



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
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CMC
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WHITE LETTER 3-18

From: Commandant of the Marine Corps
To: All Commanding Generals
All Commanding Officers
All Officers in Charge
All Senior Enlisted Leaders

Subj: SUSTAINING THE CORPS

Ref: (a) MCO 1300.8

1. Our institutional health and who we are as a Marine Corps hinges on how we recruit and ultimately transform young men and women into Marines. The current operating environment amplifies the importance of this mission. As the branch of the armed forces with the youngest population and highest turnover (60.4% of the Marine Corps is in the grade of Sergeant and below), our continued ability to operate as a forward-deployed force-in-readiness depends on the uninterrupted recruitment of smart, resilient, and fit men and women of character and virtue.

2. During FY-19, we will join and ship approximately 38,500 young men and women to the Recruit Depots to be transformed into Marines. This is the largest requirement in a decade, and the mission must be accomplished notwithstanding significant headwinds. Our previous success in recruiting and transforming young men and women into Marines stemmed from our strong sense of ownership and a common cause across the force. This is as critical today as it has ever been. Commanders and small unit leaders have a responsibility to support the recruiting, retention, and training efforts that sustain our Corps. My specific expectations are as follows:

(a) Special Duty Assignments (SDA). Assigning the right Marines to be Recruiters and Drill Instructors is a critical component of our success. We must assign our most qualified and talented personnel to SDA billets. The number of volunteers for SDA billets remains insufficient to meet the requirements. We must re-double our efforts to encourage, screen, and assign the highest quality Marines to SDA. Leaders must convey the importance and the personal and professional benefit of serving in an SDA billet. In return, we will continue to reward those who successfully complete SDA tours. On the most recent

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promotion board, the selection rate to staff sergeant among sergeants completing an SDA tour was 82%, compared to a selection rate of 69.4% among non-SDA Sergeants. Similarly, the selection rate to gunnery sergeant among staff sergeants completing an SDA tour was 54.4%, compared to an overall selection rate of 30.7% among non-SDA staff sergeants.

(b) Every Marine is a Recruiter. Personal stories and examples are often the most compelling means of connecting with the young men and women we seek. As Marines travel across the country, it is important to seek out opportunities to support the local recruiting effort by telling the Marine Corps story to those not familiar with who we are or what we do. In FY-18, our recruiters made their mission finding qualified men and women that represent the changing demographic of our Nation. I encourage all to support our recruiting effort wherever you go.

(c) Retention. It is more important than ever that we retain our best Marines, by grade and skill, across both the active and reserve components. When in-year losses exceed planned losses, it directly impacts in-year accessions and increases the demand on our Recruiters and Drill Instructors. This presents a particularly acute challenge as we seek to find, train, and replace Marines from low-density and high-demand MOSs.

3. In my February 2017 message to the force, I directed each of you to cross the line of departure together, and seize the initiative. During FY-19, I need each of you to continue stepping up your game in support of our recruiting and recruit training efforts.



Robert B. Neller