

General Mattis' Letter to the Force

A response
by LCpl Dakota Finney

In my short time as a Marine, I have already been through several companies and schools. One constant I have noticed since day one, though, is the idea that discipline is the key to success—whether it is the discipline to remain still during formation or the discipline to make a tough choice when no one is looking. Both situations require the intestinal fortitude to do the right thing.

Discipline can produce either victory or defeat for a military force. Throughout all of the recorded history of civilization, conquest, and battles, those with discipline have dominated those without. Today, however, a lapse in discipline can be even more detrimental than in days past. The emergence of modern technologies makes it much easier for service members to be exploited or simply make mistakes that give the enemy critical information. As Gen James N. Mattis explains, Ma-

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As a young Marine, my peers and I commonly make mistakes. In fact, more often than not, we are making mistakes. However, from what I have observed, the mistakes are not the problem. Good leadership sees mistakes being made (a timeline not met, a lost piece of gear, a test failure) as a teaching moment. The mistake is explained and immediately corrected. Mistakes, in this sense, are simply misguided actions or judgment.

A lack of discipline, though, is the conscious choice to do what is wrong because it is easier. This selfish action is better for the individual but not for

play no discipline sets a precedent that communicates to the rest of the Corps what will and will not be tolerated. If a recruit at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot were to see a peer being incentive trained for misconduct of some kind, he would know to avoid similar actions that would result in the same punishment. The reactions are the same throughout the Marine Corps. Seeing a peer punished for a lack of gear security is going to lead to one double checking his own gear and being more cautious.

In the fleet and elsewhere in the Marine Corps, legal punishments for Marines who cannot maintain discipline will dissuade others from engaging in undisciplined actions and behavior. If Marines are allowed to slip, the discipline of the Marine Corps as a whole will slip.

A disciplined Marine Corps is a feared Marine Corps.

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>Editor's Note: For Gen Mattis' "The Professional Edge," see <https://mca-marines.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Professional-Edge.pdf>.



ines must remain more disciplined than our enemies in both peace and war. The discipline it takes to do the little things right—at all times—will allow us to do the big things right when the bullets start flying or in any situation in which discipline is tested. In other words, having the discipline to make one's rack first thing in the morning will instill the discipline necessary to close with and destroy the enemy.

the team. A lack of discipline has the potential to affect unit morale, performance, and cohesion and rightfully generates a swift and harsh reaction from leadership. It is not tolerated because it has a disastrous potential to spread throughout the unit. This is why Gen Mattis mentions the need to use the military justice system to stifle lack of discipline in the ranks. Punishing those individuals who dis-