Corps Mentoring Program will enable Marines to face daily challenges while strengthening all aspects of the Corps. The built-in flexibility will enable Marines to use many different tools which will empower leaders at every level to better know their Marines, and provide their subordinates with guidance and focus, while reinforcing the notions of accountability, responsibility, and a true sense of being a Marine.<sup>7</sup> Mentors will be encouraged to use these proven tools, such as Military Occupational Specialty Roadmaps, Marine Corps Martial Arts Program, and core values, to help their Marines progress, reach goals, and develop leadership skills. The built-in flexibility will attempt to limit hard and fast rules, especially when it comes to the assignment of a mentor with a mentee. Placing a mentee with an unsuitable mentor would only deter from the true benefits of the program and natural process that it should give rise to. Built-in flexibility wasn't an issue with the previous mentoring program because it was never a formal process. There was no Marine Corps Order that mandated or described the

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<sup>7</sup> General Mike W. Hagee, USMC, 33rd Commandant, CMC White Letter, 30 November 2005.

Mentoring Program or how much flexibility or latitude could be used when mentoring was conducted.

### **Automation**

Mentoring occurs when a person enhances the professional life of someone else by fostering self-insight, identifying needed knowledge, or expanding the other person's perspectives. When mentoring occurs, the mentee learns something that otherwise would be acquired less thoroughly, more slowly, or not at all. Automation will assist with the implementation of the mentoring program and its documentation necessities. An entire web site devoted to the Marine Corps Mentoring Program would allow Marines to access specific orders and procedures which are necessary for conducting a mentor and mentee relationship. Automation of Mentoring Program Guidebooks can be procured and distributed in order to guide and assist a mentor in his professional duties of developing a mentee. An automated Combat Readiness Percentage can be put in place to let Marines know how they are progressing towards unit goals and to reinforce the fact that each Marine plays a part in his or her unit's success. Leadership Mentoring Log Worksheets can be maintained by both the mentor and mentee even if they are not located



within close proximity of each other. These logs will document progress, mission, goals, actions taken over a course of time, and how an individual Marine is supporting the unit's overall mission. Honor Courage and Commitment Assessments, Common Combat Skills Checklist, and off duty commitment assessments are other automated tools that can be used to track a Marines progress. The development of automation wasn't formally considered towards the mentoring program's success in previous mentoring initiatives. Automation will be absolutely necessary especially with the high tempo of the Marine Corps' current operating environment.

### **Buy-in From Junior Commissioned Officers and Staff**

#### **Noncommissioned Officers**

Junior commissioned officers and staff noncommissioned officers will be the driving force and key to the Marine Corps Mentoring Program's success because they are instrumental in the many aspects of small unit leadership. However, all commanders will have the ultimate responsibility for ensuring the mentoring program is effectively implemented in their units and that Marines are improving in accomplishing missions as eloquently stated in the following quote by Sergeant Major Drake. "Every

successful organization just doesn't sit stagnant. It seeks to improve itself." "This is a tool through which we want to improve ourselves. We're not trying to burden the unit or task the unit, we're trying to improve the Marine Corps. (The Marine Corps Mentoring Program) helps to develop tomorrow's leaders but it takes care of all Marines."<sup>8</sup> Commissioned and noncommissioned officers have the greatest influence with empowering junior leaders to positively affect the development of subordinates. Previously, no specific rank was targeted for the success of mentoring. It was a common perception that all Marines shared an equal responsibility for the conduct of the mentoring program, however, and in all actuality no one took responsibility. In today's Marine Corps, the daily inner-workings of commissioned and staff noncommissioned officers with their Marines will allow them to facilitate genuine concern between the mentor, mentee, and success of the mentoring program. They are also the key to any unit's cohesiveness, covenants shared between leader and subordinate, accountability, and responsibility of mission accomplishment and troop welfare.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Sergeant Major Ralph H. Drake, USMC, TECOM Sergeant Major, 01 September 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Mentoring Program Brief, Training and Education Command's Internet Site.

## Conclusion

In Greek mythology, the term mentor derived from Odysseus asking his friend, Mentor, to teach and watch his son Telemachus, while he fought the Trojan War.<sup>10</sup> Mentor and Telemachus developed a relationship that was unlike a parent/child relationship. The relationship thrived on advice, education, and friendship.<sup>11</sup> Mentoring is simply the development of one's career and learning through another's expertise, another's knowledge transfer, another's wisdom, and another's guidance. The importance of inspiration was acknowledged by Major General Thomas S. Jones. Major General Thomas stated "Sometimes in our profession the margin for error is very small and the difference between success and failure is sometimes only the inspiration you provide someone else." "You don't get guys walking the streets of Falluja the way they did unless they believe in their leaders."<sup>12</sup> Remembering the tenants of guidance, built-in flexibility, automation, and buy-in from commissioned and noncommissioned officers, the Marine Corps Mentoring Program will be successful like other

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<sup>10</sup> Mentor Coach, Training Accomplished Helping Professionals to Become Extraordinary Coaches.

<sup>11</sup> Marine Corps Gazette, Formal Mentoring Programs? First, let's ask a few questions.

<sup>12</sup> Major General Thomas S. Jones, USMC, Training and Education Command's Commanding General. 01 September 2005.

nationally known Mentoring Programs such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters Program, Help One Student to Succeed, National One to One Mentoring Partnership Program, and Boys and Girls Clubs of America. Mentors and mentees will do more than simply pass on knowledge and information to each other. They will impart lessons on the art and science of living. They will help others acquire vital knowledge and skills more effectively than if acquired through the "school of hard knocks." "In short, mentoring is but the active ingredient of leadership. This program, simple in concept yet requiring dogged determination, promises profound dividends: assisting leaders to better know their Marines; helping Marines focus on the mission; providing leaders those tools to better support the professional and personal growth of their Marines; preparing the Corps for all the challenges that lie ahead."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> General M. W. Hagee, USMC, 33rd Commandant, CMC White Letter, 30 November 2005.

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