

# Improving the Enlisted Assignments Process

Immediate recommendations

by 1stSgt Daniel Best

From an individual Marine’s perspective, the Marine Corps enlisted assignment process for staff noncommissioned officers (SNCOs) is fraught with uncertainty and a general lack of autonomy over one’s own career. At no point, from the initial contact with a monitor to executing the issued orders, does a senior enlisted Marine have anything more than a cursory level of involvement. Though the Marine Corps has an ambitious plan to transfer the entire process to a web-based system, anything substantive is still years away. Simply stated, our organizational desire to reach perfection is stifling beneficial progress now. There are simple but effective steps that, if implemented, would have an immediate and measurable positive effect on combat readiness as defined by the Marine Corps personnel assignment policy.

Senior enlisted Marines’ disappointing level of involvement when deciding their next assignment is a clear policy misstep. There needs to be an immediate disruption of the current practice by authorizing individuals to have a meaningful stake in the process. By allowing Marines to have a functional role when selecting the unit or whichever geographical location they are attempting to serve, the Marine Corps would foster an environment of collaboration vice frustration. Is there a practical reason for blatantly disregarding the needs of the individual instead of working to find a mutually beneficial solution? Specifically, at the SNCO level, these enlisted leaders should be given the full context of what assignments are open, if there are any positions that the

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monitors identify as a higher priority, and who else is rotating. This data is already available to monitors but not placed in the hands of the individuals it directly affects. Let me be clear, I know

not everyone has bad experiences with their monitors, but those stories are definitely in the minority—especially among the senior SNCO ranks. These senior enlisted Marines have earned the respect to be treated as stakeholders and not entry-level employees or the Marine Corps will continue to face difficulties with retention.

It is reasonable to assume an increase in self-determinism will be reciprocated with higher morale and a genuine appreciation for the organization which influences all other areas of their profession. Though there may be short-term benefits of assigning orders without adequately consulting the Marine executing them, there are lasting negative effects that must be considered, too. What kind of SNCOs are created when the organization is essentially condoning their mistreatment? Each of these



*Senior SNCOs should have a meaningful stake in their assignments. (Photo provided by author.)*



**Increasing ownership of their own career paths mean more complex decisions for SNCOs.**  
(Photo provided by author.)

SNCOs has made sacrifices to make it to the highest positions of the organization, and the lack of respect that some receive warrants immediate correction. How should a career SNCO respond when given a set of orders that will likely lead to a divorce, financial hardship, or

countability. This inability to report gross misconduct has created a Wild West of decision making, which is contradictory to anything else in the Marine Corps and has destructive effects on combat readiness. Lifelong military practitioners understand there is no

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missing important family milestones—especially when there is likely someone that desires those orders? Are they expected to then expound on the virtues of military life and encourage others to follow their path? Experience tells me that an engaged leader that has reaped the benefits of a healthy military career will have a far greater impact on their subordinates’ retention than any \$8,000 bonus or other hollow incentives.

The second but equally important step would be to provide a path for launching a formal complaint against a monitor or the enlisted assignments branch. The current structure allows one Marine to potentially negatively impact hundreds of others with no ac-

benefit to creating a culture that allows leaders to avoid executing official orders but there are positive effects when providing an approved channel to air real or perceived grievances. Programs like the Any Mouse for safety or Request Mast for leadership issues have had a positive influence on curbing unwanted behavior. The assignments policy has several directives that should govern how the monitors assign orders but how can an organization track success without providing an outlet for properly reporting violations?

It is imperative for our leaders to realize that having increased ownership over their career path is a prominent feature of the complex decisions made

by SNCOs. Each person must consider criteria like future career goals, their own prior experiences, guidance from mentors, and of course, family dynamics before deciding where to serve. It is unreasonable to expect anyone to care about a career more than the individual living it. The Marine Corps may begin to rebuild some of the lost confidence the current system has created by incorporating these two steps. It is a strategic imperative to begin considering how SNCOs are treated during the assignment process or there will continue to be retention issues. Each SNCO is responsible for not only completing his assigned mission but also leading and mentoring the next generation of warfighters—a duty that is sacred to most. However the current process pits the overarching values of the Marine Corps against those of the individual for a small convenience. The effects are felt in the longevity and quality of both family life and the legacy of leadership. There is no need to put SNCOs in conflict with those opposing wills, and with minor adjustments to the process, a middle ground can be reached.

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

***—38th Commandant,  
Gen Berger, Talent  
Management 2030***

