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*United States Marine Corps
Command and Staff College
Marine Corps University
2076 South Street
Marine Corps Combat Development Command
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068*

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

Servant Leadership: Safeguarding the Welfare, Morale, and Spirit of Marines

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

Major Abdul E. Mack, USMC

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Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: Dr. Rebecca Johnson

Approved: [Signature]

Date: 5 May 2017

Oral Defense Committee Member: Dr. MAURICE A. BUFORD

Approved: [Signature]

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Executive Summary

Title: Servant Leadership: Safeguarding the Welfare, Morale, and Spirit of Marines.

Author: Major Abdul E. Mack, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: Marine Corps culture has created a common approach to leadership that inadequately safeguards the welfare, morale, and spirit of Marines. An emphasis on servant leadership would enable leaders to protect the welfare of Marines while realigning the Corps with its spiritual heritage.

Discussion: Throughout history, the Corps has relied on a sense of spirit to foster cohesion and enhance commitment. Marine Corps culture began to change during the interwar period when the Corps was routinely forced to justify its existence as a necessary, viable, and a separate military organization. The organizational culture that resulted from a constant fear of disbandment created a paranoia that made it difficult for leaders to safeguard the morale and spirit of their Marines. In time, an institutional narrative formed that suggested the legitimacy of the Corps was based primarily on superior performance. To maintain a constant state of superior performance, the Marine Corps prioritized mission accomplishment in a manner that was not in keeping with its spiritual heritage. Moreover, the newly established organizational priority created disconnected leaders who failed to safeguard their Marine's spiritual foundation. Eventually, the 'mission first' message resonated throughout the Corps, creating new norms and less effective leadership. As the Marine Corps adapts to evolving operating environments, increasing enemy capabilities, and a wider array of global threats, this problem will only worsen in the years to come.

Conclusion: The prioritization of mission accomplishment conditions leaders to pursue mission success at the expense of the morale and spirit of their subordinates. A leader's failure to protect the morale and spirituality of Marines can lead to combat ineffectiveness, mental health deficits, deplorable actions, and/or internal injuries. Without the appropriate morale or spiritual level, a Marine loses that intangible inner force that inspires a disregard for fear, hardship, or danger in pursuit of an objective perceived to be greater than oneself.

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Preface

This research project establishes a connection between Marine Corps culture and mission-oriented leadership. Mission-oriented leadership is problematic since it is a departure from the principles of leadership established by the 13th Commandant of the Marine Corps. General John Lejeune was selected as the leadership benchmark because his views on leadership have been republished in almost every Marine Corps leadership publication for over fifty years. Within this research report, I established a link between General Lejeune's leadership principles and servant leadership. It is my assertion that cultural norms since the interwar period led to a departure from the Lejeuneian principles. Mission-oriented leadership had a deleterious influence on the morale and spirituality of subordinates overtime. I proposed an emphasis on servant leadership as a means of enabling Marine leaders to protect the welfare of subordinates while realigning with their spiritual heritage.

I initially became interested in this subject matter while making final preparations for a promotion board. Realizing that a failure to be selected for promotion would result in an expedient separation from the Marine Corps, I subconsciously prioritized mission accomplishment over morale of my subordinates. At the time, I was assigned to a high tempo unit that was known to be career enhancing for those who performed well. In over twenty years in the Marine Corps, I had never been the type of Marine that craved recognition or advancement. While preparing for a promotion, I briefly lost sight of what was important. Unfortunately, I was not the only leader whose career ambitions jeopardized the wellbeing of young Marines. I now realize how common it is for leaders to become preoccupied with individual interest at the expense of subordinate welfare. I was disappointed by what I discovered and set out to learn more about the topic in hopes of finding solutions.

I would like to thank the Marine Corps University family for supporting me during this project. Special thanks to my thesis committee for the vital role they played in mentoring and advising me. To Commander Maurice Buford, who shared his wisdom, encouragement, and positive energy during the entire process. To Dr. Rebecca Johnson, whose dedication, support and patience helped me turn this thesis into something I'm proud of. Many thanks to my wife Shereen, and son Eli, whose love and sacrifice allowed me to achieve this goal. Finally, and most importantly, I'd like to thank God for giving me the strength and stamina to see this project to the end.

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Introduction

Throughout Marine Corps history, aggressive leadership and a refusal to entertain defeat under any circumstances have characterized the symbolic representation of a Marine.¹ Despite a constant fear of being disbanded, Marines developed a sense of pride that stems from a shared sense of hardship. Through each challenge, Marines have recognized the influence that spiritual heritage plays in maintaining the high moral character and strength necessary to succeed during battle or hardship. The successes of the past 242 years had allowed the Marine Corps to be ready when America was most vulnerable. However, the Marine Corps' cultural priorities changed from service to fellow Marine, to mission accomplishment at all cost. The ensuing mindset among leaders established norms that derived from a belief that the existence of the corps was fragile. The central research question of this paper probes to determine the following: "has the culture of the Marine Corps created leaders who fail to safeguard the morale, spirit, and welfare of their Marines?" In an effort to explore this research question, this paper will examine the following: 1) the extent in which culture has influenced the cognition of leadership, 2) the behavioral consequences of organizational leadership, 3) deviation from the founding principles of Marine Corps leadership, and 4) the potential cultural influence of servant leadership. This paper advances the idea that Marine Corps culture has created a common approach to leadership that inadequately safeguards the morale and spirit of Marines. It is hypothesized that an emphasis on servant leadership would enable Marine leaders to protect the welfare of subordinates while realigning with their spiritual heritage.

Background

During the interwar period, government efforts to reduce the overall size of the armed forces identified the Marine Corps as a candidate for disbandment or reorganization into the Army.² The common perspective amongst elected officials was that the Marine Corps did not provide a unique military capability that justified its continued existence as an independent organization.³ By the beginning of the Vietnam War, the Marine Corps had transformed itself into America's first to fight and solidified itself as a separate organization.⁴ Unfortunately, the scars from decades battling to remain relevant have had a lasting impact on the cultural leadership of the Corps. Today, much of what is observable within the Marine Corps' organizational culture may be the result of a constant fear of disbandment.⁵

The cultural development of the Marine Corps was based on a combination of paranoia and a desire to be viewed as the best. In time, an institutional narrative formed that suggested the legitimacy of the Corps was primarily based on superior performance. To maintain a constant state of superior performance, the Marine Corps prioritized mission accomplishment in a manner that was detrimental to a Marine's fighting spirit. This cultural message, which was created to ensure organizational survival, created a mindset that prioritized mission accomplishment over protecting the welfare and spirit of subordinate Marines. The 'mission first' message resonated throughout the Corps, creating new norms and a culture characterized by mission accomplishment.⁶

The Marine Inner Spirit

The spirit of the individual Marine has been largely responsible for organizational success. Marine Corps spirituality has had a similar impact in bonding Marines together in a system of shared beliefs.⁷ Throughout its history, the Marine Corps has relied on a sense of

spirit to foster community and enhance commitment. Marines often state that it is their knowledge that their comrades are relying on them that pushes them past their perceived limits. Marines, who served in the early days of the Corps, described the Corps as a way of life. A Marine's morale or inner spirit produces the courage that enables mission success and should, therefore, be safeguarded. Sun Tzu describes morale as the spirit of a warrior and the foundation of strength. The tactical advantage will favor the opposing force if an attack occurs on a unit with low morale. Baron de Jomini views unit morale as both the catalyst and prerequisite for decisive victory.⁸ He views morale as a key element of spirit. Protecting the welfare of Marines begins with taking care of the inner spirit (i.e. morale) of Marines and ensuring that they are physically and mentally strong. Morale is a state of mind that can influence a Marine's ability to maintain an expeditionary mindset and is observable in a Marine's understanding of a mission or cause. It is the enthusiasm held by a leader. Karl von Clausewitz describes morale and spirit as critical elements of warfare that prove decisive during combat engagements.⁹

Without the appropriate morale level, a unit loses that intangible force that inspires a disregard for fear, hardship, or danger in pursuit of an objective perceived to be greater than the organization.¹⁰ Spirituality is defined as "a person's pursuit to connect to something or someone beyond him or herself as a means of making meaning or significance."¹¹ The obtained meaning is what allows a Marine to find purpose and cope on and off the battlefield. Spirituality, which differs from religion, includes values, feelings, and aspirations.

The values associated with the Corps' spiritual heritage are what enable high levels of performance via a shared ideology.¹² Morale and spirituality are the elements of warfare that foster an individual's sense of belonging. A warrior's spirituality is difficult to sustain if a Marine feels disconnected from his brothers-in-arms.¹³ During combat, spirituality can prove

fatal when neglected or left unattended. A degradation or loss of spirit renders it difficult to sustain the will to resist the opposition, cope with combat stress, or sustain overall effort. Jomini posits that a significantly smaller force would easily defeat a numerically superior force when the military spirit was at a high level.¹⁴

The Role of the Inner Spirit

Cultural spirituality became the compass that informed behavior and allowed Marines to discern what was within the parameters of acceptable behavior. The Corps monastic spiritual culture has served well, ensuring survival, and inspiring the will to fight. It serves as a constant reminder of a Marine's duty and obligation to his fellow Marine. Eventually, the Marine spirit becomes a source of strength for those who served.¹⁵ Gerald Averill, a World War II veteran, once stated, "To the Marine, the Corps is his religion, his reason for being. He cannot be committed up to a point. For him, involvement is total. He believes implicitly that he must live up to those epics of physical and moral courage established by those who preceded him. . . . His is an unsworn oath, an unspoken promise, a conviction that he must never betray the trust of his comrades and that his individual safety, his very life must be secondary to the attainment of the unit's assigned objective."¹⁶

Spiritual connectivity facilitates an individual's willingness to place the needs of others ahead of personal interest. In 2004, Corporal Jason Dunham jumped on the grenade to protect several members of his team.¹⁷ Corporal Dunham's decision to risk his life to protect the welfare of his Marines stemmed from a spiritual connectivity as opposed to a sense of obligation to mission accomplishment. During the Korean War, a wounded Private left the safety and comfort of a medical tent to assist members of his battered platoon. His spiritual connectivity to his fellow Marines inspired his actions that day. The Private returned from battle injured but refused

medical treatment when he discovered that there were Marines with worse injuries.¹⁸ The actions of the Marines mentioned above were inspired by a sense of spiritual obligation versus a mission-oriented obligation.

The spiritual health of a Marine has a significant influence on his interaction with leadership, peers, and the outside world. Spirituality, in conjunction with morale, allows a Marine to develop a sense of connection to an assigned unit. The connection between morale and spirituality is what influences a Marine's performance, behavior, cognitive process, emotional makeup, and confidence. Marines with high morale levels are likely to become committed to accomplishing organizational objections. These Marines feel empowered and are ready to sacrifice for the good of the institution. In contrast, Marines with low morale levels embody feelings of frustration and confusion. Low morale is an indication of a neglected spirit and a mentally drained Marine. These Marines are combat ineffective and have a negative impact on mission readiness. Additionally, to facilitate replenishment, a low-level Marine engages in self-centered behavior. Finally, Marines with medium-level morale have a diminished ability to participate effectively in organizational endeavors. These Marines are cautious, guarded and are always attempting to understand what caused their current state. Their preoccupation with seeking answers prevents them from being effective. Constantly seeking answers results in unpredictable behavior that mentally drains the individual Marine. Consequently, Marines with medium level morale react to situations instead of demonstrating initiative. Once morale reaches the medium level, it will either move to a low or high level depending on environmental stimulation. Appendix-1 is a graphical depiction of the relationship between spirituality and low, medium, and high-level morale.

Cultural Impact

Marine culture created a sense of commitment and togetherness that transcends individuality resulting in a newly formed collective identity.¹⁹ Marines have fought hard to preserve their cultural identity and regard it as a form of power that shields them in battle and during times of peace.²⁰ The beliefs that derived from cultural identity impact the behavior and unconscious thought of Marines.²¹ These beliefs have established a cognitive framework and self-concept that provided its members with a sense of identity and understanding that ultimately influenced their decision-making and behavior.²² At times, the cultural identity and perceived pressure to succeed has caused Marines to make poor choices or engaged in undesirable behaviors. Additionally, the thoughts and rationale associated with the pressure deriving from cultural identity have caused leaders to sacrifice the wellbeing of their Marines to climb the organizational ladder.

The cognitive process associated with Marine culture has often created unintended friction or consequences. While Marine culture has generated cohesion, community, devotion, and commitment, it linked a service member's self-worth to success on the battlefield. Marines who did not perform to expectation experienced high levels of shame or other forms of internal injuries. An internal injury is defined as "damage to individual's conception of themselves, other people, important institutions, or the divine resulting from betrayal of deeply held values and belief."²³ During combat, internal injuries or depleted morale impact mission accomplishment and should therefore not be viewed as secondary considerations.

A spiritual injury is a specific internal wound that occurs as part of a Marine's inner world.²⁴ It is a Marine's inner spirit versus an unrealistic adherence to mission accomplishment that allows him to win during battle by pushing past perceived limits. Unaddressed spiritual

issues combined with continued exposure to stressful environments can shatter an individual's inner core.²⁵ A leader's ability to maintain the morale and spirit of a unit is essential to combat effectiveness.²⁶ Leaders jeopardize a unit's long-term success if they fail to consider their subordinates' morale and spirit.

Although spiritual injuries are a relatively unexplored concept, the necessity for a leader to understand the phenomenon cannot be understated. Lieutenant General Paul Van Riper underscored this point stating that "an injured Marine is lost to the force, whether the injury is physical or psychological."²⁷ Similarly, General James Mattis warned leaders that neglecting the spiritual well-being of themselves or their subordinates would result in negative consequences. Moreover, he held that an individual's spirituality and cognition working together in concert allows a Marine to perform at a high level.²⁸

In 1943, the Commandant of the Marine Corps stated that war is 80 percent mind and spirit.²⁹ Spiritual readiness fosters the internal resilience that enables Marines to accomplish their mission and cope with the harsh realities of war. A Marine's spiritual reservoir is a source of strength during difficult times. Hence, troop welfare was originally a leader's effort to replenish a Marine's spiritual reservoir before it is emptied. Mission accomplishment is virtually impossible if Marines break due to an empty reservoir. Depleted spirituality is associated with undesired combat related behavior such as hesitation and indifference. Similarly, a lack of spirituality produces counterproductive thoughts such as hopelessness and uncertainty.

The impact of degraded morale and spirit can be as significant as a physical casualty. Combat related spiritual injuries can lead to psychological, behavioral, cognitive, emotional, or spiritual distress.³⁰ Spiritual injuries can cause a Marine to alienate himself from his team, endanger his sense of control, and threaten his ability to recover. During combat, service

members remain at a heightened level of alert for extended periods, which eventually cause psychological injuries. According to a 2010 report, which documents Department of Defense statistics, 14 percent of service members experienced mental health problems, upon returning home, 31 percent suffered various impairments, and over 50 percent experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or depression.³¹ The ensuing inner struggle to reconcile anxiety, doubt, and uncertainty associated with internal injuries could have a deleterious impact on an individual or unit. The trauma and stress experienced during combat erodes the core of spirituality producing various emotions (e.g. rage, fear, guilt).³² Consequently, Marines are taxed emotionally in a manner that is foreign to them.

The Onset of Mission-Oriented Leadership

The cultural prioritization of mission accomplishment created mission-oriented leaders who were less likely to safeguard the morale, spirit, and welfare of their Marines.³³ The mission-oriented leader's preoccupation with accomplishing mission related objectives distracted from his ability to care for subordinates. Overtime, Marine leaders came to care more about accomplishing the mission than ensuring the overall welfare of their subordinates.³⁴ Eventually, the Corps' culture produced an unacceptable gap between leaders and subordinates. Morale mistakenly became associated with things that were "nice to have" but not as relevant to success. Furthermore, the measure of success became a leader's ability to be promoted or gain selection for command. In the process of becoming an elite global force of first responders, the Corps devalued the role morale plays in safeguarding a Marine spirit and morale.³⁵

The impact of mission-oriented leadership is still prevalent in modern day Marine Corps since the idea of failure is unacceptable to Marines. In 1997, General Charles Krulak stated that success is "in our heritage, in our blood-we don't fail...Everyone knows Marines don't fail."³⁶

The extreme emphasis on success continues to make mission accomplishment the Marine Corps primary leadership objective. Consequently, there is still a correlation between success, mission accomplishment, and leadership. The aversion for failure has resulted in many leaders adopting a zero defect mentality. The zero defect mentality has degraded many leader's ability to identify with pre-interwar goals.³⁷ The zero defects mentality, however, is at odds with both effective leadership and effective followership.³⁸ It produces a lack of concern for the welfare of subordinates and an over emphasis on career ambitions.³⁹ Furthermore, leaders with zero defect mentalities become so focused on mission accomplishment that they develop into micromanagers who are intolerant of subordinate mistakes.⁴⁰ According to General Walter Boomer, "the zero defect syndrome is an insidious disease that robs people of initiative and courage. It demands perfection instead of mere excellence...It creates a military organization more interested in statistics than truth, appearance than reality, form than substance, and inspection results than true capability."⁴¹ Lastly, the over emphasis on mission accomplishment as observed in leaders with zero defect syndrome, breeds irresponsible behavior and erodes senior-subordinate relationships.

Consequences of Mission-Oriented Leadership

Mission-oriented leadership causes a leader to prioritize goals ahead of subordinate welfare resulting in an increase of undesired consequences. This type of leader is primarily concerned with results, status, personal image, and becoming the 'lead dog' within an organization. Their commitment to the institutional objectives are limited to that which affects fitness evaluations or advances his personal agenda. Their self-indulgence prevents them from becoming totally invested in understanding the needs of subordinates. Mission-orientated

leaders share the characteristics of 'me- first leaders' rendering them less likely to be first on a hostile beachfront or ensure the wellbeing of subordinates.⁴²

The mission-oriented approach to leadership does not embody Lejeuneian leadership principles which ultimately lead to mistrust within a junior-senior relationship. This type of leadership has the potential to become problematic given its potential to erode interpersonal relationships or morale within a unit. The bond between senior and subordinate, which is often the catalyst for mission success, never materializes within relationships characterized by mistrust. Consequently, the Marines involved are not able to work together efficiently, placing lives at risk and jeopardizing mission effectiveness. Mistrust, anger, resentment, and disengagement are routinely the consequences of a failure to develop a productive relationship.

Mission-oriented leadership is often associated with a lack of intimacy that reduces a leader's ability to affect change or influence the behavior and thoughts of subordinates.⁴³ Subordinates will not submit to the will of a leader when a lack of intimacy and common understanding characterizes the senior-subordinate relationship.⁴⁴ Mission-oriented leadership not only degrades the junior-senior relationship, but it does also little to bind them together in a mutual pursuit of organizational objectives. This approach to leadership is based on a business-like, mutual exchange that places little emphasis on safeguarding an enduring relationship. The authority associated with mission-oriented leadership derives from rank as opposed to relational influence. Consequently, subordinate compliance is motivated by an expectation of reward or desire to avoid punishment versus trust and respect.

In a haste to be viewed as effective, mission-oriented leaders create spiritually bankrupt subordinate leaders who are less capable of calling upon their warrior spirit. The initiative lost when Marines are not in touch with their warrior spirit makes it difficult to create battlefield

success that could later be exploited. Instead, mission-oriented leadership increases the friction and complexity of mission objectives while sending spiritually neglected Marines to operate in dangerous in combat environments.

The Essence of Leadership

Lejeuneian Principles of Leadership

A Marine's effectiveness and endurance despite harsh conditions is largely predicated on a leader's ability to address the morale deficits or spiritual conflicts that exist within each Marine. Such a well-rounded approach to leadership would address the physical, mental, and spiritual components of morale, while increasing unit esprit de corps in the process. In 1921, General John Lejeune articulated a holistic approach to leadership that can be described as service based. According to Lejeune, a leader must "put himself in the place of those whom he would lead; he must have a full understanding of their thoughts, their attitude, their emotions, their aspirations, and their ideals; and he must embody in his/her own character the virtues which he would instill into the hearts of his/her followers."⁴⁵

General Lejeune held that the nature of a senior-subordinate relationship should be based on the characteristics of the father-son bond.⁴⁶ The Marine Corps has since defined leadership as "the sum of those qualities of intellect, human understanding, and moral character that enables a person to inspire and to control a group of people successfully."⁴⁷ Several hundred years earlier, Sun Tzu describes successful leaders as individuals who regarded soldiers as their children in order to maximize potential and effectiveness.⁴⁸ He held that in return for ensuring their well-being subordinates unconsciously support leaders until death. Sun Tzu was describing a servant or care based approach to leadership that understands the connection between superior performance and troop welfare.

General Lejeune selected the father-son bond to describe the ideal senior-subordinate relationship since the concept is based on love and compassion. Love is manifested through acts of service in response to the various needs of others.⁴⁹ An act of service often requires a Marine to make sacrifices for the greater good. Genuine sacrifice and service to others cannot exist outside the presence of love.⁵⁰ Love, as the basis of service, would therefore be a prerequisite for the development of a senior-subordinate relationship that emulates the father-son bond. Without love, establishing meaningful relationships or effective leadership style is an overwhelmingly challenging task.⁵¹ Spirituality, which facilitates effective leadership, is also a product of love. According to Stephen Post, “meaningful spirituality is shaped by love, and any spiritual transformation that is not shaped by love is suspect.”⁵² By loving their subordinates, leaders discover the measure of effectiveness associated with service to others.⁵³ Hence, the history of Marine Corps excellence and pride is deeply rooted in a tradition of service and love.⁵⁴

Servant Leadership

What Is Servant Leadership

The servant leader is committed to serving the needs of others and actively seeks opportunities to enhance interpersonal relationships. Servant leadership emphasizes persuasion rather than control or the threat of punishment.⁵⁵ Servant leaders are conscious nurturers of the spirit who care more about the well-being of their subordinates than personal grandiosity. Servant leadership begins with an exploration and commitment to understanding the dynamics of human nature. A servant leader looks at situations and tasks from the perspective of his subordinates to understand their needs, emotions, aspirations, and mental state.

From a subordinate’s perspective, effective leadership is characterized by the sacrifice and service associated with servant leadership.⁵⁶ The servant leader prioritizes the welfare and

spirit of their subordinates, which ultimately resonates throughout the ranks. Consequently, there are very few limits to the task effort a subordinate would put forth to accomplish a task from a servant type leader. Hence, if leaders hope to maintain high levels of morale or develop followers that are willing to sacrifice for the good of a unit, they must demonstrate a willingness to serve subordinates regardless of personal cost. During the American Civil War, General Robert E. Lee's devotion to the welfare and needs of the soldiers entrusted to him strengthened his connection to them. His regard for his subordinates "produced in them something akin to the idolatry of youth for greatness."⁵⁷ By serving his subordinates, he developed soldiers so committed to him and the mission that on occasion they refused to fight until he removed himself from harm's way.⁵⁸ Ultimately, the environment a servant leader fosters creates committed subordinates who are connected to strategic objectives and would act regardless of the personal sacrifice. Servant leaders display a tremendous degree of concern for their subordinates' needs, performance, and professional development. As mentors, servant leaders create a climate that allows subordinates to tap into unrealized potential while inspiring a sense of commitment that allows them to succeed under dire conditions. The relationships that emerge are intimate and meaningful, which strengthen beliefs in the institution's objectives. When a subordinate's beliefs and goals align with leaders, the subordinate can experience a high degree of satisfaction and cohesion.

Shortfalls of Non-Servant Leadership

The shortcomings of non-servant leadership are exacerbated during stressful situations and times of difficulty. Non-servant leaders are often the single point of failure, and their subordinates do not exude the traditional warrior spirit. In the fall of 2005, Lieutenant Colonel Tom Kunk deployed the 1-502nd Infantry battalion to Southern Baghdad, in support of

Operation Iraqi Freedom. During his deployment, Kunk adhered to a non-servant leadership approach because he failed to understand the importance of the subordinate senior relationship.⁵⁹ His leadership style was excessively demanding, harsh, oppressive, and task focused with little regard for the welfare of his subordinates. Lieutenant Colonel Kunk's inflexible mission-oriented approach to leadership created a deleterious command climate that severely degraded the performance of his battalion.⁶⁰ Lieutenant Colonel Kunk compromised the long-term success of his command for absolute control and the efficiency that is initially associated with a non-servant leadership style. Unfortunately, when highly motivated, experienced subordinates are subjected to inflexible leadership for an extended duration the results are often catastrophic. Lieutenant Colonel Kunk's approach was not motivated by a desire to safeguard the long-term health of his unit or the coach, mentor, develop approach advocated by the founder of servant leadership.⁶¹ Instead, the non-servant leadership approach Lieutenant Colonel Kunk utilized was inspired by the desire for individual success at the expense of his subordinates.

An Effective Tool for Change

Servant leadership is an effective tool for change because it maximizes the potential in others. Servant leaders serve as shepherds who encourage and guide their followers from the point of friction. Their presence instills confidence in subordinates who realize their leader is safeguarding their interest.⁶² Healthy or unhealthy organizational culture stems from leadership or a lack thereof.⁶³ A unit generally assumes the traits and characteristics of its leader.⁶⁴ Within an unhealthy, dysfunctional, or failing organization climate, there is an abundance of leaders who are focused on "looking good for their boss rather than striving to do the right thing for the people they lead."⁶⁵

The servant leader's emphasis on the needs and development of subordinates facilitates positive change within an organization. A servant leader prioritizes service, which is manifested in a desire to lead predicated on "a deep belief in the unlimited potential of each person."⁶⁶ It is a servant leader's belief in subordinates and willingness to prioritize their needs that create a shared sense of purpose.⁶⁷ The end state is the development of a spiritually whole subordinate who prefers to "live a life dedicated to an idea or a cause...than lead a life of aimless diversion."⁶⁸ In contrast, individuals who regard themselves as leaders first are typically motivated by a need for power, prestige or material possessions.⁶⁹

The Requirement for Servant Leadership

The responsibilities entrusted to Marine leaders require them to adopt many of the attributes of servant leadership. The authority associated with rank, position, and status within an organization belong to the subordinates a leader serves. Servant leadership reduces the development of self-serving behavior that prevents leaders from addressing the needs of their subordinates. Non-servant leaders cannot adequately safeguard the morale and spirituality of their subordinates because of their inability to serve. Moreover, a non-servant leader's lack of understanding regarding who he serves deprives him of purpose and effectiveness.⁷⁰

According to General Dwight Eisenhower, "When Napoleon started to fight for Napoleon, and not France, France fell...Battlefield failure awaits the selfish leader."⁷¹ Sun Tzu posits that "The general who advances without coveting fame and retreats without fearing disgrace, whose only thought is to protect his country and do good service for his sovereign, is the jewel of the kingdom."⁷² These statements support the assertion that servant leadership is necessary to safeguard the welfare and spiritual integrity of subordinates.

An effective leader realizes that a singular focus on mission accomplishment is unsustainable and will not result in sustained superior performance. A leader must develop a compassionate approach to mission accomplishment that recognizes that protecting subordinate morale and spirituality simultaneously addresses mission accomplishment. Such an approach influences subordinates to contribute their hearts, mind, and spirit to the good of the team.⁷³ If a leader can “Teach, train, guide, and take care of your Marines, including their families to the degree that you can, and they will charge right up the enemy’s gun barrel for you in a moment’s notice and never ask why.”⁷⁴ Ultimately, compassion is what separates management from leadership. Management reflects what an individual does whereas effective leadership is a reflection of who an individual is.⁷⁵

The Benefits of Servant Leadership

Servant leaders are deeply committed to making a difference in the lives of others and to promoting the growth of individuals within their organization. A servant leader recognizes the tremendous responsibility to do everything possible to nurture the personal and professional growth of subordinates.⁷⁶ These leaders credit the success of the unit to the efforts of their subordinates and accept responsibility for unit failure.⁷⁷

Servant leaders demonstrate a commitment to Marines that will continue long after any given mission is completed. This enduring commitment to Marines allows servant leaders to develop relationships and the influence that enables long-term success. An enduring commitment enables servant leaders to remain connected with the present day concerns of their subordinates. It also allows them to leverage past experiences and to understand the long-term consequences of their actions.⁷⁸ Consequently, servant leaders are deeply committed to the growth of each individual within their unit. Through their commitment, servant leaders provide

an example of an effective attribute of leadership while creating an environment that fosters morale and enhances spirituality.

The spiritual connection fostered by servant leadership fuels a warrior's inner strength and is a key element of mission accomplishment. This spiritual connection propels Marines to surrender their individuality to experience a deep sense of community. Placing mission accomplishment before the overall welfare of subordinates may result in leadership that degrades the spiritual connection upon which senior-subordinate relationships are built. The interaction between servant leaders and subordinates occurs in a manner that raises the motivation and morale of all involved. The confidence and level of respect gained enhances cooperation and adherence to institutional values.

Confidence in leadership is a prerequisite for high morale and a spiritually connected senior-subordinate relationship.⁷⁹ Through their example, servant leaders earn the confidence and respect of their subordinates, which leads to increases in morale. They develop subordinates who believe in themselves, their mission, and are more likely to sacrifice for their unit. When these subordinates are placed in a combat environment, confidence in their leadership and high levels of morale play a key role in unit performance. Historically, military units demonstrating a high level of esprit de corps and morale have frequently produced the best results.

At its foundation, servant leadership is based on the notion that influence is a product of a spiritual connection forged through trust. There is recognition of trustworthiness, selflessness, and concern for others associated with servant leadership. The servant leader strives to create a relational foundation with subordinates based on mutual trust and respect. The likelihood of fulfilling mission objectives increases when members experience a feeling of mutual trust, openness, and respect towards one another. Servant leadership effectively utilizes the spiritual

aspect of trust to inspire troops towards mission accomplishment. Corporal Eugene Sledge, a World War II veteran, attributed his unit's battlefield success and endurance to the trust and connection young Marines had in each other and their leadership. The level of trust that exists within a unit is a “primary factor in how people work together, listen to one another, and build effective relationships.”⁸⁰ Through trust stemming from servant leadership, Marine leaders gain credibility and influence within their unit. As trust in leadership increases, a Marine’s overall commitment level intensifies. Commitment and a belief in leadership inspire Marines to place the common good above self-interest and to dedicate themselves to enhancing combat related skills.⁸¹

A senior leader’s demonstration of servant leadership serves as a model of behavior subordinates can emulate. Because servant leaders are trusted, admired, and respected by subordinates they are likely to attempt to emulate their leaders. In doing so, Marines observe and learn behaviors or habits that increase their potential to success. Competent and mature Marines are required to successfully utilize a decentralized approach to leadership or mission accomplishment.

Servant leaders tend to enjoy a greater degree of credibility with subordinates in comparison to mission-oriented leaders. This is primarily due to the servant leader's desire to place the needs of subordinates ahead of his or her needs. Furthermore, the personal nature of servant leadership enhances a subordinate's belief in the willingness of a leader to share risk, hardship, and any would-be rewards. The inspirational example of servant leaders enhances individual motivation and esprit de corps within the unit. The leader’s commitment to his subordinates ultimately encourages subordinates to view the institution as a long-term option.

Perceived Limitations

The idea that servant leaders lack the fortitude and assertiveness to be successful during crisis or emergencies derives from a lack of understanding of the meaning of strength.⁸² A servant leader's steadfast resolve during a crisis derives from their spiritual foundation and deeply rooted sense of commitment. Essentially, the servant leader's character is what makes him or her reliable during crisis or emergencies. Since the founding of the Marine Corps, the character that derived from spirituality has spearheaded Marine Corps success during times of adversity.⁸³ General Charles Krulak punctuated this point when he stated that the Corps' challenge is to exist as men and women who consistently represent the highest moral character.⁸⁴ The servant leader's character is beyond reproach because it is not tied to self-interest. Such leaders are effective during a crisis because their inner foundation allows them to fight with a 'happy heart and strong spirit.'

The uncertainty of combat and the evolving nature of military engagements render adaptive, flexible, servant leaders a source of strength. During times of crisis, a servant leader's natural inclination is to ensure the wellbeing of others, which often comes at the expense of self-interest. The desire to aid others despite hardship enables a servant leader to succeed in a chaotic environment. A servant leader's diminished concern for self-interest provides them with the freedom to avoid being concerned with the consequences of potential failure. General Patton posited that the "courageous man is the man who forces himself, in spite of his fear, to carry on."⁸⁵ General Patton is describing an inner strength required to diminish self-interest in favor of serving others.

Findings, Summary, and Conclusion

Leadership and the art of leading subordinates require the ability to demonstrate compassion for those led and a willingness to work diligently to safeguard the morale of followers.⁸⁶ Degraded morale contributes to the fog of war and the overall friction associated with combat.⁸⁷ A commander who fails to recognize the importance of morale is one that will ultimately fail in combat.⁸⁸ Commanders and leaders can best serve their subordinates by knowing and meeting their needs. These needs generally include a requirement for confidence in one's self, unit, and leadership. Furthermore, Marines need to know that their efforts are connected to a cause that is just and larger than any given individual.

The Marine Corps adheres to a demanding warrior culture that requires loyalty and boldness to foster effectiveness while ensuring survival. Marines view the Corps as a brotherhood that requires an unwavering commitment to mission accomplishment. The true strength of Marines derived from this spiritual brotherhood.⁸⁹ Unfortunately, culture ultimately required Marines to prioritize the needs of the mission and institution ahead of personal interest.⁹⁰

Ensuring the well-being of Marines will require a commitment from future Marine leaders to safeguard the morale and spirit of their Marines. Welfare and morale should not be mistaken as an undisciplined attempt to promote comfort while reducing hardship. Instead, it should be viewed as a leader's effort to help subordinates cope with the stress related to the human dimension of combat. Ensuring the wellbeing of Marines will require leaders to create an environment where subordinates can replenish their inner spirit in order to remain whole. It will mean preparing them to perform in any situation under the most severe conditions. During the interwar period, the decision to prioritize mission accomplishment over morale and spirituality

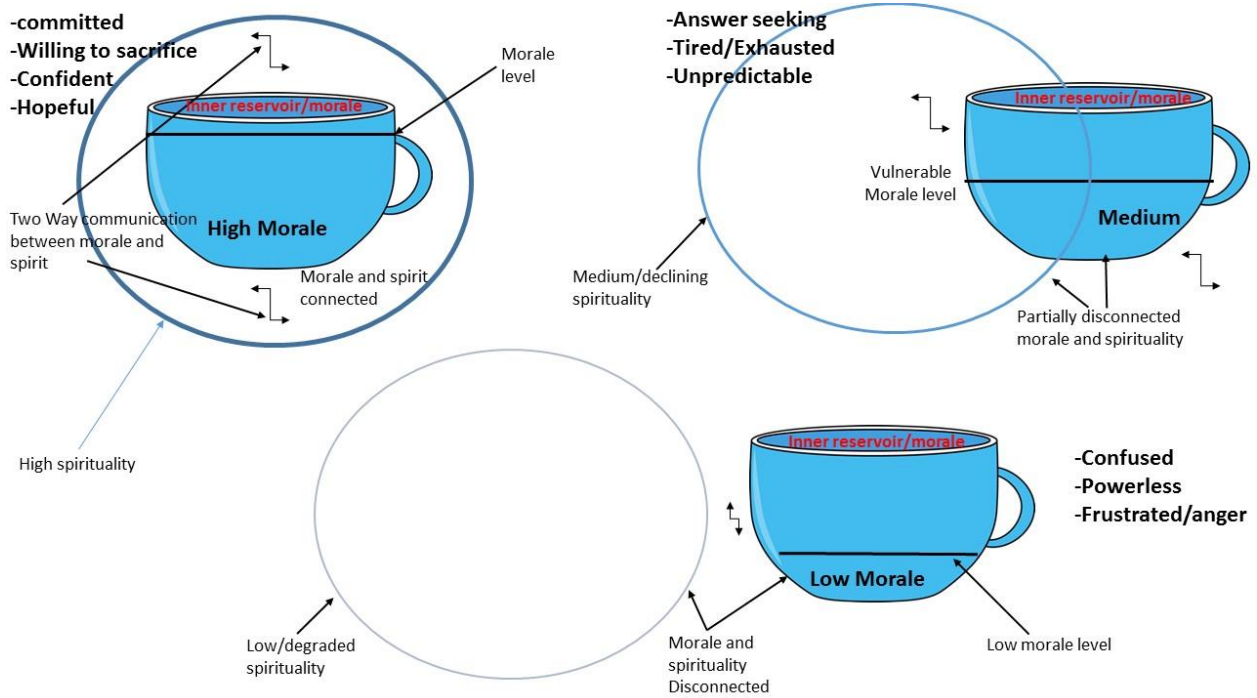
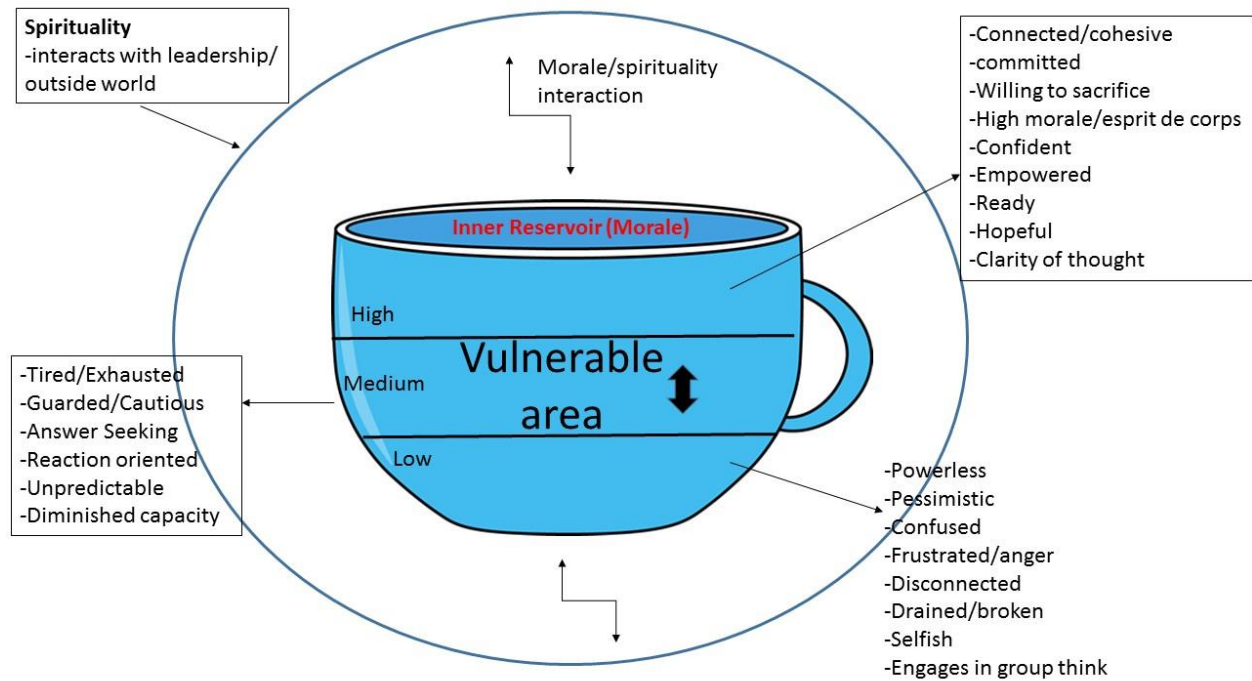
was a moral temptation mistakenly seen as moral dilemma. Furthermore, it disregarded the value associated with caring for troops leaving the Corps most valuable asset (i.e. Marines) unprotected and vulnerable.

The Marine Corps' success has been attributable to an alignment between ensuring the wellbeing of subordinates, spirituality, and institutional values. Strong leaders are able to embody compassion, morality, and spirituality as part of their approach. Neglected spirituality can fracture the relationship between the inner core and the outside world producing feeling of helplessness and toxic emotions. Although discipline is often viewed as the glue that forms cohesion and binds a unit together, morale and spirituality enables service members to accomplish their mission.

Marine Corps culture has created a common approach to leadership that inadequately safeguards the welfare, morale, and spirit of Marines. Furthermore, the Corps unrealistic approach to mission accomplishment has degraded the spiritual readiness of the Marines within its ranks. As the Marine Corps adapts to evolving operating environments, increasing enemy capabilities, and a wider array of global threats, these problems may worsen in the years to come. The servant leadership approach represents a solution to the challenges associated with balancing the Marine Corps leadership objectives while safeguarding the morale and welfare of subordinates.

Appendix 1

Spiritual/morale Conceptual Framework



Notes

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⁹⁰ James A. Warren, *American Spartans: The U.S. Marines: A Combat History from Iwo Jima* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 13.