



# It Worked



## Making the Connection

- Use a group “Bucket List” to form your monthly socials around for smaller groups, such as your Officers’ Spouses’ Club or Enlisted Spouses’ Club. This gets everyone excited and bought into the idea of spending time together, plus you immediately get to know more about each other.
- Let others be good at what they are good at! Ask for help to encourage “buy in”.
- Always be your best, refined self, because people will tell if you’re trying to act like someone you’re not.
- Always go and talk to someone new each time you go to an event, or five depending on your personality.
- When there is an event, try and reach out and tell at least one of those new people you just met at the last event about the event that is going to be going on. This is how a network is built, one spouse at a time. The connection cannot grow unless you grow it.
- Do not use text messages to relay important information. Call on the telephone and speak to the one you need to confirm with.
- Write personal thank you notes by hand. Do not use text or email for this purpose.
- I tried my best to remember names. I know that’s impossible (I failed, I’m sure, but I tried). It’s the smallest gesture that has the biggest impact.
- This may sound silly, but I started to see generation/age gaps and read a few good books about it. This was important when I stopped to consider why some things worked and others did not.
- Introduce yourself by your first name, example – “Hello, I’m Rebecca. It’s nice to meet you”. If using name tags at functions just use your first name – sometimes people won’t introduce themselves to you if they know you are the CO’s spouse.
- Icebreakers : Play Bunko at a coffee in the fall when there is a big turnover. It’s a quick easy way to get to know people.
- Pass post it notes around and ask people to write something about themselves that other people may not know about them. Then within the hour, after others have had a chance to socialize, have people guess who wrote it.
- Push yourself to step out of your own comfort zone at events and talk to people you don’t know or haven’t met before OF ALL RANKS. People want to be included and you can show that everyone is part of the “family” by how you behave and who you spend time with at unit events.
- Listen for opportunities to reach out to individuals in need of a personal “touch” - a Get Well card, a phone call to check on sick children, a congratulatory note, a birthday greeting, etc.
- Host a “Meet and Greet” to start meeting spouses.
- Send a welcome letter/pkg to new spouses to the unit from the FRO, CO spouse and SGT Maj spouses. Include useful information regarding the base and/or surrounding area.
- Pass out your email and/or other social media information to all spouses so that you can be contacted. Use that opportunity to collect their information as well so that you can create your contact list of those who want to be contacted by you. (since social rosters are a thing of the



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past). Have “business cards” printed with the info you are willing to share and have them handy to pass out.

- Contact each new member of the unit and welcome them. Learn about them, invite them to the next social event, and maybe find someone they know or who lives nearby to pick them up and ride together.
- Be a good listener. Keep confidentiality and maintain trust.
- Use your first name on your nametags and encourage them to do the same. Treat everyone with respect and strive to make everyone feel welcome.
- People are more likely to attend when personally invited. This can be in the form of an email, snail mail or phone message, but it is better if it comes directly from the host, rather than through the office or posted on a website or newsletter.

## Family Readiness

- CO Spouse should find an Enlisted spouse to team up with to make sure that everyone’s needs are being addressed.
- Command Team Advisor can be anyone: Single Marine, Parent of Marine, Spouse, Enlisted/Officer
- Have regular, organized meetings. Make an effort to respect everyone’s time—start meetings on time, stick to a strict timeline, and provide an agenda.
- Remember CO Spouse, Advisors, Assistants, and Volunteers do NOT work for the unit (unless they are actually Marines in the unit) and please don’t pester the S5 Officer.
- FRO and Family Team Building will help coordinate the appropriate training....contact them!
- Have an instructor come to your unit and do simultaneous group training when at all possible. It makes sure that everyone is properly training and builds comradery. LINKS Training can be done as a unit training session for anyone interested.
- Social Roster: ask the CO for Marine roster to match up to your spouse social roster. Make sure to reach out to make sure that you’ve included everyone who wants to be included. You can use this roster as a calling tree in the event of an emergency or need. I would initiate contact with an email and always asked if they minded having their phone number on the list. I only called when there was no response to an email.
- Work with the CO and FRO/command team and see if it isn’t better if having all the Advisors, and Assistants take all their Family Readiness classes first to show commitment and then come in for an the interview. This seemed to work and weed out dropouts and built a very strong command team. FRA’s can start right away and all the paperwork is completed and done on the first day. Advisors and FRA’s can participate in command team meetings right away due having already passed all their requirements.
- Work with the FRO and have “Fix a Flat” classes... this was a huge hit in our Bn due to the high rate of deployments we went through. They were classes on basic car maintenance. This also works with self-defense classes as well... we also did this!



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- Read everything, especially all you can about MCCS Funds. When you have a question, ask your Marine or go to the JAG office
- Read your Marine's command guidance, if he has one. Coordinate schedules (meet him for a working lunch...great excuse to see him)
- Work with the FRO, volunteer with the FRO, help the FRO, advocate for the FRO, but remember that you are still a spouse who does not need permission from the FRO. They provide a great service, but at the end of the day you are still your own best source of referral and information. Each spouse should have the confidence to feel the same way. Trust in your relationship with the CO.
- Remember the single Marines
- "CO Evening with Spouses" done before deployment with just CO and unit spouses. Spouses hear from CO about deployment, can ask any questions etc.
- Have FRO send out an email to entire Unit – Marines and Families to encourage help and support – nothing is too big or too small – you DON'T have to be family readiness trained in order to volunteer for the Unit.
- Foster a relationship with the FRO right away if you want to be involved. This is their professional job so be careful not to step on his/her toes, but be clear that you want an active and informed role (if you do.)
- Combine Spouses' gatherings with an information/training. For example, at a potluck or social event, invite Family Team Building to do a class (i.e. Four Lenses), the chaplain, New Parent Support... who can talk about a specific topic. This combines social with Family Readiness training/education.
- Ask for unit event ideas from the families.
- Treat the FRO and Family Readiness Team like colleagues. They are doing a job and should receive respect, appreciation galore, and freedom to do the job the CO has asked without micromanagement. Help them!
- Meet individually with the FRO regularly when possible to build rapport and show dedication to the work (s)he does. Enjoy non-shop talk if you have that type of rapport.
- Vary time and location of Family Readiness meetings so that everyone has a chance to be involved. At Pendleton, we rotated our monthly meetings on the north and south side of base; even though our unit was based on the north side, many of our families lived in southern housing areas. We also offered some evening and some morning meetings to accommodate different schedules.

## Volunteerism

- Keep volunteers busy with anything and let them help!
- Don't forsake your Key Volunteerism: I did and I kick myself. You can write a letter, make a phone call, create roster groups for your own phone tree of sorts, say hello, send flowers, etc. – just keep it simple so that when you adopt the idea of "what I do for one, I will do for all" you don't break the bank.



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- The spouses have so many amazing ideas and like you before them, just want to be heard and included. Find your medium to make this happen.

## Command Timeline

- The Change of Command focus really should be the outgoing Commander.
- The incoming CO spouse and Sergeants' Major spouse should attend the 2<sup>nd</sup> to last social meetings, so that the final social meeting can be reserved to farewell the outgoing spouse and provide a proper good-bye without making for a possibly awkward event.
- Ask everyone "How Can I Support?"
- When you are the outgoing CO spouse and Sergeants' Major spouse, be sure to invite the incoming spouse to the 2<sup>nd</sup> to last social meeting for an introduction and warm hand-off. I recommend calling the incoming spouse as soon as the command assignment is made just to welcome her/him and answer questions from housing to schools, etc.
- Don't forget to get a turnover binder, Facebook administrator passwords, etc.
- Get a BIG binder/folder and keep everything for the duration of the command tour; paper trails are relevant and necessary
- Be a fan of listening for awhile in the beginning
- At the COC, if the outgoing CO spouse is going to "in lieu" of getting flowers donate that money to a certain club or to the unit spouse club if there is one, be sure to let the incoming CO spouse know this so she can do the same.
- Within the first month of command host a "shed head" function inviting all SNCO's and important command team billets. This is a great opportunity for the CO to pass on the Commander's vision and get a feel for how things are going within the unit. Also this is a great opportunity to share your email and collect spouses email information.
- Prepare your own family with expectations for the time your spouse is in command. Let kids know how often they will join you at events (age appropriate) and when they get to have movie night with a sitter. Discuss with your spouse what your role should be at home and with command functions.

## Entertaining / Coffees / Gatherings

- We didn't have a lot of interest in coffees. I tried to plan something once a quarter and the best times we had were playing LRC with candy for some prizes which I put together and we did a Murder Mystery Party which was hilarious! We also planned dinners out, movie nights, and the Bn Family Days went over really well.
- We planned quarterly themed pot lucks with spouses which were really fun. Each section took turns planning the theme and it was a nice way of getting together. Our holiday party was also lots of fun- we did a Yankee Swap (some call it Scrooge- take a number, #1 opens a gift then #2 can steal or open a new gift).
- Plan some social functions in the evening for those who work and remember not everyone has kids



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- Make it a Potluck (themed or not) Meeting for Volunteers – Monthly Get Together – don't be embarrassed to ask or about using paper products. Be comfortable and everyone else will be.
- Bunco - Volunteer/Unit or Spouses - Fun way to meet new people
- For coffees, in addition to bringing a hostess gift, I also have my thank you note attached. It was one less thing to do in the next day or two.
- Whatever you plan to do, start as soon as possible. Connections take time to develop and your time is remarkably short! 18-24 months goes quickly and you want to facilitate those bonds well before deployments.
- Learn about what the outgoing CO Spouse has been doing/not doing.
- Figure out what the group wants and needs before setting your ideas in stone.
- Remember – people want to be connected above all else – that is the main purpose of any social event. Be true to your personality when you entertain and suggest social events for the unit. If you aren't "fancy" or into themes or comfortable with door prizes at your events – don't worry about it. Just because other units do things one way, doesn't mean you need to. Be genuine, and just try to help connect people and build a cohesive unit.
- If the Officers' spouses are too few in number or are too busy to attend spouses events then host "couples" events. i.e. massage night at a spa with wine and dessert.
- Christmas parties with a "gift exchange" are always fun.
- Plan a general timeline with unit family events and smaller personal events so you fit them in and can plan ahead for them. Time goes by so fast!
- Have members of the social group sign-up to host, so they choose venues they want, to add variety and share the lead (i.e. some gather at homes, some gather at dinner places or parks, )
- When possible, have social events for all rank spouses, but keep the O Spouses meetings monthly.
- Never forget about the single Marines! They should not always be asked to set-up and clean-up. Have activities they enjoy! Organize events with each age group in mind, (i.e. younger kids, older kids, single Marines, married Marines)
- One of the best things I learned at the Commander's Course when I attended: another spouse explained that she always included what the CO would be wearing when she sent an invite to an event at their home. Thus I always included "the CO will be in shorts and a golf shirt" or "the CO will be in a sport coat." Of course since our commands were in the desert, our invites usually said "the CO will be in a Hawaiian shirt and flip flops"! It really made people more comfortable if they didn't have to guess at the dress code from a "business casual" designation.
- I would always host the first event, then at that event, pass a sign-up sheet so that each month someone else could "host". Events did not have to be at your home—we took advantage of base offerings such as painting ceramics, movie, coffee shop etc.
- When the unit was deployed, we always celebrated Valentine's together. I've both hosted and attended these, as well as helped planned unit events that fall on Valentine's—twice we even got a DJ for a girls' night out dance!



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- Our unit event for Nov. when the guys were deployed was an Ugly Gown Ball. We had a blast with prizes for best hair, ugliest gown, best of the 60s, 70s, 80s etc.
- Don't overlook the base MCCA recreation rental for your events. Our command was in 29 Palms so I regularly rented the inflatable water slide for events at my house—even just volunteer gatherings if kids were included.

## Gifts

- Our FRO got on board with baby gifts but I seem to recall some funding issues. I gave something from the CO & I when a baby was born. I also gave something to our departing wives.
- Baby Gifts – Depends on the size of the Unit - Unit Burp cloths, onesies, books in bulk. Party City has cards for \$1.00 (-10% Military Discount). One unit printed Baby Orders certificates for each baby, welcoming them to the unit.
- Don't do for one what you can't reasonably do for every person/spouse in the unit. If you can't buy a \$10 baby gift for every family in the unit, then don't start. Assume EVERYONE will have a baby or that everyone will get married!! 😊
- Think ahead for thank you/going away personal gifts to spouses that do a lot of volunteer work for the unit, coffee groups, Family Readiness Team etc. Think of things that will mark their time with the unit – location or logos, etc. Plan for these expenses ahead of time so they don't all have to be paid at once.
- Cutting board with the unit emblem burned into it. (can add cocktail napkins, cheese knives, etc)
- Make gift bags by printing out unit emblems onto peel and stick paper and then put it on a unit colored bag or red USMC colored bag
- Print the unit emblem onto address labels and then wrap Hersey's nugget chocolates and toss on tables at unit events or social gatherings.
- Make a unit ornament for a unique Christmas gift. Or host a unit ornament making party and sell them at unit functions. (mugs are fun too!)
- Find local crafts or art work that would be unique to your assignment
- Simple items with the unit logo are popular. (hand towels, candle holders, vases, Christmas ornaments, plates)
- New parents should always receive something. It can be "Baby Orders" or a more personal item, but honor the special time!
- Volunteers need to be thanked! Unit logo items like engraved glass, wood, etc are easy to produce in bulk and less expensive than flowers. Personalized notes are meaningful and easy.
- Our volunteers loved anything with the unit logo on it. One of the best things we ever gave—credit to our KV Coordinator—was an engraved small bowl/vase. I bought them for just a few dollars at Wal-Mart then the base engraving shop did the work. It fell well within the volunteer /family readiness expense and looked great. I have used that bowl as a votive candle holder, candy dish and vase and it always looks great.



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- We organized a Holiday Stocking Drive for the squadron while they were deployed. The squadron had 606 Marines and Sailors deployed to Afghanistan. With the help of volunteers, we collected 800 stockings (all stuffed with goodies). The remaining 194 stockings were delivered to the hospital and neighboring units in Afghanistan by the CO, SgtMaj, and XO. The family members/volunteers loved it because they received thank you notes and pictures from the marines and sailors. It was and will always be a memorable event.

## Other

- Deployment ideas: Dinner with Daddy/Mama placemats (glue photos of deployed parent on big piece of construction paper, have it laminated, and let kids use it as a dinner placemat). Secret Sister (send out questionnaire to spouses of deployed, they return them to you, and you then blindly pair them up with another spouse to receive little gifts).
- Jane Wayne Day: Come to work and see what the Marines do
- Book club, rent a beach house for a BBQ, schedule a park day for those with children, go out to a special dinner with those without children.
- Sometimes catering “off base” is a better deal.
- Children’s Book Exchange... ask for donated books and have the children come each month to exchange books and have the spouses meet each other. If there are different companies, each company can do this or you can do it on a larger scale. This also makes a great Family Readiness Program.
- Unit Movie Night – Find a venue, classroom, gym, etc – supply popcorn, drinks and enjoy
- Deployment Idea – Kisses (Hersey’s candy) from Daddy or Mommy (Male or Female Marine) – Place kisses in a jar with the wording “Kisses from Daddy or Mommy) – have your child eat one kiss per day until they return (have extra kisses on hand to add to jar if deployment is extended)
- Homecomings... make a special goody bag for the single Marines for their barracks room.
- Prepare a "themed" family dinner and bring it to the barracks. If you have families that don't cook ask them to help serve or assist with set up and/or clean up.
- Some spouses groups like to volunteer for a cause, like beach clean-up, help with Ball Gown Giveaway, support a Toys for Tots event.
- Go into the command with the mission to create something better than you found, and make a significant impact on the overall unit.
- We had our unit Christmas party one year at the base bowling alley and it was a huge hit (our unit was not deployed). The single Marines were invited from 4-6, then allowed to stay if they wanted when families arrived from 6-8. Everyone enjoyed having such a fun activity —it worked for everyone and the single Marines especially appreciated it because so often the holiday events feel like they are more for families or just about food.
- I love having a banner at a Family Event that all of the kids can sign, decorate and put their handprints on. The banner is easily shipped and hung at a dining hall where the unit is deployed. It’s a great Sept or Oct event so the banner arrives at Thanksgiving or Christmas.



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- Fun idea for a spouse gathering—wedding remix. The host asks everyone to bring a picture/album from their wedding, as well as submit their first dance song. The host then made a playlist on CD of everyone’s song as a party favor and we all enjoyed sharing wedding stories.
- On several occasions we hosted family day gatherings at local parks when our unit was deployed and we invited the remain-behind Marines to come. Rather than put them to work, we encouraged them to play basketball, softball, Frisbee, etc with the kids. The kids loved the male bonding and the Marines had a blast.
- Idea for the green side—our unit gathered all the Marines together while deployed and filmed them yelling “Happy Mother’s Day.” The quick video was sent out and posted on our page. The mothers of young Marines especially loved this.