

Selecting the right EOR can impact unit readiness

By Maj. William Gillespie
DEOMI Marine Corps Liaison

Appointment by MOS is a time worn procedure that may cause troops to question the value, intent of the commander's EO program.

Commanding officers are expected to successfully lead organizations in a world of unprecedented scrutiny, complexity and ambiguity. Marines participating in sexual harassment, hazing, gangs, and extremist groups have caused commanders to reduce their focus on warfighting and have also tarnished the public image of our proud Corps.

Individual Marines rely on our Core Values of honor, courage and commitment to help us navigate ill-defined landscapes. Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Charles C. Krulak stated in his "Commandant's Planning Guidance" that, "I do not intend for honor, courage, and commitment to be just words; I expect them to frame the way we live and act as Marines."

Commanding generals and commanding officers of major active commands have equal opportunity advisors to assist, advise and measure the application of our Core Values to all Marines and Sailors. In addition to sergeants major, chaplains and subordinate commanders, commanding officers at the organizational level, have equal opportunity representatives to check the azimuth of the command's route toward Core Values for everyone.

And, whereas sergeants major, chaplains and subordinate commanders are assigned to their positions by virtue of experience, training and education, what attributes qualify a Marine to be a successful EOR?

Information I have gathered from various commands indicate that the normal strategy for assigning the collateral duty of the EOR is based on the individual's primary duty as the

administration officer or non-commissioned officer-in-charge (S-1).

And although the principle of selecting Marines to fill most collateral duties is a successful time-validated process, the essence of selecting an EOR must not be lost in a rote, checklist-minded procedure: particularly since an effective EOR requires abilities, attributes and competencies not necessarily associated with a particular military occupational skill.

In fact, the essence of selecting an EOR should be based on three major factors: perceived fairness, competency, and availability to fellow Marines and Sailors.

Fairness

Marines and Sailors who are reluctant to report their problems or perceptions to the chain of command or the EOR are often compelled to remain silent. Silence will not resolve the problem; the problem is likely to fester and manifest itself as low morale, unauthorized absences, congressional inquiries or local and national media interest.

Therefore, a commander should seek an EOR who is generally perceived to be fair, impartial, and honest by junior Marines and Sailors in the command. Although all good Marine officers and staff noncommissioned officers should possess the aforementioned attributes, not all are viewed that way by the troops.

For example, since the S-1 officer is frequently assigned the collateral duty of legal officer, young Marines and Sailors might perceive the S-1 as a "punisher" instead of as a

creative problem solver. And although the EOR should not be viewed as a "victim's advocate," the EOR should be able to empathize with the alleged victim.

Competency

Publishing a letter declaring an officer or senior NCO as the battalion's EOR does not make the person competent to perform the job. Training is an integral part of the competency.

Although Marine Corps orders do not identify specific tasks required of EORs, most local equal opportunity advisors develop and administer training for EORs to address their cognizant commanding general or commanding officer's equal opportunity policy. At a minimum, an EOR should be trained to process complaints, conduct EO training, assist the EOA in measuring the command's equal opportunity (core values) climate, advise the commander on EO issues and assist the commander in managing his or her EO program.

Availability

Junior Marines and Sailors, the people who are most likely to be harassed, are often reluctant and uncomfortable with expressing complaints to a commissioned officer in the "distant command post" because there are formal and informal communication barriers that hinder the candid subordinate to senior dialogue.

For example, although I believe intuitively, that when a commander asks, "How are you doing Marine?" the commander expects an honest answer. However, I have observed that the Marine will typically give a preconditioned, "Fine Sir/Fine

Ma'am," regardless of their situation.

The EOR billet is a time consuming collateral duty. The interaction between the EOR and the troops must be more than a cursory "hello, good-bye" association. Their relationship must be built on mutual trust and confidence and nurtured over time.

An EOR with a myriad of other collateral duties may not be able to take the time to establish rapport with the troops or simply blend in the motor pool, maintenance bay or barracks.

The Informal Resolution System and the chain of command are the preferred methods of addressing EO complaints. However, a savvy EOR may be an effective alternate method of addressing complaints just in case the problem lies within the chain of command or the Marine is afraid to use the preferred method.

Commanders may increase their organization's readiness by assigning EORs that are fair, competent and available to their Marines and Sailors.