

➤ Quality of Life Commitment

DISCUSSION

The Marine Corps commitment to quality of life (QOL) stems from two simple premises – one is cultural, the other practical. The first, “Marines take care of their own,” is the foundation of the Marine Corps ethos. However, this imperative for the leadership of the Corps to provide for enhanced QOL for Marines and families is balanced by the second premise – the practical realization that the Marine Corps must achieve specific outcomes through its investments in QOL programs. Improved personal and family readiness, enhanced recruiting, and strong retention are critical to the Marine Corps ability to fulfill its assigned missions. This link between mission-accomplishment and the welfare of Marines and families is at the heart of the Corps’ efforts to improve QOL.

Over the last decade, the Marine Corps has invested extraordinary resources to increase Marine income and standard of living, revitalize housing, and enhance community services, among other QOL improvement initiatives. Without question, the living conditions for our Marines and families have improved dramatically by almost any measure. This distinct improvement in QOL has presented the Marine Corps two new and difficult challenges: (1) managing the ever-increasing QOL expectations of Marines and families that even now surpass the institution’s ability to resource and (2) ensuring that QOL investments are properly aligned to Marine Corps human resource goals.

Compounding these two challenges are the Marine Corps’ distinct demographics that set the service apart within the Department of Defense. By considerable margins, the Marines Corps is younger, more junior,

and less married than the Army, Navy, or Air Force. Almost half of all Marines hold the grades of lance corporal (E3) and below, while only about one quarter of airmen, soldiers, or sailors hold a similar grade. Two-thirds of all Marines are age 25 or younger, while no other service breaks the 50% threshold.

Such demographic differences extend to Marine families as well. Not only do we have more single service members, but our married Marines, their spouses, and their children are considerably younger on average than their Army, Navy, and Air Force counterparts. In terms of service members and families, as well as the QOL initiatives designed to support them, the Marine Corps is, and must remain, unique within the Department of Defense.

The Marine Corps is now squarely confronting the challenge of not only meeting the QOL needs of Marines and families, but also addressing their expectations. It is clear that as long as the expectations of Marines and families grow faster than the Marine Corps ability to objectively improve QOL, the service will be challenged to positively influence satisfaction, not to mention the military outcomes that QOL initiatives and programs are designed to impact. Unbounded expectations will make the Marine Corps’ ultimate impact on overall satisfaction and corresponding human resource objectives negligible.

The Marine Corps’ extensive and ongoing 2002 study of QOL clearly indicates that the only sustainable strategic action is to address the “expectations issue,” while simultaneously ensuring that QOL investments are aligned with the Corps’ human resource goals. Such an approach will not seek to



reduce efforts and resources committed to the objective improvement of QOL, rather it will look to maximize the Marine Corps return on its QOL investment.

In the near term, the Marine Corps, together with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, will seek to better express a QOL “end state” through a “social compact” with Marines and families. The initial focus will be the Corps’ current QOL priorities of pay and compensation, health care, bachelor and family housing, infrastructure/workplace environment, and community services. It will formulate Marine Corps positions on questions such as basic pay, what families can expect relative to housing, and the ultimate

scope of the Marine Corps Child Development Program. A specifically defined benefits package will be fundamentally linked with the human resources outcomes that the Marine Corps intends to impact through its QOL investments.

MARINE CORPS POSITION

The Marine Corps is defining a QOL end state through a social compact with Marines and their families. Marine Corps QOL planning and resource allocation will be inextricably linked to goals identified within the Marine Corps Human Resource Development Process.