

Re-Framing the Force of the Future:

Traditions, Modernization and Talent Management Breed Success in the Information Age



From the left: Sgt Ramon Esteves, MSgt Jorge Loera, Sgt Joshua Duke, Capt Miles Essay and 1stLt Benito Escobedo gather for a photo at the reenlistment ceremony of Sgt Duke, 1st Bn, 11th Marines, 1stMarDiv, at Camp Pendleton, Calif., Feb. 8.

By Sgt Joshua E. Duke, USMC

Editor's note: The following article is the second-place winner of the 2022 Leatherneck Writing Contest. Major Richard A. "Rick" Stewart, USMC (Ret) sponsored the contest through the Marine Corps Association Foundation. Upcoming issues of Leatherneck will feature the third-place winner and honorable mention entries.

Marine Corps traditions, professionalism and ceremony have always been the primary motivating factors for potential recruits to choose the Marine Corps over other branches of the military. These same factors are what drive retention within the Corps, from skill in leadership development, to the underlying meanings held in each ceremony or uniform article, and even the stature that Marines exert while carrying themselves anywhere in the world. Civilians and Marines want to become and remain a part of The Few and the Proud. For nearly 250 years, the Marine Corps has prided itself in recruiting and retaining the best that America has to offer, training them to fight and win decisively in any climate or circumstance, and to do it with pride, honor and style. As society has changed over generations, the Marine

Corps has adapted to ensure that the best always find their way home to the Corps, and in the 21st century, change is needed again as the world and society move quickly and decisively into the information age.

The Commandant of the Marine Corps' Talent Management 2030 plan, augmenting the Force Design 2030 plan, is designed to bring the human capital within the Marine Corps into the information age by increasing focus on the skills and abilities that will be needed for America to succeed in future wars. Modernizing the Marine Corps through talent management will not hinder the physical traditions of the Marine Corps so much as it will elevate and equalize the intellectual needs and requirements for service in the most distinguished branch of America's Armed Forces. Modernization of the force does not just mean modernizing equipment, tactics and strategies to meet future threats. A large factor in force modernization includes reshaping the social structure of the force by shifting the human capital investment mindset to more accurately reflect the modern culture of

society, while maintaining and re-imaging the traditions and culture that separate Marines from other branches of the military. Cultural modernization of the Marine Corps can be achieved by focusing on, rather than relinquishing, the traditions and cultural history of the Corps, while relating those traditions and values to modern-day needs within information age society.

Leadership, professionalism, fortitude, integrity, selflessness, drive. These are some of the attributes offered through service in the Marine Corps, and these attributes will inevitably result in success in any area of life that an individual chooses to pursue. Modern society desires and requires these attributes to succeed as much as every generation that has come before. Being a Marine is a mental attitude achieved through the culture of traditions and training offered in the Marine Corps, having nothing to do with being new or old, but rather a state of evolution achieved through teaching, learning and training, ultimately unlocking the greatest and most useful potential and abilities inside an individual as a unique and profound way of life. The object and purpose of the plans to redesign the Marine Corps' force in readiness are to shift the Marine Corps' mindset to include social developments in American



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Left: LtGen David Ottignon, DC, Manpower and Reserve Affairs, was a featured speaker during a luncheon as part of the MCA-hosted Force Design series at the Clubs at Quantico, Va., on March 17.

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culture that have changed in the last few decades in order for the Marine Corps to appeal to and integrate information age Americans into the most deadly fighting force on the planet.

Marine Corps traditions and values have always promised to help advance the minds and bodies of Marines to ensure that they can succeed at anything they put their minds and effort into from their personal or professional lives, to impacting communities, the nation and the world, while achieving every possible success for themselves, the Marine Corps and America.

By implementing policies that target the skills and abilities that this new information age generation has produced, the Marine Corps can effectively facilitate the transformation of the Marine Corps in accordance with the Talent Management 2030 plan, delivering traditional Marine attributes that inevitably result in success to information age Americans in this new style of cyber-based society. Using targeted recruiting and retention operations designed to integrate information age insight and talent into the Marine Corps traditions, while explaining how those traditions apply to today's society and prospects for success, the Marine Corps can effectively facilitate the transformation of the force in accordance with the Talent Management 2030 plan, which in turn ensures the success of the Force Design 2030 plan.

The Talent Management 2030 plan is not an attack on the culture or traditions of the Marine Corps, nor should it be a change that is feared by "old breed" Marines—it is a shift in mentality designed to capture the changes in society that have taken place as America moves into

the information age. The 2030 plan is a top-down effort to shift the focus of retention and recruiting from a numbers game focusing primarily on physical attributes and strength, to a more intelligent approach that recognizes intellectual skill sets needed to modernize force structure effectively to meet 21st-century challenges. The Talent Management plan refocuses the human capital priorities of the Marine Corps to expand the needs for information age warfare, while retaining and emphasizing the traditions and culture of

due to physical requirements for the opportunities. The end goal should not be for all Marines to run perfect physical and combat fitness tests, and also be experts in cyberwarfare, intelligence operations or analysis. Generally, individuals excel in one of these categories or the other, notwithstanding some exceptions that can be great at both. Under policies prior to the enactment of the Talent Management 2030 plan, Marines with these information age skills leave the Marine Corps, either to make more money, or due to a lack of career options preventing career advancements in directions that benefit the desires of the individual Marine.

Current policies also make it difficult for Marines to change career paths, which is a major reenlistment disincentive. Marines joining the service don't really know what their job is going to be until they start doing it after training, and many realize they don't like their job once they find out what it is. These Marines usually end up leaving active duty when they discover that there aren't really options for career path changes. The Talent Management 2030 initiative eliminates these problems, allowing Marines to excel in their Marine Corps careers as they progress, even if that means changing career paths. The possibility of career path change has been low due to the needs of the Marine Corps. The solution for these talented individuals prior to the enactment of the Talent Management 2030 plan has been to leave the Marine Corps, even when they truly believe in the Corps and its traditions and don't really want to leave. The Talent Management 2030 plan opens the door to Marines who continue to study and self-educate, as well as Marines who take advantage of education and advancement opportunities offered through the Marine Corps, encouraging and enabling Marines to better themselves continuously to take advantage of new career path opportunities without leaving the Marine Corps.

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the Marine Corps, to include physical training. Marines under this new plan will now not only be the most lethal force on the traditional battlefields of the past, but also the most lethal force in space and cyberspace, taking advantage of information age technologies to supplement the Total Force from robotics and artificial intelligence to high-tech weaponry designed to defeat any adversary on the planet.

The 2030 plans change policies that shift the Total Force to expand focus on the intellectual skill sets needed to fight and win on the modern battlefield, specifically to enhance areas such as cyber warfare, intelligence, and counterintelligence, among others, with specific focus on the space and cyber domains in general. Retention will be directly affected by these changes to outdated policy barriers that historically closed off opportunities to Marines with needed skills, usually



BGen Ahmed Williamson, right, discusses Talent Management with other panelists Col Ty Zagurski, USMC (Ret), left, and SgtMaj Daniel Mangrum at the Force Design luncheon at the Clubs at Quantico, Va., on March 17.

Career path opportunities combined with emphasizing Marine Corps traditions and ceremony that set Marines apart from other military branches will stabilize and improve recruiting and retention across the Corps. Marines have a unique style of leadership training that results in success in the civilian world after leaving the service, creating people who have their own initiative to get things done, for personal and organizational success, and to achieve greatness at anything they choose to do in the future. Marines are physically and mentally forged through the culture of the Marine Corps and training to hold themselves, carry themselves, and speak to people with authority and confidence. Marine Corps ceremonies—from birthday balls and funeral details, to promotions and graduations—emphasize the traditions and splendor of the Marine Corps that drives retention. Implementation of these traditions under the unique decentralized command structure of the Marine Corps shape the essence of Marines, and drive victory in warfighting.

Decentralized command is the most powerful game-changing decision advantage used in warfare, enabling action-oriented decision making to take place at the lowest levels of leadership possible while still enabling strategic level organization and planning. The Marine Corps focuses on decentralized command strategies from the first day of training throughout the entire career of every Marine, providing opportunities to lead as early as possible in order to train the minds of Marines to automatically decide and act as a force of habit in accordance with Commander's intent. The Marine Corps produces the most successful civilians in society of any branch, increasing the hireability of Marines due to leadership, management, and the action-driven skills that come from forming a habit of action. Habit of action, coupled with intentional distribution of power, creates action-oriented empowered leaders that can and have changed the tide of battle throughout history, creating advantages over centralized command adversaries and forming a sense of unity that can only come from shared authority to act.

Centralized command hinders the action of every person in a military organism, slowing down the machine, leading to inaction, and creating strategic soft spots for adversaries to exploit. Nations have been lost to inaction. Marines act. Marines are trained to decide, act and innovate. They are driven to act throughout their training, encouraged to act throughout their careers, and forced to act in order to survive and succeed in the nation's smallest and most deadly fighting force. The drive to act and innovate in any situation makes anything possible and sets Marines apart from other branches. When that drive is applied to a specific generation, this generation, action-oriented information age warriors will change the face of warfare in the 21st century, creating a decision advantage for America in every domain, from land, sea and air, to space and cyberspace. Investing in modern society through the Talent Management 2030 plan will deliver this drive to act to the next generation of warfighters, ensuring the

decentralized command mindset of the Marine Corps acts as a guiding force on the future of America. Action creates victory, and America will have victory or risk losing freedom for the world.

Guided by the advancements of the 2030 plans, the Marine Corps will permanently advance the strength of the Total Force, leveraging the talent force multiplier of information age Americans to create a decision advantage leading to success on future battlefields, particularly to address challenges in the space and cyberspace domains. Relating the Marine Corps' traditions to information age Americans, from leadership training creating action-oriented minds, to the decentralized command structure that enhances battlefield tactics and strategies, will lead to achieving and maintaining decision advantages for information age warfare. Branding this new generation of warfighters with these traditions and skills will reshape modern



MajGen Michael Borgschulte, Director, Manpower Management, center, discusses the role Talent Management plays in Force Design 2030 while SgtMaj Rafael Rodriguez, M&RA, left, and SgtMaj Ronda Kirkby, MM, right, await their turn to speak during the Force Design panel on March 17.

warfare, creating a new generation of action-oriented people driven to succeed by the nature engraved on their souls through Marine Corps training. Under the new Talent Management strategy for modern manpower management, the Marine Corps will continue to mold the minds of the future, streaming into the information age, recruiting the best and retaining the best. Always ready, always faithful.

Author's note: I would like to thank 1stLt Benito Escobedo, MSgt Jorge Loera, and Capt Miles Essay for their inspiration and confidence that led to me writing this article. They encouraged me, convinced me to submit an entry, and inspired me throughout the writing process, allowing me to talk through ideas and enhance my insight into both the topics and the organization of the article, ultimately resulting in the final product being published. Semper Fidelis.

Author's bio: Sgt Joshua E. Duke is an 0621 serving with 1st Bn, 11th Marines. He was previously an Army intel analyst, deploying in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. He has a bachelor's degree in intelligence with a concentration in counterintelligence from American Military University. 🇺🇸

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