



**COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS
SAFETY DIVISION**

701 SOUTH COURTHOUSE ROAD
SUITE 20050
ARLINGTON, VA 22204

PHONE: 703-604-4367/4463/4362
[HTTP://WWW.SAFETY.MARINES.MIL/](http://www.safety.marines.mil/)



AVIATION COMMANDER'S MENTORSHIP HANDBOOK



UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION
2. COMMAND THOUGHTS
3. THE ROLE OF THE STAFF
4. SAFETY
5. MAINTENANCE & LOGISTICS
6. SHIPBOARD OPERATIONS
7. COMBAT THOUGHTS
8. COMMAND AT THE GROUP AND WING LEVEL
9. LEADERSHIP
10. CLOSING





“CONGRATULATIONS ON
EARNING THE PRIVILEGE TO
COMMAND MARINES.”

1 INTRODUCTION

Our Marine Corps exists to fight for the nation we serve, and Marine aviation exists to provide the MAGTF commander the flexibility and agility to conduct that fight at the time and in the place and manner of his choosing. You, as new commanders, provide that agile and ready force.

You have been selected to command for your accomplishments to date: your exceptional performance in the cockpit, in the classroom, in the hangar, in the office and in the field. You have also been selected for your accomplishments to come, both your flying skill and your potential to lead our nation's most valuable asset: the individual Marine. You should feel justly proud of both those aspects of command: the things you have learned and what you will now pass along. I remember the difficulties and frustrations of daily command, the demands on time and a tempo that forces prioritizing, and the unique pride and pleasure of leading our nation's finest young men and women. All these things, and more, await you as you assume command.

My priorities for our Marine Corps aviation are simple. First, we will prepare to deploy to combat and focus on readiness for combat. Second, we will modernize our force with new aircraft and systems, continuing our in-stride rebuild, refit, and reset of the force to put reliable aircraft on the line and on the flight deck. Concurrently, we will support the maintainers, those experts who we all know make our squadrons actually operate, by providing them with the leadership and career paths that take advantage of their unique skills and with the incentives that keep them on our team. Finally, all this will combine with MAGTF integration,

providing day and night assault support and tactical aviation to a combined-arms fight anywhere in the world. These priorities are the framework on which we will build tomorrow's force.

Naval aviation is a tough and unforgiving business. Those who have commanded before you have been incredibly successful; yet, we have all made mistakes so we are passing down the lessons we have learned. This book began ten years ago as a "gouge book" of things to do – and not to do – in day-to-day command. Use it as a reference, a guide for how your predecessors have addressed their issues, and adapt it for the command challenges you will face.

You are our top aviators and our top leaders. I expect you to know and lead the generation behind you and to train them to someday take your place. I am envious of each of you as you embark on your command tour and face these challenges.

I am proud to serve alongside you, and I look forward to seeing you in the fleet!

Semper Fidelis,

Stick

Steven R. Rudder

Lieutenant General USMC





LEAD IN A MANNER THAT REINFORCES YOUR STRENGTHS IN TALENT, INTELLECT, AND PERSONALITY...LEVERAGE THE TALENTS OF OTHERS TO LEAD, TURN, AND MITIGATE ANY OVERALL UNIT WEAKNESSES.



2 COMMAND THOUGHTS

Command Proverbs:

- When in Command, COMMAND.
- Have a passionate commitment to excellence.
- Be demanding and fair. Do not let people off the hook.
- Empower subordinates; train them to do your job.
- Have the courage to check. Things seem to improve when leaders effectively supervise.
- What gets measured gets performed.
- Trust but verify which requires you to personally “inspect what you expect.”
- One person with courage is the majority.
- Reasonable people can disagree on the allocation of scarce resources.
- Listen to your instincts — they are generally correct.
- Each supervisor is responsible for moral and ethical leadership — if in no other way than by personal example.
- Optimism is infectious — never underestimate the effects (and power) of a smile and a kind word.
- Competition is good; teamwork is better.
- Hope is not a course of action.
- Do the unpopular thing before an issue becomes a problem.
- Bad news never gets better with age — keep the Commander informed!
- Play the hand you are dealt, not the one you wish you had.



“WORK WITH YOUR FAIR SHARE OF TALENT AND PLAY YOUR TEAM MEMBERS TO THEIR STRENGTHS.”

- Act and make decisions as if this command is your last one and as if it is your last day in command.
- I have never lost any sleep over grounding someone or removing an individual's wings. I have lost sleep for not doing it.
- Use MAWTS. It is not just for the WTI class. It is your weapons school and your source for academics, additional instructors, and ACE integration expertise.
- Do not take it personally. It is not about you...it is about the command.
- One person providing leadership at the point of friction can make a world of difference. Make it a point to seek the point of friction.

Knowledge:

- Know yourself, your limits, and those of your squadron.
- Be brutally honest in your assessment of risk; seek constant feedback from across the command.
- Ensure training is realistic and challenging; this does not mean taking unnecessary risks or being unsafe.
- It does not matter whether you have a squadron of rock stars; what is important is achieving the maximum performance with who you have.

Mentoring:

- When tackling tough issues, use your mentors for advice. Do not forget to be a mentor yourself.
- You are a leader and a teacher; the two roles are inseparable.
- You need to give back what you have learned while continuing to grow personally and professionally.
- Conduct PME on things other than flying airplanes. Remember, you are educating Marines — not just aviators.
- Know the blue and the red threats to mission success. Both can kick your butt, but the blue has an exponentially higher kill ratio.

Compassion:

- Care about your Marines and their families, hold each Marine accountable for their



domestic responsibilities, and ensure that the support agencies are there when they need them. If a Marine leader will not take care of the fire team at home, there is a good chance they will not take care of their Marines either. A bad spouse / parent is usually not a good leader.

- Command is all about getting people to do what they thought they could not do; genuine compassion inspires people to the highest levels.
- Being genuine cannot be faked.
- If you are disappointed in the execution of an event, look back at your plan or previous guidance before you begin summary executions.

Integrity:

- Do the right thing when you know that no one is watching...but know “they” always are.
- Visibly test and retest yourself and your aircrew. Take the opportunity to lead flights on occasion, and exhibit your expectations / standards to the ready room. DO NOT let your PTO “pencil whip” your qualifications and designations based on your experience.

Execution:

- All the positive attributes of COs are of limited value if they do not or cannot follow through and expertly execute.
- It does no good for the Wing or Group to have all mediocre units and one shining example. If you allow a leper colony to take root in one unit to make the others more ready, you have set the conditions for failure for that unit and everyone in it. Wing and Group Commanders have to balance the wealth.
- Help out your fellow Commanders without prompting by the senior Commander; this goes a long way to promote higher level teamwork. Also, your peers' opinions of you is important.
- Effective communication of your intent is crucial to execution; a simple message, repeated and reinforced often, is the key.
- What separates great squadrons from merely good ones is the way they execute.
- Quality starts with taking care of Marines, then goes to maintaining aircraft, and finally culminates with employing the squadron in combat.
- Develop a program in which every mishap, HAZREP, or serious flight incident within your flying community is briefed at AOMs. There is no better way to learn than from others' experiences.
- Schedule a non-attribution “True Confessions” opportunity as part of your weekly AOMs.

- Focus your flying not only on tactics but also on basic flying skills and reinforcing fundamentals at all levels of leadership.
- Place more emphasis on airmanship and systems knowledge.
- Focus on fundamentals and mental preparation.
- Ensure the basic tenants of airmanship are included in every brief.
- Place emphasis on monitoring and grading each phase of flight to include ground operations.
- Develop scenario training using current mishap / malfunction trends as the basis for simulator and chalk talk training events.
- Adherence to NATOPS and SOPs are trademarks of good squadrons.
- Developing and acknowledging your collateral duty inspectors and quality assurance representatives (CDIs / CDQARs / QARs) is key; their integrity will save airplanes, engines, and components and build the foundation for a strong squadron that performs well long after you give up the flag.
- Develop a standardized training program for new aviators and new ground officers. Do not just throw them on the flight schedule or into the operation.
- Develop a standardized program for helping below average aviators succeed.
- Stress that your flight leaders are teachers first and evaluators second.
- Focus more on flying basics, NATOPS, systems, and simulation; this will keep you from losing aircraft.
- Embrace Risk Management (RM) tools.

Some other items to consider:

- "We've always done it that way" is not an acceptable answer to a "why" question.
- When a Marine makes a bad decision, someone knew it was coming — he or she just did not stop it.
- Know the difference between being demanding and being demeaning (teamwork).
- Understand "service" versus "servitude."
- Success breeds success — we need to posture our units to succeed.
- Mentor and teach.
- Be yourself — lead in a manner that reinforces your strengths in talent, intellect, and personality. Leverage the talents of others to lead, improve, and mitigate any overall unit weaknesses. Tapping the overall talent and motivation of the team with opportunities to excel always overmatches that of any select individual or group of individuals.



- In your organization, everyone has a special talent to contribute. Accept others for themselves and match / place them in jobs that leverage strengths and mitigate weaknesses for overall team success.
- Give credit where credit is due. Show your subordinates off in their best light. Be the "buffer" when they fail to shine. Provide assistance when they need your help.
- Work with your fair share of talent, and play your team members to their strengths. They will become strong team players; be grateful for the confidence and the opportunity to excel, and do a great job for the team. You will succeed and go further with all hands "pulling" through good team leadership vice having just a few "race horse" individuals while the rest of the leadership potential of the squadron effectively sits on the sidelines.

Some squadron and battalion Commanders have been reluctant to make hard calls because of a misplaced sense of personal loyalty or friendship with subordinates. Some Commanders strive to be buddies with their Marines in a quest to be popular. We must be Commanders first and foremost and not allow friendships to shape our judgment. We must be able to make difficult decisions that affect a Marine's career. Grounding, letters of caution, boards, etc., are all sometimes necessary to preserve the integrity of our Corps. Make the hard calls, and make our people perform to standards. Commanders are not in command to make friends; they must be fair and firm — protectors of the Corps.

Honor forms the basis of all that we are as Marines; integrity puts honor into action. In all that we do as Commanders, we need to be honest with one another. There should never be any second-guessing or checking up required...our honor is sufficient. Whether it be readiness reporting, mishap investigation, or speaking with the press, our course will continue to be honor and integrity. Always ask yourself what is the "right" thing to do — and then do it.

Commander's Intent — There is another kind of intent, beyond what is written, to which your Marines will need to pay attention: for lack of a better term, "living Commander's intent," i.e. learning the CO's thought process and way of doing business...what's important to them and why. You will hear about intent from them in person, and you will read about it in writing as you communicate. Pay attention to it and make understanding Commander's intent important to you and your staff. As the Commanding Officer talks about how they intend to operate within the command, how the command will train for combat, and about the care of Marines and the equipment for which they are accountable, the Commander is telling you "what" is important and "why." Expect your Marines to always consider your intent as they make decisions regarding their responsibilities.

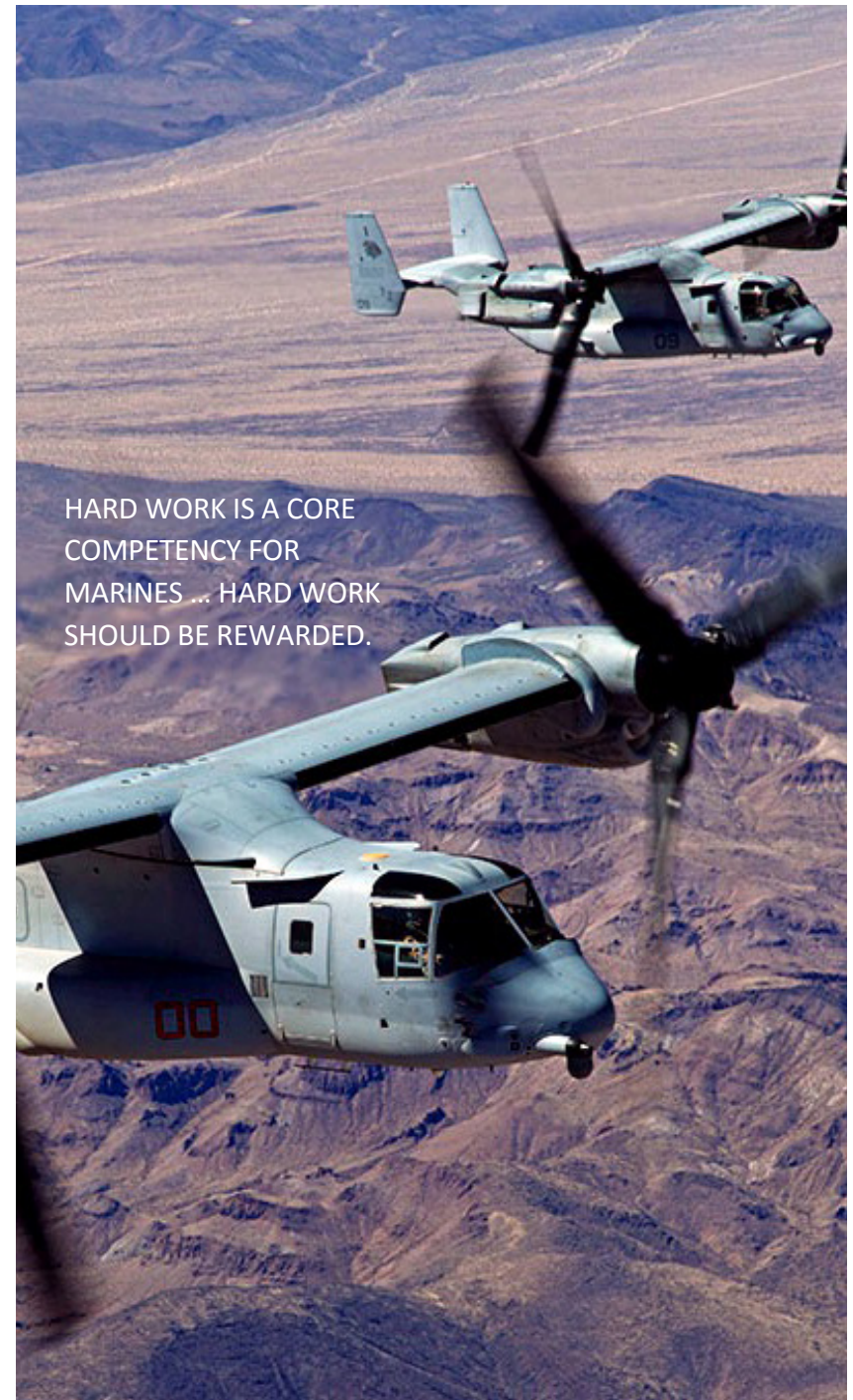
There are several ideas that have served Commanders well. A "superior unit" is one that works hard but not so hard as to crush itself, one that produces a quality product recognized as such by those outside the unit, and one that can make difficult things easy and finds a way to have fun in the process. It sounds straight forward, but there is much to consider.

Hard work is a core competency for Marines. Marines are most happy, and personally and professionally satisfied, when they are working hard in their MOS in an operational setting. Hard work is a good thing but must be balanced. Some Commanders never find that balance. Some work hard when it is not required and gain nothing in the process. They actually lose when they do this.

Hard work should be rewarded. Celebrate everything...and do not be stingy with lower level awards! After a squadron excelled on the Commander, Naval Air Forces (CNAF) maintenance inspection, the Group Commander called and related he wanted to award Navy Commendation Medals to deserving Marines. Squadron leaders told him they would get started on the paperwork. He told them to forego the paperwork for now and send him the names and a brief description of each awardee's program and performance on the inspection. He intended to come over and award them on that very afternoon; the paperwork could be routed as soon as possible thereafter. Obviously, this type of thing must be used sparingly. In this case, however, numerous SNCOs related they had never before seen anything like that in their careers. Morale soared in the squadron.

Producing a quality product can only be determined by those that receive it. It is not what a squadron thinks of itself that counts; it is what other units, and those individuals supported by it, think that counts — the Group, Wing, Company, Battalion, Regiment, Division, and MEF have the votes that count. Some squadrons have perceived that they were "King Kong" while all those around them laughed at their incompetence, even more so because they could not see it themselves. Units that drink their own bathwater and make a habit out of patting themselves on the back are clearly not what Marine aviation — or the Marine Corps — needs. If you think you do not have any room to improve, your standards are not high enough.

We have all been around Marines and Marine units that find a way to make things difficult, whose natural inclination is to say "no." They are wet blankets — miserable creatures and leadership failures. Effective leaders inspire units to make difficult things easy and effect in each person a "can do, easy" attitude. Be a leader, and develop Marines and Sailors who naturally say "yes" to reasonable requests. "Can do, easy" will go a long way toward setting a winning command climate. Conversely, do not write checks your unit cannot cash without dashing themselves on the rocks. Be the only Marine in your unit that can say no.



HARD WORK IS A CORE
COMPETENCY FOR
MARINES ... HARD WORK
SHOULD BE REWARDED.



You have to find a way to have fun with your Marines and Sailors. While it will not all be fun and games and many of your tasks will be demanding, success in command will be elusive at best if you cannot find a way for your Marines and Sailors to have some fun and take satisfaction from a difficult job done well.

If you are able to achieve these three things — 1) work hard but not so hard as to crush your Marines and Sailors; 2) produce a quality product, recognized as such by those outside the unit; and 3) make difficult things easy while finding a way to have fun in the process — you will have a successful command that produces many fond memories that your Marines and Sailors will cherish for a lifetime. When you are in a “superior unit,” things just click. You work hard, do great things, have a blast, and would do it all over again in a second. You leave such a unit reluctantly, taking fond memories and lasting friendships. Life simply gets no better.

You are more ready for Command than you think so do not be timid. Jump in with both feet, and put your whole heart and soul into being the very best Commanding Officer that has ever come along. While you will walk on ground that you have never before encountered, walk with confidence. Your Marines want leadership and they want to be led; it is up to you to earn their confidence...Marines like decisiveness.



Find a way to make sure your enlisted Marines know how critical their contributions are. At one Command, all the maintenance Marines had secret clearances. During a deployment, they would be brought into the ready room in small groups following each mission that was conducted. The Operations Duty Officer would explain the ground situation that had existed, show the operations that were performed, and describe the outcome. Seeing the end result of their labor and knowing how important those missions were to the ground combat element led to high morale and superior performance throughout the deployment. Whether in peacetime or combat, your Marines will not let you down if they believe in the squadron's mission and truly understand the critical nature of their contributions.

Judge success continually — not only while you are in command but after as well. Successful command tours manifest long after the change of command in the junior pilots that become successful flight leads and MAWTS-1 instructors, in the department heads that slate for command, and in a squadron that continues to achieve.

Lead from the front:

This is the greatest opportunity to contribute you will ever have. This is also the best job you will ever have — enjoy it.

You win with people:

- Get out of the office and away from the computer. Do frequent “battlefield circulations.” Even better, do them often with your Sergeant Major.
- Never keep the Marines waiting in formation — their time is as important as yours. If you have to run to be on time, start running.
- Your Ready Room is a reflection of your command.
- Your hangar deck and flight line is a reflection of your command
- Do not be afraid to make the tough call.
- Make sure you have a subordinate that will tell you (tactfully) when you are wearing no clothes.
- You can never be too close to your Marines. Know them, know their strengths and weaknesses, and know their relationships with their families, friends, and fellow Marines.



“WHAT SEPARATES GREAT SQUADRONS FROM MERELY GOOD ONES IS THE WAY THEY OPERATE.”

Communicate:

- Attempt to make Marines feel they are working with you and not for you.
- When you talk to your troops, it is not how long you talk but what you say that really matters.
- Communicate with the officers, communicate with the SNCOs, communicate with the NCOs, and communicate with the Marines. Do it formally and informally, and do it often. Communication is a combination of listening, thinking and THEN talking.
- Always answer emails and be quick about it. If you do not, you're showing that you are not concerned. Be responsive.
- If it does not make sense or is too tough, tell someone — do not ignore it.
- Empower and develop free flowing communication in your squadron.
- "Yes men" are not helpful; cooperative leaders are.

Never use the word "they" ...you are "they" to your Marines. Take responsibility for actions / tasking and bad deals from higher, or explain who "they" are and tell them why "they" are asking for something to be done.

Understand and Embrace:

- The Commandant's Planning Guidance
- Sortie-based training
- T&R manuals
- Aircraft material readiness
- Safety Management System
- Aviation logistics and maintenance
- Aviation ground support
- Innovation and METT-T
- Group / Wing / MEF directives and orders

All elements of responsibility, authority, and accountability within a unit are resident in the Commander. Before you take the flag, make sure you have thought about the consequences of every action you take or do not take.

Considerations Prior to Command:

- Ensure, prior to taking Command, that you understand the unit's mission — not what is stated in your T/O but what it equates to in the unit's daily operations. You as the Commander need to translate that into something the Marines can understand as an obtainable goal. Once you have established that, articulate it to your staff and Marines.



- From this mission, develop your intent, vision, and how you plan to get there. Convey that to your Marines. During this transition period, you need to be standing side by side with your SgtMaj and XO. Your unit needs to see you as an integral team.
- Give your Command Safety Policy the consideration it deserves and write it before you take command so that it can be published, disseminated, and digested immediately. Mishaps can be prevented every day, including the day of the Change of Command!
- Be aware that there are other policy letters that should be published soon following the CoC: Equal Opportunity, Hazing, Substance Abuse, and overall Command Philosophy or Intent.
- Decide what is most important in order to achieve your mission. You have about six months to accomplish change; after that, you will be too consumed, and the train will be off the track. Do not change things for the sake of changing things. If it is working, do not mess with it; figure out how to continue what is working.
- As you prepare for command and think about what you want to achieve and how you want to achieve it, you should consider what you will be known for. What will your Marines remember you for? What will be your theme?

EMPHASIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF
EXECUTING WHAT WAS DISCUSSED,
PLANNED, AND APPROVED



Some Commanders don't know what they wanted to achieve or what they want to be known for. They go through command trying to figure it out for themselves. For these Commanders, their senior leadership soon concludes that the Commander does not know what they are doing and respond accordingly. Their command tours were wholly forgettable and few Marines in the unit maintain contact with one another as a result. If you don't know where you are going and where you are taking others, you may end up some place you were not expecting to be. It is important that Commanders have a simple theme that is easily communicated and easy to understand, and ensures that all in the command will pull in the same direction. A theme that has worked well for many commanders, that the new Lance Corporal can identify with, is — "There are three priorities — readiness, readiness, readiness. We will know and meet standards and we will use our Core Values in our decision making." That is just one example, and there are many other equally valid and effective themes or slogans that can be used, but if your rank and file cannot spit out your vision when asked, you will not achieve it. Remember, you cannot do it all — know your priorities, communicate them, and ensure they are understood and acted upon.

Remember the Marines in your command were there before you got there and they will be there afterwards. You are running the 10K, they are running the marathon — don't surge for surging sake and end up leaving a breathless worn out command to the Commander who takes over for you. You can accomplish more through steering the command vice picking up the pace.

Upon assuming command, have every previous air and ground mishap and serious safety incident that has occurred in your command in the recent past briefed to you. Take the time to read each of the formal reports. Study them in depth. Sometimes they focus on the wrong "what went wrong." Look for breakdowns in the fundamentals... NOT following written instructions already in place, NATOPS knowledge, supervision, maintenance, etc.

Develop written billet descriptions for your field grade and SgtMaj billets. Walk in the door knowing what you expect from them, but remain open to adjustments in the relationship as you learn each other's strengths and weaknesses.



After You Take Command:

- Give your Commander's Intent immediately, and ensure it addresses your expectations for conduct, professionalism, and discipline. Base your other policies on this intent, and tie them together by using the same language/phrases that are important to you.
- Conduct a Command Climate Survey immediately after taking command. Using these tools does not cause one to lead by survey, but it does allow you to uncover dark areas — hazing, harassment, improper relationships — immediately after taking command. This first survey lets you know the climate of the command you assumed. Take another survey or schedule a Command Culture Workshop 6-12 months later that lets you know the climate you have created and gives you a chance to make course corrections before you give up the squadron. Ensure you brief survey results back to your command so they know you have heard them and see the same sight picture that they do.
- You will be required to conduct an Equal Opportunity Survey as well; this survey can be tailored with specific questions. Put some time and effort into crafting the questions for the survey. Know what you are looking for and tailor the survey to get to it, to ensure that the results will give you the information and lead to the insights YOU will need to make decisions.
- Stress effective communication throughout the entire Command. Continually ask, "What do I know," "Who needs to know it," "Have I told them," and, in the case of email, "Have they received and understood what I told them?" Remember, action passed or email sent is not action taken.
- Develop a battle rhythm that is executable for upstairs and downstairs. If meetings continually start late, are postponed or are cancelled, something is wrong.
- Hold a quarterly NCO breakfast or lunch with the SgtMaj. This forum can be very beneficial when held during safety stand downs or training days. If you present a topic on leadership, you will be able to encourage a discussion among the NCOs. The real benefit behind the discussion is to see firsthand how your NCOs interact and to be able to pulse their morale. Also, the NCOs will have a better understanding of your intent / guidance and feel recognized as NCOs.



- Have quarterly or semiannual town hall meetings. The SgtMaj and you should host them. Break it down into E-5 and below, E-5 and above, and SNCOs and officers. Include E-5 in both enlisted groups so that they can hear both groups. They often will be the gateway between the SNCOs and the junior Marines. You will hear many things, some true, and some misperceptions. Do not get defensive. Sometimes there will be things Marines will complain about, but there is nothing you can do except acknowledge it. Many times, just the act of being heard by their Commander and SgtMaj is enough.
- During your staff meetings, planning, and briefings, emphasize the importance in execution of what is discussed and planned or approved. Too often we plan and fail to execute and fail to monitor progress. At the end of each meeting, ask "OK, so what is the next step?" What has been decided, what action is to be taken, who is going to execute, and when? Who will monitor?
- Have weekly formations. Often they can just be a school circle to pass information or pass out kudos. Do not forget about night crew. Sometimes it is good to hold a quick school circle to pass info only to night crew just to make them feel included.
- Safety stand downs — make them interesting. Get away from the death by Powerpoint. Include one session where the enlisted aircrew and the pilots are in the same room to discuss issues. Have a couple of pre-seeded topics with selected aircrew to get the discussion going.
- Hold periodic ALL HANDS FOD WALK. (This includes EVERYBODY — upstairs, downstairs, officer, enlisted.) This helps build unity in the Command and provides an opportunity to chat with the Marines on an informal basis.
- Have and maintain a flight debrief book. Debrief significant issues at each AOM.
- First workday of the month, all aircrew should sit in the ready room and take the closed book monthly EP and NATOPS exam — you included.



Empower your people, but make sure they understand the boundaries of the empowerment, what they can make decisions on and what they can't, what they can use your name and title for while speaking at a meeting and what they can't. You will be surprised at how often your name or title will be used in the wrong manner — "The CO said...." when in fact you did not.

Flight schedule — ensure it is coordinated thoroughly and communicated prior to signing. If you routinely have a flight schedule with numerous changes, it isn't being coordinated and communicated effectively. Ensure you do monthly and weekly flight training plans to include aircrew names assigned. Yes, weeklies and monthlies will change, but it is a starting point and probably an 85% solution and something to plan to. Maintenance and OPS must have an effective balance in planning and execution. Cancelled sorties generally mean that the ops/maintenance plan is not in synch. Both have a vote and responsibilities. You must ensure that happens.

Cross Countries...watch out! You need to put as much scrutiny on these as you do the flight schedule, maybe more. Many of your the supervisory checks and balances that you have for operations out of home plate are not there. Your flight leads need to understand what an extreme privilege it is to conduct these types of operations. The OPSO briefed me personally — in detail — on every planned Cross Country long before the request went to the Group for approval.

Last flights in the squadron...watch out! These are high risk events for the aircrew executing them. Make sure they have a valid mission, good flight leadership and a defined "box." Ensure that the "last flight" is not a mishap in the making.

Decisions on flight operations must withstand the sanity check / test. If something happened related to or unrelated to this decision, could you defend it if it was analyzed by an Aviation Mishap Board?

Open up your ANYMOUSE program to include other issues as a means for anonymous input to the Commander. Ensure you promptly address any input and convey issues to the command, if appropriate (and usually it is), along with what you plan to do about it.

Do not sit in your office waiting for people to come to you. Go to them; get out and about. Walk the spaces and the flight line routinely. You will know you are doing this enough when they are no longer surprised to see you in their spaces or suspect something is up because the CO is standing in front of them.

Put emphasis on night crew leadership — at least a strong SNCO and if possible, an officer. Ensure they are out and about and not just sitting behind their desk. Drop in on night crew periodically, and ensure they know you are watching out for them.

Ensure you place a high priority on the human factors / force preservation councils and STAN boards; don't just pay them lip service. Tie them into your mentorship / sponsorship programs for officer and enlisted.

If possible, have an office for your flight surgeon to conduct business. You will reap huge dividends with this. Ensure you and the flight surgeon have routine discussions between just you and them on the physical and behavioral health of your Marines. Make use of the Group Chaplain in the same manner.

Plan to sit down at the beginning and end of each day with your SgtMaj, even if it's only for a few minutes. Include them in everything.

Be steadfast during crisis. Do not be the one reacting emotionally or irrationally when things don't play out the way you thought they would or in time of crisis. A true test of your leadership will be how you react to adversity, because Marines will be watching. Do you have the perseverance and the calmness to steer your command in stormy weather? Do you have what Plato called "endurance of the soul?"

Be professional, accountable, affect / influence what you can, and have fun with command. If you are not enjoying yourself and are worrying about everything, they will see it and it will affect the entire command.

Have junior Marines witness NJP proceedings. Instruct them to tell their peers what they witnessed and what they think about it. You want the word to get out. Also, consider doing a public NJP on the hangar deck after your first few months in command, especially for something like DUI. Your selective use of public NJP can be a powerful deterrent to others who might otherwise make similar decisions.



Additional Thoughts about Command:

- Be comfortable with accepting personal responsibility for everything your command does or fails to do without obfuscation, blaming others, or excuses.
- Believe in and trust that people are always trying to do the right thing.
- Give people the freedom to decide and act in accordance with your guidance and intent or you will not have a peaceful night's sleep throughout your entire command tour. You can sleep peacefully if you have good people always trying to do the right thing. When it does not unfold well, be there to work with them towards achieving the end-state and ensuring it goes well.
- Your command will reflect your personality. Make yourself available across the spectrum of your units as a visible and enduring presence, don't just be a picture on the command board. Demonstrate this philosophy by making yourself a noticeable presence across all your units.
- When reacting to bad news (the first report is always wrong) make sure you listen first. Remember when you were a Squadron CO, Department Head, or even just a pilot. There are times you want to take in the information, times you want to pass expectations and guidance, and times that you want to ensure everyone understands your displeasure. Every incident is not necessarily a hanging offense; take it as a learning experience, and incorporate it into your personal ethos.

MARINES WILL SEE EVERYTHING YOU DO OR DON'T DO AND MAKE THEIR OWN VALUE JUDGMENT AS TO WHAT YOU THINK IS IMPORTANT SO SET A GREAT COMMAND CLIMATE FROM DAY ONE.



Being a good listener cannot be overemphasized. If you routinely interrupt or cut off your subordinates, or if you routinely shake your head halfway through a subordinate's point, you will quickly create a climate in which it is difficult for your officers to deliver unpleasant news or present alternate viewpoints. When your subordinates come to you to talk about something, a good rule of thumb is to spend 80% of that interaction truly listening and 20% talking. Taking the time to listen and consider the viewpoints of your subordinates (even if you have zero intention of taking their advice), goes a long way towards creating a healthy command climate. Your subordinates will believe their input is valued and considered, even when it is not adopted.

Tell your Marines, on a regular basis, it is an "honor to serve." It is just a phrase if you do not feel it or practice it. Make this your personal mantra, and a tenet of your leadership.

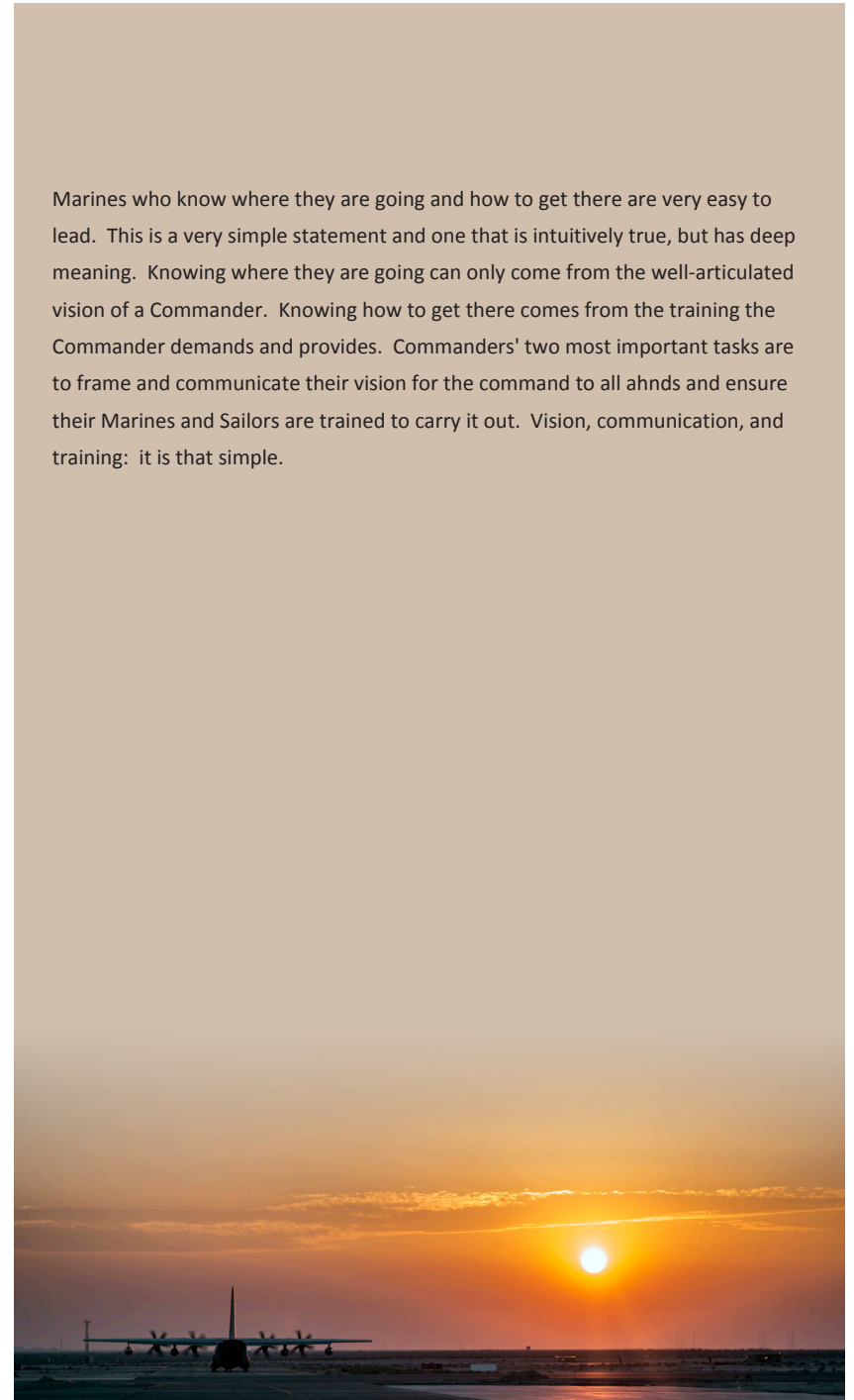
We all have our limits and Commanders at all levels must pace themselves, especially during periods of intense operations and combat. You must keep a clear mind in order to deliver sound military judgment. A tired leader will usually fail. A sleep-deprived leader is working at an extreme disadvantage.

As a new Commander, keep what works and aggressively make changes to areas that are missing the mark. Even if the prior Commander is seen as having been successful, it's probably time to take a holistic look at how your unit conducts operations and maintenance.

Much of what is written in this section can be wrapped up in the term "command climate," and no one sets or "owns" the command climate more than the CO. How you establish that climate is by implementing many of the actions listed here; however, you should think about what you want your command climate to be, and then set about making it happen from day one. The difference between a good squadron and a great squadron is often command climate, and this is the one program that belongs almost exclusively to the CO. One of the absolute joys of being a Commander is that every Marine in your squadron wants you to succeed and most will give everything they have to ensure your success. Marines will see everything you do or don't do and make their own value judgment as to what you think is important, so from day one, set a great command climate.



Marines who know where they are going and how to get there are very easy to lead. This is a very simple statement and one that is intuitively true, but has deep meaning. Knowing where they are going can only come from the well-articulated vision of a Commander. Knowing how to get there comes from the training the Commander demands and provides. Commanders' two most important tasks are to frame and communicate their vision for the command to all ahnds and ensure their Marines and Sailors are trained to carry it out. Vision, communication, and training: it is that simple.





OUR DUTY AS MILITARY PROFESSIONALS IS TO FIND THE MORAL COURAGE TO DO THE RIGHT THING, EVEN WHEN NO ONE IS LOOKING.



3

THE ROLE OF THE STAFF

Executive Officer:

Let your XO be the second in command. Because the XO is critical to the squadron's success and must be prepared to command in the CO's absence, it is very important that you take the time to develop and mentor your XO. One technique for doing this is to talk to the XO before and after Department Head meetings and important decisions. These time investments will help the XO understand your priorities, how you think, and how you manage and mitigate risk.

- Meet often with your XO and SgtMaj; they are your best sounding board. If they know you care what they think they will carry out your intent.
- Pass tasks through the XO or Department Heads. Avoid going straight to your officers without informing their boss of the issue.
- Always remember the XO will take your place in your absence, whether that is due to leave, the flight schedule, or combat loss. Select, train, and mentor them with that in mind.

As your XO is your second in command, they are expected to make wise decisions that are in line with your intent in your absence. In many cases, your XO is also being groomed to eventually become a Commander himself. They need to both learn and contribute, while serving as your deputy. The bulletized list below was created over 17 years ago — "guidance" for Executive Officer. It is offered here only as "food for thought" as you develop your own specific guidance for your Executive Officer.

- Set the standard in the ready room and in the air.
- Implement and supervise the CO's policies.



- Manage the staff. Keep them informed. Demand that they keep you informed. Ensure they communicate with each other.
- Complete staff action — give the CO background, options, and recommendations. Help him / her make the right decision.
- Ensure the implementation of all safety policies.
- Ensure administrative excellence.
- Keep track of (and ensure compliance with) all suspense dates.
- Manage leave and liberty (CO approves SgtMaj / Dept Heads).
- Ensure cleanliness of squadron / hangar / grounds.
- Act as security manager.
- Include the SgtMaj in all actions / issues involving enlisted personnel.
- Manage the officer fund via S-5 officer.
- Oversee the memorabilia and squadron fund via S-5 officer.
- Manage the SDOs and GDOs via SWO.
- Manage BEQ cleanliness and adequacy via SgtMaj / S-4 officer.
- Manage fitness reports, ensuring timeliness and completeness, via the Adjutant.
- Act as inspection coordinator.
- Assign and manage action officer activities for Navy Relief / CFC (positive leadership = 100% contact, not threats)
- QA administrative benefits to ensure compliance with all rules (e.g., comrats, BAH, advance pay, etc.).
- Recommend officer personnel assignments, collateral duties, schools (ASO, WTI, etc.), special projects, and FAP / FAC / Fragger billets.
- Manage and direct the update of SOPs, orders, bulletins, etc., in all departments.
- In cooperation with the OPSO, chair weekly TEEP review meetings for upcoming major events (squadron deployments, ITX, WTI, etc.).



- Chair monthly awards board. Ensure all Command-delivered NMCAMs are issued. Manage inputs for MCAA, NHA, and other unit / personal awards: the more, the better.
- Monitor enlisted meritorious promotion boards. SgtMaj manages those boards along with the Marine of the Month / Quarter and NCO of Month / Quarter boards.
- Manage and ensure publication of up-to-date lineal list, social roster, and officer leave list.
- Manage the message board, day file, action board, and check-in / out policy via Admin-O / Adjutant.
- Act as senior member of the standing AMB. Ensure training and readiness of primary and alternate members. (Be prepared to focus on the squadron after mishap, while the CO initially focuses on families.)
- Act as the enforcer on basic training, driver improvement, NATOPS quals, dental readiness, hearing conservation, rifle cleaning, EMI assignment, motorcycle safety, etc.
- Keep the paperwork flow moving. Leave work with “action pending” only when you must.
- Remember — the CO is the CO, and you are not.
- Ensure you know what the CO wants — then give it to him. If you don't agree, always voice your opinion privately, and then support his decision as if it was your own.
- A primary role as XO is to get people to do “hard work” efficiently. Anyone can do “easy work” and “fun work.” It's our ability to do the “hard work” that will make us great.



“OUR GOAL MUST BE TO BUILD UPON THE UNSURPASSED COMBAT LEGACY OF MARINE AVIATION.”



Sergeant Major:

You and your SgtMaj should be joined at the hip. Everywhere you go and when you represent your command, your SgtMaj should be with you. Though your SgtMaj may not have the same technical acumen that your Maintenance Chief can offer, your SgtMaj brings an “outsiders perspective” to your aviation-centric modality. Take time to listen to the fresh perspective your SgtMaj may offer. Show me a disciplined unit and I’ll show you an active, successful SgtMaj with passion and influence.

With some Commanders, the SgtMaj can become a real friend at work, someone to whom the Commander can unburden themselves. A good SgtMaj is perceptive. They understand your moods and respects them. A good SgtMaj never presumes upon the affection and respect the Commander feels for him / her and should be honest to a fault.

The SgtMaj is a confidant and can be told the real, sometimes personal, reasons for decisions. They can be counted upon to put a good face on something unpopular. They can be a sounding board for ideas; a critical audience and can maintain absolute silence. If you’re lucky, this should end up as one of the most special relationships you will have in your entire career.

The relationship between the SgtMaj and Maintenance Chief is vitally important. Sgts Maj who are new to Marine Aviation will possibly require some training and education on corner office decisions that are disruptive to the conduct of maintenance, and on squadron priorities during the conduct of flight operations or dedicated maintenance periods. Once the SgtMaj understands these things, they can work with the Maintenance Chief to find a way to schedule formations, Birthday Ball practices, unit PT, etc., in a way that minimizes disruptions to the maintenance department.



Never make a decision that will affect an enlisted Marine without SgtMaj input. You may not agree with the input, that is your prerogative, but you owe it to yourself and the Marines to seek your SgtMaj’s advice. However, if you have a bad SgtMaj, treat them like you would any other Marine who is not meeting your expectations: give clear guidance, document shortfalls, and communicate with your Group CO and SgtMaj.

Squadron Staff:

Weekly meetings are good. It’s as important for you to keep them informed as it is for them to keep you informed. I held meetings on alternating weeks with the entire staff, and then just the Top 4 of XO, OPSO, AMO, and DSS (SgtMaj was present at both). I felt this was a much better use of time and more effective for tasking.

- Pass bad news quickly. Fill in the details later.
- Policy is set only by the Commander. Arbitrary decisions can have disastrous effects on the squadrons.
- Follow through – ensure completion. Action passed is not action complete.
- Don’t threaten falsely using the CO’s name!

Some of the most important decisions a squadron Commander makes is who to select to attend Aviation Safety Officer Course and the MAWTS-1 Weapons and Tactics Instructor Course. For the F/A-18 community, the same is true for selecting who attends Navy Fighter Weapons School (TOPGUN). WTIs set the tactical and training tone for their squadrons, and ASOs are critical to keeping planning and execution balanced and within established controls. Commanding Officers must ensure they pick the right individuals to attend these schools to take maximum advantage of the training they are exposed to and maximize what they provide upon return. WTI and ASO candidates must be highly credible in their MOS, solid officers, leaders, and top notch instructors. Additionally, ASO may often be a great preparation for your WTI candidates or a WTI a great candidate for a DOSS.



“DON’T BE AFRAID TO TELL YOUR UNIT LEADERSHIP TEAM THE TRUTH ABOUT THEIR REPUTATION. LIKELY, THERE IS A DISCONNECT BETWEEN THEIR PERCEPTION OF THEMSELVES AND THEIR ACTUAL DEMONSTRATED PERFORMANCE.”

Group WTI:

Ensure that the MAG and Squadron CO personally meet with every prospective TOPGUN, MDTC, and WTI student / candidate the MAG plans to nominate before their names go forward. The CO should also know when the students graduate from those courses and should plan to attend their graduations.

Group WTI/MATSS OIC:

You are responsible to the MAG CO for the tactical training of the entire MAG. Your efforts will largely determine the MAG's combat readiness. TRAINING WILL FOCUS ON OUR MOST LIKELY MISSIONS IN THE NEAR TERM. Demand excellence and work through the MAG S-3 or DOSS, but maintain direct access to the MAG CO.

- Ensure instructor certifications are coordinated through the MAG.
- Have routine tactical competitions within the MAG. Make them fun and tactically sound — they must add to the overall combat readiness of the MAG.
- Have routine NATOPS and maintenance knowledge competitions within the squadron and MAG. Publish the results.

The WTI and the MAG Safety Officer should work together in everything they do. In a perfect world, the MAG WTI and Safety Officer would be one in the same. Ensure that he is in on the ground floor of planning for any tactical training evolution you develop. Have the Safety Officer "what if" and RM everything you put together.

Operations Duty Officers:

The ODO should be considered an integral part of the crew assigned to conduct missions on the flight schedule, and ensure the safe return of aircraft and personnel.

Many times Marine units assign very junior officers to be ODOs. The British have a very different approach to supervision. They have a billet the call the Flight Authorizer. They train five or six qualified officers who can act as Authorizers: the XO, the three Flight Commanders (all Major equivalent), the Qualified Flying Instructor, and the qualified Weapons Instructor. These officers, all senior experienced aviators, supervised the conduct of the daily flight schedule. They could make decisions on changes to the flight schedule based on weather and aircraft availability. They also made sure that any changes in weather or NOTAMS that might affect the mission's ready to go were briefed to the outgoing events. Lastly, they looked at all the products the event had prepared for their mission before they walked (maps, target attacks divert plans, fuels), to make sure they were correct and to standard and lastly



they queried the members of the flight on the EP and NATOPS question of the day and on the restrictions associated with their flight (or members of it). The Authorizer designation was a stepping stone billet to senior leadership and command billets in the RAF. Authorizers were very experienced flight leads and decision makers. They held the CO's trust and confidence to supervise the execution of the flight schedule and make decisions / changes on his behalf. You could examine doing something similar in your units by introducing a policy that only Section leads and above should be ODOs. It may initially be an immensely unpopular policy and potentially decrease your flight schedule by one or two sorties because of a lack of flight leaders, but you will have more experience at the ODO desk for each event as it plans and departs to execute the mission in the aggregate.

The flight schedule is the most important document you will ever put your signature on. The CO must understand every moving part, the pairings, the potential problem areas, the impacts on maintenance, everything. The Flight Officer and OPSO might create the flight schedule, but it is the CO's responsibility to make sure it is sound and sensible. If it is screwed up, it's not the OPSO's fault — it's the CO's. I made life hell for my OPSO initially, in the amount of attention and rudder I applied to the flight schedule construction process. After a couple of months it got a lot easier, because the OPSO started asking the FlightOs all the questions they knew I was going to ask. The FlightOs and WTIs built the Training Plans they needed to make the OPSO's job easier, and the OPSO, Safety Officer, and Maintenance Officer met to hash out the scratchy problems long before it got to me. Not an epiphany by any stretch, but for that unit, we needed to establish the high degree of importance the Commander placed on the flight schedule (in construction and execution) — and that its construction was a team effort (OPS, Safety, and Maintenance). The seeds of many mishaps are sown in a unit's flight schedule — much more so than the mishap reports ever identify.

Director of Safety and Standardization (DOSS):

The DOSS is your right-hand man in regards to safe and standardized operations. Ensure that your DOSS understands policies and enduring intent. The DOSS is responsible for our safety stand down events; they should be intimately involved in every aspect of the planning and execution. However, ensure your DOSS understands he/she needs to place as much, if not more, emphasis on the standardization aspect of these duties. Units that conduct professional, precise, and repeatable operations develop good organizational habits and very rarely have safety issues.

- The DOSS should have direct access to the CO — anytime, anywhere.

- The DOSS should spend at least two hours each day observing squadron operations—flight scheduling, ODO actions, flight briefs, flight line operations, FOD walks, aircraft maintenance, and other events that warrant leadership and supervisory oversight. If you are doing this right, every Sailor and Marine in the unit will know the Safety Officer.
- The DOSS should not hesitate to contact the CO with immediate concerns or policy issues. In the CO's absence, they should immediately seek out the XO.
- Tell the CO how we can reduce off-duty mishaps, especially motor vehicle / motorcycle mishaps.
- The DOSS should be involved in all standardization issues. I view the "standardization" role as being much more proactive than the "safety" role. Expect to work very closely with the S-3 and the MAG Tactics Officer to ensure that the unit is managing risks in everything we plan and do.
- Ensure that the units understand, appreciate, and comply with the concept of Risk Management and properly execute MAG standard procedures for the same. Conduct training on this, as required.
- Be prepared to talk at every unit staff meeting and be prepared to facilitate "True Confessions," as appropriate, with the intent of having experienced aircrew talk candidly about mistakes that they have made in the past with the intent of preventing the junior aircrew from experiencing the same.
- Be prepared at every staff meeting / safety stand down to discuss the circumstances you would predict for the next unit mishap — and discuss how you can prevent it.
- Ensure that the unit does not lose focus on NATOPS / OPNAV basics.
- Ensure that units conduct thorough pre-mishap drills at least quarterly. Ensure that some are conducted at deployed sites.
- Ensure that the units have input to *360 Safe* and *Approach* at least twice each year. General interest articles, Bravo Zulus, and milestone accomplishments should be forwarded for publication.
- Inform the CO where you require augmentation to support department projects.
- Provide aviation safety material where the aircrew congregates.
- Monitor individual aircrew safety milestone accomplishments (1000, 2000, 3000—hour, accident free flight hour certificates) and ensure prompt and proper award recognition.
- Ensure the CO is part of recognition events where prudent judgment and RM practices prevented a mishap. As appropriate, these need to be big events that have the CO's complete attention.



BE AN ENABLER TO GETTING THE MISSION ACCOMPLISHED SAFELY. THIS MEANS BEING INVOLVED IN THE PLANNING FROM THE START. IF YOU WAIT UNTIL EXECUTION TO IDENTIFY OUR PLAN IS UNSAFE, YOU HAVE FAILED.



Photo by Ted Carl

Aviation Safety Officer (ASO):

- ASOs are not statisticians. Junior Marines can be assigned to keep track of mishap-free flight hours. As the ASO, ensure your role and contribution to the squadron is something greater than tracking stats and flight hours.
- Aviation safety means doing things correctly. The ASO, together with the DOSS and NATOPS instructors, should be the standard bearers for safety and standardization — doing things correctly. This includes detailed planning, conducting flight briefs, filling out weight and balance forms, adhering to NATOPS and SOPs while in flight, or performing maintenance.
- The ASO should be a presence at every AOM. Volumes of safety information are generated each week that can be used to raise awareness in a unit's ready room and illustrate how hazards have affected other organizations.
- Look in other communities for safety information and best practices that are applicable to your ready room — a mishap that could have been prevented by a more thorough preflight is applicable to all platforms.
- Be an enabler to getting the mission accomplished safely. This means being involved in the planning from the start. If you wait until execution to identify our plan is unsafe, you have failed.
- The ASO should be a peer-group leader.
- The ASO must be astute enough to balance, in his mind, operations and safety. An ASO that continually "pulls the safety card" needs to be counseled or fired —unless your squadron needs him to do that...

Chaplain:

Don't overlook or underestimate the role of the chaplain. They are key members of your staff and should be used as such. The chaplain can be a confidential sounding board for the CO who will deal with some tough questions. They should know your squadron, and can be another set of eyes on your command climate. They serve as a valuable member of the Force Preservation Council team, and provide insight into struggling Marines. If the worst happens and you lose a Marine, you have a ready resource and not a stranger making that long walk up to someone's door. Ask the chaplain to visit the squadron regularly; like the flight surgeon or "docs," make an office for the chaplain, too. This is equally important at both 0-5 and 0-6 level command.



The chaplain is an expert in helping Marines deal with grief on the individual and organizational level. Chaplains are also able to provide sound and frank advice on funeral arrangements and help with the deceased's family.

“FLIGHT SCHEDULE — THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT DOCUMENT YOU WILL EVER PUT YOUR SIGNATURE ON.”





THE GREATEST VARIABLE IN AVIATION IS HUMAN PERFORMANCE.



4 SAFETY

Food for thought

Has the Marine Corps selected the right aviator, trained and scheduled them properly, supervised them appropriately, and implemented all possible controls to reduce the risk to the absolute lowest level while still achieving the desired effects? Where are you in this process, and who do you lead that influences this process? Your actions now, as an aviator and as a leader, could mitigate the potential for a future mishap that will save valuable lives and machinery.

Safety is an integral part of every command. There is a direct correlation between SAFETY and READINESS.

Purpose: ***"Marines Take Care of their Own"***

MCDP 1-0 Operations identifies six enduring Marine Corps principles. These principles define the Marine Corps' culture, organization, doctrine, and essential equipment. The sixth principle expresses the devotion that Marines have to one another: "Marines take care of their own." There are no limitations to this principle; it is unequivocal. It is what makes the Marine Corps unique among military services, and it is the distillation of "Semper Fidelis."

Method: ***The Four Pillars***

An effective safety program is proactive, coherent, transferrable, and recognizable. The Marine Corps Safety Program provides the foundation for centralized safety command and control to preserve Marines and equipment. An effective safety system is outlined in four simple principles. Since safety is a byproduct of demonstrated

and enforced standards, the inherent responsibility for the implementation of these four principles rests on the Commander.

1. **Culture** – “Marines take care of their own” is the guiding principle. It is the Commander’s responsibility to ensure that this principle is evident in planning, operations, and mentorship, both on and off duty. It establishes a just, learning, and reporting culture that empowers all Marines to proactively enhance safety and manage risk in daily operations.
2. **Training** – Each command is distinct and will require unique safety training specific to their function, mission, experience, location, etc. Commanders and their staffs must determine and implement the appropriate training.
3. **Risk Management** – Risk Management is primarily an organizational process to assist Marines in making risk-informed decisions during execution. Its corollary is the Marine Corps Planning Process; planning is conducted to enable valid decision making in execution.
4. **Assurance** – “Inspect what you expect” – The Commander must identify a series of metrics indicative of the nature of the culture, the applicability of training, and the effectiveness of the Risk Management in the unit. This feedback provides the Commander information required to apply resources to the appropriate pillar to create a more effective system.

End State: *“What are we doing about these losses?”*

“Marines take care of their own” means that the loss of any Marine is significant and should concern us all. There is no need to wait for a statistically relevant trend to take action. The system listed above provides coherence between both the Marine Corps Safety Program and a unit safety program.

Presence: *“Every day a Commander must determine where their presence is required.”*
– Gen Dunford

Where you are on a daily basis will demonstrate to your Marines what is important to you. Are you at FOD walk? Do you take part in mission planning? Do you attend the debrief? Do you spend time with night crew? You will not have time to do everything you want so you must understand where you are required for the benefit of your Marines. The only way to develop a culture of safe operations and mishap avoidance is by consistent visible commitment on the part of the Commander. Once the culture is established, Marines will innovate and find ways to optimize the precious resources of the squadron. If you are committed to Risk Management, your Marines also will be.



Comments from the Greybeards:

This is a profession where on a daily basis we literally place our lives in the hands of those who maintain our aircraft, and Marines who fly with us place their lives in our hands. This is an awesome responsibility and we must constantly prove worthy of the trust that other Marines place in us.

We always make time to do things right the second time after we have had a mishap. As we work the mundane day-to-day business associated with staying honed for combat, make sure that we are following the procedures, anticipating the worst that can happen, and operating to mitigate the risk. In combat aviation, we are more likely to become ineffective by violating the SOPs than we are from enemy action. Our Marines and Sailors are too precious to be injured or lost due to departure from the procedures or inattention to detail.

“It is the little stuff that kills us.” This may seem like a trite phrase, but in fact when you examine the findings of a mishap investigation it is a breakdown of small procedures or inattention to small details that combined culminates in a catastrophic event. Pay attention to the little things, the details; seek “excellence in all that you do” and the large things will fall into place. Details matter...and as Ben Franklin said: “Be prepared, or be prepared to fail.”

- There are few things more fulfilling than showing up on day one of the battle with all of your airplanes and all of your Marines...except for accomplishing your mission and bringing all of your airplanes and Marines home when the deployment is complete.
- If you’re not being safe....then you’re not being tactical (or professional)!
- There is no such thing as a sound tactic that is unsafe. If it is unsafe — then it’s not sound.
- Reducing a Marine’s exposure to risk while you kick your adversary’s ass just makes sense...only a fool thinks otherwise!



“THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS RISK FREE FLYING AND THERE IS NO “AUTO PILOT” IN COMMANDING AN AVIATION UNIT.”

Preparation / Planning: *“The key to success in aviation is preparation.” – Capt Eric “Winkle” Brown, Royal Navy (google the name)*

Commanders must set goals for their units. A challenge for Commanders is to pursue these goals while accounting for the personal, material, organizational, and environmental hazards that can lead to mishaps, injuries, or near misses.

If you build your plan by assessing your TEEP, deployment timelines, training opportunities, manning levels, qualifications, and readiness levels and incorporate Risk Management principles from the start, you will have your controls “baked in.” If done well and communicated effectively, all members of your unit will utilize Risk Management as part of the planning process, and it will foster an environment for sound decision making during execution.

Well trained, prepared, and disciplined pilots and aircrew are the last line of defense against operational failures and mishaps. Through your example, demonstrate to your Marines that you know your stuff and set the standard for preparation and judicious risk-informed decision making in execution.



Safety Policy: *“Innovation happens in the operating forces; change happens at the institutional level.” – Col Bryan McCoy*

Develop a safety policy that your Marines can use throughout your command. Inform the staff and the Marines of what their role is in the safety program, how the program will function, who is responsible for its execution, and what resources are available.

A good policy development process should look like MCPP. Ensure the XO, OPSO, AMO, and DSS know your expectations, how you expect them to interact and integrate Risk Management principles, and what authority you are delegating to them (and what you are not). Explicitly identify the appropriate level for risk acceptance.

Standards and Standardization: *“Never waive a training standard...”*

NATOPS, SOPs, and T&R requirements are institutional controls created to mitigate hazards that have been identified over decades of operational experience. Reliance on and familiarity with these procedures and requirements is even more crucial when operational tempo increases or the sense of urgency associated with the mission is higher. Foster a command climate that promotes flight discipline and adherence to established procedures and requirements at all times. Deviations from these controls must withstand the toughest scrutiny and shall not be tolerated when unjustified.

Training the way that we fight is still a sound principle. In training, our crews will eventually have to conduct tough, challenging missions, and they will learn to perform them well. How we attain and maintain that level of readiness is the secret to minimizing risk and protecting our Marines and equipment.

The experience base in our squadrons has diminished significantly. Quite frankly, we no longer have the seasoned Captains and Majors in the air or on the ODO desk to make the hard calls. Nor do we have the depth of seasoned Gunnery and Staff Sergeants in Maintenance as we once had. Sergeants have been replaced by Corporals and Lance Corporals; Gunnery Sergeants have been replaced by Sergeants. Risk mitigation provides “trip wires” that automatically require us to ask questions such as “Why?” and “Is the payoff worth the risk?” Risk Management is the CO’s alter ego when he or she is not present - empower your Marines to use it, at every level, every day, for every mission.

As a Commander, you must embody Risk Management and its principles. Risk Management increases the ability to make informed decisions by answering the question, “Do the benefits outweigh the risks?” More plainly stated – “Is the juice worth the squeeze?” Risk Management is a means to identify and assess hazards, make risk decisions, implement controls, and supervise. We do not “just wing it” — our Marines and equipment are far too valuable to the nation. At a minimum, all briefs should

answer two questions: (1) What were the risks identified in this mission or course of action? and (2) What has been done to reduce those risks to an acceptable level? Always be on-guard against acute and cumulative fatigue. The effects are insidious and will degrade the performance of the best Marines. Fatigued individuals are more likely to make mistakes and then be less likely to catch them.

Aviation Safety: Although we are preparing for combat, we must execute safely in both the training and operational environments.

- No sound tactical plan is unsafe.
- Fly often, fly the hard missions, and remember everything you do will be noticed – mission plan, brief, preflight, post flight, de-brief. Set the standard, live the standard, and demand others follow.
- Fly with each of your pilots and aircrew, and rank them with the XO and OPSO; see if any of you have major disconnects.
- Do peer evaluations — flying skills, professional skills, and personal skills. While keeping these confidential, they may give insight on hidden problems. Give your department heads and junior officers the opportunity to critique you through command and personal surveys.
- Prepare for mishaps and deaths so that you are ready if the unthinkable happens.
- Encourage junior officers to speak up and listen to them; what seems obvious to you may not be to them *and vice versa*.
- The little things matter – cranial on when preflighting, visor down and gloves on when flying, approach plate out; your first tour pilots are developing their habit patterns based on your actions.

Almost every accident is due to a procedural error of some sort. It is not that the individual involved was not trained, did not know better, did not have resources available to reference, or could not have made a different decision as the incident / mishap unfolded.

Engaged leadership and mutual accountability across the ranks is required, both when deployed and in garrison, to ensure the individual Marine and the team sustains excellence in operations...safely.

Give safety drills their due diligence. We often degrade to an ODO drill, but you should also have the standing AMB, maintenance department, and recovery team Marines go through procedures. Conduct CACO drills as well.

The systematic approach outlined above is not proscriptive; instead, it provides the tools and flexibility for a commander to innovate to accomplish the mission while maximizing performance and managing risk.



SET THE STANDARD AND DEMAND OTHERS FOLLOW!





THERE IS NO SECOND CHANCE IN MAINTENANCE. THINGS MUST BE DONE CORRECTLY THE FIRST TIME AND THEY MUST BE DONE BY THE APPROVED AND ESTABLISHED PROCEDURES.

5 MAINTENANCE & LOGISTICS

- The center of gravity of a flying squadron is its maintenance department. Everything is possible with good aircraft availability. Nothing is possible without it.
- The center of gravity of a flying group is its MALS. A MAG CO that does not understand the MALS, does not weight his effort between flying squadrons against the MALS, and does not ensure the MALS supports all of the MAG's squadrons, will fail.
- Mindset: CDI = WTI. Know all of yours. Ensure you have picked the right Marines for these critical jobs.
- There is no second chance in maintenance. Things must be done correctly the first time and they must be done by the approved and established procedures.
- There is no room for the "This is the way we do it here, or did it in the old days" mentality. There is only one way to do it...the right way.
- No one has the authority to overrule the NAMP or cut maintenance procedures / inspections, not even the CO. If the aircraft is down, it's down. Only a waiver from NAVAIR can authorize a onetime flight. Once your Marines observe the CO cutting maintenance corners, they will follow in due course.
- Train your new Marines, train them correctly, and give them the power to stop the train when they see something unsafe or when they are uncertain whether something is being done correctly.
- Get your leadership out from behind their desks and computers and have them lead and supervise the maintenance and training being done. Don't allow them to just sit in their air-conditioned spaces and give instructions.
- Accountability is key. Marines at all ranks must be held 100% accountable for their actions and decisions.

- You can't "hope" it works out. Planning early may mean that you must plan more than once, but a good plan early is much better than an excellent plan late.
- Maintenance and Operations must work together, hand-in-hand; one complements and enables the other. Have them develop monthly, quarterly, and yearly plans that are supportable and allow each to be successful.
- Personnel stability can be a driving variable in a squadron increasing risk to life and mission. This is a critically important factor in building and maintaining a cohesive maintenance department in particular, and it is something you must give appropriate attention.

People are your driving force in maintenance and striking a good balance of personality, experience, work ethic, professionalism, and ingenuity across the department will be your task. Do not leave this to the AMO alone. A poorly placed individual is a cancer that adds friction, which increases risk in a number of ways. These "cancers" will spread and negatively influence the rest of the department.

You cannot hand pick every Marine. Build a team with what you have. Additionally, there are a number of actions you can take to decrease variability and uncertainty in maintenance departments, thus reducing risk. Here are some ideas:

- Have the Maintenance Chief and AMO build a long-range personnel rotation plan (that you can understand) and note when key billet holders are moving and when shops will be overstaffed / shorthanded. Have the AMO explain it to you in detail at least once a quarter.
- Ensure all key billet holders: AMO, AAMO, QAO, MMCO are trained before they take the job.
- You may have a captain that is better suited to be the AMO than an available major.
- We must be good stewards of our aviation assets (aircraft, IMRL, tools, etc.). We cannot misuse, abuse, or over use our tools and war fighting assets. Getting the most flight hours is not a good approach to asset management. Use the T&R and plan your training programs to accomplish goals while preserving our assets.

The long-term health of our aircraft is critical to the ability of the Marine Corps to make mission and fight wars. Solid training programs provide the means to accomplish these goals while preserving our assets. It is short sighted to sacrifice the training requirements for short-term gains, so focus on maintenance training. Your attention as the Commander will carry tremendous weight in the squadron. Focus not on what is written in the MMP, but focus on execution of maintenance training in a manner that is valued by the squadron and by the Marines and aggressively builds the qualifications and experience you need to be successful.



Developing and acknowledging your collateral duty inspectors and quality assurance representatives (CDIs / CDQARs / QARs) is key; their integrity will save airplanes, engines, and components. Recognize excellence with these Marines, and reward them when they make a tough decision, even if it means lost sorties. Ensure your maintenance Marines aspire to these positions of responsibility.

Weekly tech training is critical to developing skilled maintainers. Do not cancel or shorten weekly tech training periods unless absolutely required to support a fragged event, and then be very diligent to reschedule the missed tech training for the very next day. Show your personal commitment to weekly tech training by observing and participating in it. Rather than scheduling your weekly Department Head meeting during tech training, walk around and observe tech training in 2-3 different shops. Make sure your Division Officers and Maintenance Officers do the same thing.

Maintenance Department SNCOs, especially Division Chiefs, should spend most of their time on the flight line, observing, and mentoring. For these SNCOs to maintain the respect of their subordinates, they must re-earn their maintenance qualifications. Do not allow a SNCO to return from a B-billet like recruiting and decide to focus on the "leadership aspects" of their Div Chief job and not re-earn their qualifications.

Add incentives for your Marines to earn advanced maintenance qualifications. Marines will sometimes view such quals as being good for little else than guaranteeing them more work hours. If this is the case in your squadron, work very hard to change that perception. There are a host of ways to do this. Painting the names of new CDIs and CDQARs on your aircraft (like we do for plane captains), awarding them 96-hour weekends upon completion of their qual, and recognizing them at all hands formations are just a few examples.

Keep constant focus on improving the material condition of the aircraft. Personally look closely (similar to a pre-flight) at each aircraft after the flying day is complete and weekly when no flight line activity is taking place. Gripes will begin getting corrected, and the little things will also be improved. If that is not possible, the AC Phase maintenance cycle should be performed which cleans out the ADB of all up gripes — waived only by the AMO and briefed to the CO before it is returned to flight. This pays



“YOU CAN LEARN A LOT BY LISTENING AND WATCHING — THE KINDS OF THINGS THAT MAY NOT SHOW UP IN YOUR READINESS AND RETENTION REPORTS.”

off in developing a culture of greater attention to detail in the maintenance department, with sustained, high readiness rates and fewer major failures and repeat gripes. This has to be sustained by a CO's constant attention in post-flight maintenance debriefs, interaction with the maintenance department, and guidance to pilots.

There is no slack in the foreseeable future on the use of our airplanes and equipment. While we wait for the good work that Marine aviation has done to arrive in the fleet, we will be required to care for and fight with what we have on our flight lines. You are required to do your part; take splendid care of what you currently have. Quite frankly, we will be at war again with the assets that we currently own before the new stuff arrives. You should like well-maintained and clean airplanes and equipment! Shabby, worn-out looking equipment is a disgrace to the squadron Commander and his / her Marines.

There was a day when squadron Commanders were known as either "operations" Commanders or "maintenance" Commanders. Flying squadron Commanders who fail to focus on aircraft maintenance fail. The fact is that everything is possible with up aircraft, and nothing is possible without them. You can have a ready room full of WTIs, but if you have no up aircraft, your squadron is useless. Good squadron Commanders universally understand aircraft maintenance. They understand the data that their maintenance departments provide them and are skilled at using data to understand and make sound decisions regarding proper resource allocation in order to maximize aircraft readiness and sortie based training results.

Plan to launch all the aircraft you have at the same time once every three months. Plan for it; maintenance can work phases around it, and it is a huge motivational boost for the squadron. Conduct ever-increasingly complex missions when airborne; this allows your planners to prepare for a flight level mission and you can blend in threats, escorts, etc., when ready. If you get used to launching 1/4 or 1/3 of your aircraft each day, that's where the bar will be set. While it's impractical to attempt to surge all of your aircraft regularly, there is usefulness to planned periods of surge operations in order to allow a CO to evaluate and test the capacity of the squadron (both operations and maintenance).



Presence and kicking boxes:

Make sure you take time out of your day / evenings / weekends to go out and visit your maintenance Marines and talk to them (nothing new here). Tell your AMO that you are going to go out and talk to the Marines whenever you want — without a heads up. It is a way of getting to know each of the Marines, learning about what they are doing, and determining what you can do to help them — and do so in an informal way that does not interrupt the work being done. Most importantly, Marines see you out and about in their work centers. Make a point of trying to go in on nights and weekends if Maintenance crews are on duty. You can learn a lot by listening and watching — the kinds of things that may not show up in your readiness and retention reports.

In theory, a squadron that conducts its maintenance in strict accordance with OPNAV 4790 should always be "inspection ready." In reality, that is often not the case. While the maintenance itself is sound, squadrons will sometimes fall behind on certain administrative requirements or need dedicated time to prepare for the practical drills they will see during the inspection. Even the best squadrons will therefore usually require dedicated time to prepare for a maintenance inspection. The OPSO will resist this, especially if he or she does not have a maintenance background. The CO should remind the OPSO that the impact to qual progression and flight hour production will be far greater if the squadron fails the inspection than if the squadron simply sets aside adequate preparatory time up front. There are a variety of ways to create whitespace in which your maintenance department can prepare for the inspection without the distraction of running a local flight schedule. Mid-week cross countries and out-and-ins to other bases are but two examples.



Maintenance advice:

Make sure your QAO, QA chief and QA department are rock solid, staffed to T/O, and up to the job. They need to be senior and experienced Marines who want to be there because they understand their critical importance. They need to be visible and capable of intervening and mentoring. Task them to do things and have them produce a weekly report of their activities / observations.

- Have the OPSO personally brief the Maintenance Department once a quarter on the operations game plan.
- Force your staff to produce a flight schedule by 1600 every day.
- When you fly, pay attention to the details, flight schedule, shop preparedness, logbooks, sign offs, weight and balance, correct loadouts, etc.
- Use MALS for inspection assists as often as practical to get a second opinion on your programs.
- Attend FOD walks often.
- Observe aircraft launches from a distance.
- Sit through a maintenance meeting at least once a week.
- Have your AMO review shop pass down books for good communications.
- Visit night crew often and ensure there is a visible officer presence.
- Never let the AMO or Maintenance Chief move a key billet holder / SNCOIC without your knowledge.
- Know every aircraft inside and out.
- Ensure all up AC discrepancies are corrected before completing an a Phase Maintenance cycle.
- Know when work is being done twice.
- Unscheduled maintenance is not good.
- Only the most qualified and capable pilots get FCF quals and only as many as you need.
- Take part in some maintenance actions, watch for pub use, workspace hygiene, leadership, QA presence, and proficiency. Engine installs are good for this.
- Take part in solving tough downing gripes.
- Read the NAMP.
- QARs must not have their own set of standards.
- Demand a clean, organized work environment that includes individual Marine hygiene.



Cultivate a maintenance organization that is not “doing maintenance because it does maintenance.” This means Marines need to feel like they can take their time to do the work correctly the first time. They have lots of pride and will be reluctant to ask for help on troublesome gripes. Your job is to save them the pain and get the sorties out. Get help early from Tech Reps / FST. Quality work over time will get and keep your aircraft / systems healthy and morale high. Quality does not come overnight. It requires your devoted attention for the long run.





6

SHIPBOARD OPERATIONS

We are a maritime nation with global responsibilities requiring ready, sea-based forces that are organized, trained, and equipped to conduct operations in the littorals ranging from humanitarian assistance to major combat and “such other duties as the President may direct.” This has been, and will remain, the Marine Corps’ primary role in providing for the Nation’s defense. Our ability to operate safely and effectively from amphibious shipping makes us America’s expeditionary force in readiness.

Communication:

Effective communication is the key to your organization’s success. Whether you are dealing with your staff, higher headquarters, or the Navy, it will be difficult to be an effective Commander if you cannot articulate your position.

Aboard ship, there is an important triad that impacts aircraft readiness. It is composed of the ACE, Ship’s Supply Officer (SupO), and Aviation Intermediate Maintenance Department Officer (AIMDO). SupOs, in particular, can make or break you with their ability (or lack thereof) to get parts. Ensure you develop a good working relationship with the SupO and AIMDO. Another key relationship is between the ACE CO and the Air Boss. You have to spend time with the Air Boss in an effort to increase the understanding of what you are trying to accomplish with the ACE and what you expect out of the Air Department. It is possible the Air Boss will not have an amphibious background and will not be familiar with the size of MEU air packages. It will take time to increase the knowledge base and comfort level. Do not be surprised if the Airboss tells you the ship is unable to launch more aircraft than they have spots for, particularly at night. An ongoing education process is required

to shape the Air Boss and the Air Department.

One recommendation to help reduce ramp-up time is to push for the Air Bosses from your MEUs to come out to observe CERTEX / JTFEX prior to the start of your PTP so they will have a better understanding of how the Air Department is expected to operate in the months ahead. This will go a long way towards easing some of the apprehension the Air Boss will experience over working with a composite squadron for the first time. Keep the lines of communication open.

Coordination:

Coordination goes hand in hand with communication. Aboard ship, the amount of coordination and lead time required to make something happen is significantly higher than ashore. Everyone is competing for a share of the same real estate. To ensure that you get what you want, you must make sure you have representation at the weekly PB4T (Planning Board for Training) meetings. During the PB4T, the schedule for the following week is planned. Based on PB4T input / discussion, the Ship's Operations Officer develops the Schedule of Events (SOE). If you have not completed the required coordination necessary to get an event on the SOE, it probably is not going to happen which means you are going to have to wait another week to get what you want.

Realistic Expectations:

One of the biggest challenges aboard ship is balancing competing priorities. Understand that the ACE is not the only game in town. Make sure ship personnel know that the ACE has more stringent and codified requirements for re-fly interval and proficiency. So goes the ACE, so goes the MEU.

During the TRANSLANT / TRANSPAC period, it is difficult to establish a flight operations battle rhythm. This is mainly due to the winds not always supporting flight ops. Normally on the way out, the squadron's focus is on DLQs which forces the ship to provide favorable winds for a long period of time. If you can stay on PIM and conduct flight operations without having to make major course corrections, everything will work out fine; otherwise, you will have a fight on your hands. The MEU staff should help you with this battle.

There is an amount of uncertainty associated with life aboard ship, and changes from one day to the next are a fact of life. The Air Planning Board (APB) can be a tough place to negotiate. The more predictable you are, the more likely you are to get what you want / need. Your squadron's training requirements should be driving the PB4T input and make it easier for your operations representatives to do their jobs.



If your ACE or any part of it is not current or proficient, your ACE is below average and essentially "not ready." If any portion of the ACE is not ready, the MEU is not ready.

Flight Deck Operations:

It is important to break-in the flight deck in the right way. Do not sign up for ill-advised SOP items with the ship, even if it is only for a short period of time. Whatever standards you put into place, the next guy will either have to live with or be forced to spend an inordinate amount of time trying to undo the damage you did.

Seasoning the flight deck correctly is going to be especially important as we continue to introduce F-35Bs to the shipboard deployment cycle. We have to get it right the first time in order to mitigate FOD incidents. This will take a lot of oversight on the part of the ACE staff, and this goes well beyond just landing aboard ship.

Tower Flower:

Take a personal interest in training Tower Flowers. The Tower Flower is your direct representative and must be aggressive to be effective. The Tower Flower must fully understand your priorities for the fly day (training vs. testing, one T/M/S vs. another, etc.) in order to be able to properly advise the Air Boss. The Tower Flower must be in continuous communication with Maintenance Control and the ODO to maintain situational awareness and should always be looking for opportunities to sneak in another test aircraft.

If Tower Flowers are not driving the train, Air Bosses will do what they think is best. Spend time in the tower to see how things are going and influence operations. You should conveniently appear in the tower anytime anything controversial or out of the ordinary is about to happen.

STOVL LSO:

The LSO is your expert in launching and recovering fixed-wing aircraft. Observe them at work in the tower, ask questions, and learn from them. Due to their duties, they will have direct communication with the Air Boss and the ship's Captain. Ensure they also



“SOLVE PROBLEMS AT THE LOWEST LEVEL POSSIBLE.”

have a direct line of communication to you in order to provide a seamless message to Navy leadership.

Listen to your LSO teach and brief the detachment pilots. Learn and understand the difference in hazards and concerns for fixed-wing / single-piloted aircraft vs tilt-rotor or rotary-wing aircraft.

The duties of the LSO do not start and end in the tower. Ensure the LSO and detachment personnel are present at flight deck meetings and all FOD walks. Engage with the entire Air Department from the Air Boss to the lowest ranking blue shirt to create a team that will accomplish the mission.

Ensure LSOs understand the big picture. They are a representative of the entire ACE in the tower and can assist the Air Boss and Tower Controller to accomplish all ACE priorities – not just those priorities of the fixed-wing component. LSOs are senior aviators with proven decision-making skills and multiple deployments that can offer advice and assist in a crisis.

Carrier Air Wing (CVW) LSO:

Get involved early with CVW Paddles. Invite them to fly and wave your squadron FCLPs as well as become part of the squadron prior to at sea periods. Get your LSOs trained early, and keep them proficient.

Problem Solving:

Solve problems at the lowest level possible. Do not allow your staff to drag you into trivial arguments; force them to solve the problems themselves. The CO should only get involved as a last resort. For you to get involved, it should be for time-sensitive situations that require your participation to prevent losing an important training opportunity, etc., or when all other options have been expended.

Use your fire power wisely / sparingly; otherwise it will not have the desired effects.





"LEADERSHIP"—
CALMLY AND CONFIDENTLY TAKE CHARGE.



7 COMBAT THOUGHTS

- Combat flight operations are the reason our nation has Marine aviation. If we do not do it well and enable the success of the MAGTF, there is no point in maintaining Marine aviation. It is critical that your maintenance and aircrew Marines see combat as nothing more than an extension of the training you've conducted to prepare them. "Fight like you train" is just as important as "Train like you fight."
- The terminal phase of flight is the most vulnerable time for rotary wing and tiltrotor aircraft; it's important to heed the advice of HLZ control and make use of tactical approaches to mitigate the SAFIRE threat. Basic tactics work the best. Don't forget about HLZ preparations – improvements are risk mitigation.
- Time on the ground in an HLZ, for aircraft, can be crucial. The enemy is adaptive and will anticipate your departure. Understand there are limits to your exposure and only deviate after careful consideration.
- Timelines are important, whether it's a named operation or routine tasking. Getting ahead or behind timeline has second and third order effects.
- Communication is key. The plan is a point of departure for every evolution. Once things begin to change, communication with the TACC (via the MACCS) can mean the difference between wasting precious time on the aircraft and making efficient use of available assets.
- Establish a squadron SOP that requires your aircrew to call the supported units before and after every mission. The first phone call verifies the tasking, requests situation updates, and informs the supported unit that your flight will be on time, 15 minutes late, etc. The post-mission phone call debriefs potential issues, seeks

lessons learned, and answers any questions that might have arisen. The habitual conduct of these phone calls builds a professional working relationship and ensures that mistakes, once made, are not repeated.

- Send After Action Reports (AARs) to the rear echelon for review and possible implementation into new TTPs. Today's adaptation to the enemy or situation is tomorrow's procedure. Ensure AARs are available / utilized at required training venues and integrated into any / all pre-deployment training. Train to ROEs before you deploy (this is especially true for shooters).
- Squadrons should strive to build enduring relationships with the units they will support. The relationship building stage starts before deployment and continues throughout the deployment. Team building is contagious.

The threat, weather, environmental conditions, illumination levels, and HLZ conditions often combine to create a challenging and hazardous environment; take care to mentally prepare crews that some missions will challenge or stretch their comfort level. This is a natural phenomenon. Care should be taken when scheduling crews to avoid exceeding skill sets of individual pilots. Not all pilots are capable, or up to, every mission; play to your crews' strengths. You may have to pick an "A" team and a "B" team.

Never forget who you support. The Marine on the ground is, in most cases, taking a lot more risk than you think (and probably more than you). Support them as much as you can while considering tactical risk, limitations, and expectations. While providing aviation fires, deadly accurate fire is only productive if you are destroying the enemy. Any civilian casualties can destroy our tactical / strategic advantages.

As you prepare to deploy to theater, remember the importance of fostering habitual relationships with our counterparts in the Ground Combat Element (GCE). These relationships are strengthened at places like The Basic School, Expeditionary Warfare School, on FAC tours, and they are critical in a combat environment. They help us better understand the needs of the GCE, and it helps them better understand our capabilities. At the end of the day, it increases trust, fosters implicit communication, and makes us a much more effective fighting force.

Transition to combat is easier if you don't have to bend the rules to get the job done. When Desert Shield became Desert Storm there was a lot of inappropriate discussion about getting rid of the rules, but they are critical in a combat environment. Never waive a peacetime rule during deployment. You may have the authority to do it, and it may be easier to do it, but hold the standard. Strive to have your unit in the position to avoid the path that forces us to choose between safety and mission accomplishment.



The training you provide needs to be challenging and realistic. Focus your efforts on your forthcoming deployment and your most likely required missions. That said, there is never a reason to lose an airplane, a valuable piece of equipment, nor, more importantly, the life of one of your Marines during training...NEVER. Do not fall for the old ready room adage that if you're going to train hard and realistically, you have to expect and accept losses. That kind of thought is not tolerable. Building block training: There is no other way to get the Marine Corps where it needs to be regarding fielding core-competent squadrons than by training in a building block approach. Walk before we run...each step built upon the successful completion of the previous step. It forms the foundation of the Core Competency training model.

In combat, flight leadership means more than instructor skills. Each Commander should build a standardization and certification program that teaches and emphasizes the importance of sound airmanship and strong flight leadership and leverages the experience and inputs of the FLSE. We in aviation have become enamored with instructor qualifications at the expense of consistently strong flight leadership and headwork; we as the senior leadership of our communities must turn this around.

The Day You Have a Combat Loss or Mishap:

In advance, you must mentally prepare and be explicitly clear as to your expectation of the unit in the face of a combat loss or mishap and the deaths of fellow Marines and Sailors. From day one, you must believe in, reinforce, and lead by demonstrated example.

Be ready for combat losses. Ensure your units are overly prepared for when an aircraft goes down with fatalities; the response is on autopilot when emotions are high and nerves are raw. From the CO down to the ODO, everyone needs to know exactly what to do and in what order. Get everyone else out of the way and ensure they are refocused on the mission. The unit will key off your reaction, body language, and leadership —

“FIGHT BETTER, SMARTER, MORE EFFECTIVELY.”



calmly and confidently take charge. The Marine Corps is a small organization, and losing a comrade affects more than the immediate unit. Remember, while deployed, other organizations will aid in your success to deal with such a loss. Their aptitude, preparedness, and professionalism will ensure your success when dealing with family, friends, and loved ones of the fallen.

- You must tell your Marines and Sailors that, as a Commander, you cannot guarantee that your unit will not have a combat loss or a mishap, but you can guarantee them what they will do if it happens. They will get up, fix, operate, and fly safely, continue to learn and adjust, climb in their cockpits, and they will fight better, smarter, and more effectively than before the loss.
- You will not relieve them of any combat tasking or mission; you cannot. There are 19 year old Marines out there counting on the ACE to be there for them. Frankly, it does not matter to them that you have lost your comrades and friends in combat or mishap. They have lost their friends too, probably at a greater rate and in greater numbers than you and your aircrews have experienced. What matters is that you are there to “fight overhead and alongside them,” so they kill the enemy, get the job done, and finish the day alive with all their parts intact.
- Our GCE and LCE brothers and sisters go out every day, patrol and fight, get blown up or ambushed, lose their comrades in engagements and then, the next day, they get up, climb in their armored HMMWV / MRAPs / LAVs, and go do it all again until our adversaries are crushed and defeated. They will have an opportunity to honor and mourn, but in the meantime, they have their duty to perform. We can show no less courage or dedication. Your squadron needs to know that you and the Chain of Command will only relieve you of the tasking necessary to get organized for either the recovery or the aircraft mishap board.

Courage is defined by Webster's Dictionary as “facing danger or risk without fear.” Experience teaches that “Courage is really facing danger or risk with your fears.” Men and women, afraid, acting as though they are not really, and then moving out and forward towards the enemy to do their duty and get the job done the best way they can. Your Marines need to know and be reminded about what is expected of them, and to show courage by their decisions, examples, and actions.

You must circulate and speak to your command, remind them of your conversation and the expectation of duty. Acknowledge the loss of your comrades and remind them that we will all have the opportunity to mourn together — just not yet as there is work to be done and comrades still at risk.



- As an Aviation Commander, you are expected to lead from the front, by example, share in the risks, share in the courage of your Marines and Sailors, and cheer them onward to greater achievement.
- Follow the general rule that when the bulk of your squadron is committed to battle / combat, then you will be in the air and in command. You were selected for this command and are being paid to competently lead, fight, and succeed with your squadron.
- You must ensure your personal tactical planning, execution, and flight skill sets are proficient and exercised regularly, as they are perishable.
- You need to train alternate Mission Commanders for depth and leadership resilience in the event of casualties or incapacitation. The highest compliment for a combat leader is that his leadership team and unit are so well trained and competent that they will succeed without him.
- Time is your adversary if you let negative or fearful attitudes take root and affect the combat readiness and performance of the unit.
- You must continue the tempo and pace of operations. Keep your Marines busy and focused on the current and next mission. If you do not, you risk breaking the “spirit” of your warfighters by allowing them too much time to think and feed their personal fears.
- The combat loss assessment or aircraft mishap board will come to its conclusions. Your job is the present, the living, and keeping your unit in the fight and combat effective. Your goal is to make them more dangerous to the enemy, not less, through continued daily focus and effective execution.
- You must put away your personal fears and be the first to climb into the cockpit.



Lead from the front and by your steadfast example in order to share in their courage, share in the risk, and cheer them onward to greater achievements. Otherwise, the unit may break or someone else may replace you as the undesignated but actual combat leader of your squadron / unit, and the person your Marines and Sailors will follow into and out of the operational maelstrom.

Assess the loss and then adjust your employment pattern, scheme of maneuver, or TTPs to mitigate risk and give maximum combat and safe execution advantage to the operators and aircrews as they fight.





WHILE WE STRIVE TO MAXIMIZE RM AND OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY, IT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO DEVELOP TACTICALLY SOUND PLANS.



8 COMMAND AT THE GROUP AND WING LEVEL

When deployed, be wary of Squadron Commanders who try to outdo one another regarding flight hours and sorties. Fostering a spirit of competition is healthy, but not if it comes with showmanship and one-ups-manship. The hours and sorties are always dictated by the mission. Watch your flight hour management programs. Stress on manpower and equipment is not worth bragging rights in the rear on “who got the most / who did the best.” The next unit in theater will pay the price.

While we strive to maximize RM and operational efficiency, it's most important to develop tactically sound plans. A tactically sound plan is inherently safe, recognizes and mitigates risk, and achieves mission success. No plan is without risk, but proper training and planning significantly reduces risk. Detailed plans are not to be confused with complicated plans; there are three keys to a good plan. Good plans are simple, redundant, and well-understood.

When dealing with coalition relationships, think outside the box. Build a relationship with your coalition partners, cull information from their TTPs, and adapt. They have a wealth of knowledge. All mission planning should have a coalition partner. One way to build enduring relationships is to encourage face to face meetings before you deploy, and continue it throughout deployment.

Feedback is critical; if something needs to be fixed, complete an after action report so that higher HQ knows about it. It goes without saying; it can't be fixed if no one knows it's broken.



“THE GROUP STAFF’S PRIORITY IS TO SUPPORT THE SQUADRON — BE A HELP, NOT A HINDRANCE.”

Each agency in the MACCS relies on the input of aircrew operating in the system; the MACCS will have an incomplete picture of the situation unless aircrews intentionally and regularly provide timely feedback and updates.

The unit CO must adhere to your guidance, lead his team forward, and accomplish the desired end-state or be replaced after a warning. Time is of the essence in keeping the warfighting spirit and focus of the unit. If the leadership at the top falters or waivers badly, due to exhaustion or character flaws, you have no choice; you must act decisively and get someone in there that will re-focus and re-motivate the unit by their leadership and example.

The press can be positive or negative. Use your Public Affairs Officer to influence as much as possible. Know that no matter what you do, there are some agencies that have an agenda and will write what they want. Be prepared for damage control. When dealing with reporters, keep your PAO in the loop. Know who the reporter will interact with and ensure they are properly briefed on OPSEC, mission statement, and possible questions to be asked.

Some of your COs will not really be comfortable in command yet. They may have a tendency to work for consensus rather than laying down the law when it is required. They prefer to tell their personnel the Group said no. Some just cannot make good decisions on their own.

Balance the requirements and desires of your staff and your subordinate Commanders. Both will be “right” at different times. Hold your squadron Commanders accountable: ensure they are flying and leading professionally and setting the standard for their squadron. At the same time, you must be approachable: talk with them about their future, their strengths and weaknesses, their family, leadership, and legal challenges. Develop a climate where squadron COs work together and solve problems with each other’s help / input. Use MAG CO meetings to discuss items that apply to the group: supply issues, legal challenges, material readiness, near misses, etc.



Focus on being a force provider, balancing resources to keep squadrons whole, and creating the right environment to allow all squadrons to succeed. This takes stress off the squadrons and can prevent a squadron CO from being put in a box that leads to unnecessary risks. Pay more attention to managing tempo, people, and maintenance logistics.

Get the word out at your level – the MAG will not fly if productive training is not being achieved. Encourage cross country training flights and allow some en route instrument time, but flight hours for flight hour’s sake is completely unacceptable.

Things you should do personally: Officer PME, meet with FRO regularly, HAC interviews, casualty notification. Be yourself. Don’t revert to being a squadron CO. You must think at a different level. You’ve had your time, let them have theirs. The Group staff’s priority is to support the squadron. Focus on logistics, resources, TEEP, and frag loads to enable squadron success for your squadron COs. Set the limits and let them know what you require.

Your job is to posture your squadrons to produce effective and efficient sorties. Don’t be a redundant squadron Commander.

If you are a Group Commander, then you need to circulate down and through your units and personnel across their shifts, take their pulse, and discuss your expectations and impressions with the Squadron CO. Get out regularly to see your flying squadrons, your MALS, and any MACGs and MWSSs that you command. You set the squadron expectations and the end-state they must achieve.

Fly with the squadrons regularly, but don’t take time away from their training. At times they will need you to fly, other times they won’t. It’s relaxing and plain fun to fly and sit around and BS with the crews — you learn a lot about what’s going on as well.



MAG Commanders should take keen interest in who their COs are selecting to attend critical schools, especially WTI, TopGun, and the Aviation Safety Officer Course. Meeting with candidates and graduates ensures all see the criticality of these programs and allows MAG Commanders to directly influence tactics, training, and safety priorities.

Get the next higher Commander's assessment of your command: It is critical that you sit down with your next higher Commander and have a clear conversation and understanding regarding their guidance and intent, and their understanding and assessment of the challenges, strengths, weaknesses, culture, leadership, and performance of the unit of which you are assuming command. It is your starting point for understanding the unit and your potential measures of leadership success. Keep this discussion and assessment private. This assessment is the command leadership and performance starting point against which you and your leadership team will be measured for improvement. During turnover, see if the assessment is reality or perception. If perception, and not reality, then you must include the leadership team action items that will enable your leadership team to correct the perception through demonstrated sustained high performance.

Leading Change (Turning Around a Failing Unit):

If you are being sent into a command that requires a change in the operational culture or a raised standard of discipline, teamwork, and performance, you face a hard task. As adaptable as Marines may be, change is always hard. Immediately following your assumption of command, confirm with your next higher Commander that leading this change effort is either a specific or implied task he / she sees you accomplishing. This discussion provides you with an opportunity to share your observations and honest dialogue on the way ahead. Once confirmed, you have a solid base of understanding and support by your Wing / Group Commander from which to depart, develop a plan, and implement the necessary changes.



Don't be afraid to tell your unit leadership team the truth about their reputation. Likely, there is a disconnect between their perception of themselves and their actual demonstrated performance. Most often, they think they are doing a great job when, in reality, there could be much requiring change and improvement. Tell them the truth and use follow-on discussions as team building exercises and opportunities to work together, gain buy-in and bring everyone closer as a leadership team. Be honest, be fair, share in the perceptions about the command, and don't criticize anyone who preceded you, as it is now your unit and you are the leader responsible for leading and bringing about the needed changes. Some egos will be bruised. Some will be fearful they have somehow failed. Re-affirm your confidence in them. Don't forget they are Marines and Americans. They are built from sturdy mental and physical stock. They are not afraid of hard work. Give them clear guidance, the opportunity to excel, and freedom to work within your intent and they will achieve more in different ways than you imagined.

With your officer and SNCO leadership team, lay out on a white board a general way-ahead framework and capture their specific ideas and action items for positive change. Work it iteratively and have your leadership team solicit input from the NCO and junior ranks. Then revise your Commander's guidance, intent, and specified / implied tasks appropriately. Put on the track shoes and run the race at the head of your team.



...GIVE THEM CLEAR GUIDANCE, THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXCEL, AND FREEDOM TO WORK WITHIN YOUR INTENT, AND THEY WILL ACHIEVE MORE IN DIFFERENT WAYS THAN YOU IMAGINED.





9 LEADERSHIP

Take personal responsibility for the success or failure of your safety program. For decades, the culture of our Corps held that mishaps are a natural by-product of preparing Marines for combat. This is a myth! The fact is that nearly all mishaps are preventable with engaged, aggressive, thoughtful, and visible leadership, up and down the Chain of Command. Therefore, expect leaders at every level to become personally involved in reducing risk. Do not tolerate unsafe activity or unsafe conditions in the name of mission accomplishment. Hold yourself, and those who work for you, to the same exacting professional standards that you learned to uphold on the first day you earned the title Marine.

Maxims of Leadership:

- Be technically and tactically proficient.
- Know yourself and seek self-improvement.
- Know your Marines and look out for their welfare.
- Keep your Marines informed.
- Set the example.
- Ensure that the task is understood, supervised, and accomplished.
- Train your Marines as a team.
- Make sound and timely decisions.
- Good leadership is not dependent on the kind of aircraft you fly.
- Develop a sense of responsibility among subordinates.

- Employ your command in accordance with its capabilities.
- Seek responsibilities and take responsibility for your actions.
- Get the word out early to your folks...do not tolerate any physical, verbal, or mental abuse that removes the dignity of one of your Marines.
- Trust your subordinates to accomplish their jobs. Delegate that which can be delegated and hold subordinates accountable. Be sure to provide the necessary guidance and uphold your standards. Supervise, confirm, kick boxes...

The key objective is to develop an environment that stresses that every individual is vital to the mission success of the Group or Squadron. Each and every individual must feel they are critical and responsible for mission success and the safety record of the unit. It must be stressed that no individual is any more or any less important than another. They must understand that they are a team made up of individual Marines with individual talents, who form a bond and unite into a team.

When a Marine enters the Group or Squadron for the first time, you want them to feel like they are joining something much larger than themselves. Having the unit's history visible for all to see, along with the presence of unit logos throughout the spaces and on the hangar doors, is critical in developing that esprit de corps.

You want them to get the same feeling they had as a high school freshman sitting in the bleachers of their high school gymnasium, getting ready to try out for the football team. They saw all of the conference and state championship banners hanging from the ceiling, and it showed them they were joining something that was much larger than themselves. You want them to feel special for having the privilege to be a part of the unit.

Constantly stress that good units are good because they do the right things, in the right ways, for the right reasons. This sounds simple, and it is, but this is key to the unit's success. These simple words should guide their every action.

One of the best examples that you can set for the other aircrew in your squadron is to continue to be a good student. Set a high standard for yourself in preparing, briefing, and debriefing a training sortie. Your Marines will respect and imitate your work ethic in preparation. In addition, always debrief your errors first. Your Marines already know when you make a mistake. They are watching to see what you do. The Commander who is both proficient and transparent will gain the respect of his Marines and effectively model the proper way to teach and learn.

In order to reduce mishaps, you must stress leadership and team building. You must maintain an environment that allows your officers, your SNCOs, and your NCOs to lead



“THE KEY OBJECTIVE IS TO DEVELOP AN ENVIRONMENT THAT STRESSES EVERY INDIVIDUAL IS VITAL TO THE MISSION SUCCESS OF THE GROUP OR SQUADRON”

properly. Good units display leadership at all levels. Put your trust in them and they will seldom, if ever, let you down.

Building a team is the only way to accomplish the mission safely. Every effort must be made to work together as a unit in order to succeed. You are not looking for individual stars; instead, you want a group of average Marines in an average squadron to pull together to deliver excellence! Do not look to recruit an all-star staff. Instead, be the Commander who plays the cards they have been dealt and meets their mission objectives without seeking undue favoritism.

Your squadron is no different than any other squadron. Nothing makes you special. You have the same aircrew, officers, enlisted Marines, parts and aircraft, workspaces, and pay and allowances. You will be special because you recognize their individual talents and work together as a team. The individual Marines you have assigned make your squadron unique. As they join the squadron, they are no different than other Marines checking into other squadrons. It is your charge to take them in and make them a part of a great team. Make them an important part of the squadron by allowing them to use their unique talents and personalities to make contributions to the success of the squadron.

Demand that your Marines and Sailors maintain a high level of physical fitness. Fit Marines and Sailors consistently outperform those that are not fit. Demand that they know and meet service standards. It has been my experience that Marine aviation has not always done a good job of holding to this simple standard. I have seen non-standard Marines given a pass because they were “the best,” “indispensable,” and “the only one who can get us through the inspection.” That is BS! Minimum Marine Corps standards are not hard to meet and any Marine that cannot meet them should not be wearing the uniform. When a Marine, regardless of rank, fails to meet a standard, he forfeits the ability and opportunity to lead. The impact of your Marines and Sailors knowing that you, knowingly or unknowingly, accept a double-standard — that you are not enforcing the standard — will be a morale degrader of the highest order. Holding Marines to standards

not only holds them accountable, but tells the other 95 out of 100 Marines that you are upholding the standards of the organization. Morale is consistently far, far higher in units that demand standards be met.

Conduct, at a minimum, monthly Command PT. You lead. PFTs should be done as a unit. They may complain initially, but eventually they will look forward to it. Switch it up and make it interesting and challenging. That is why they joined the Marine Corps. Small unit PT with the CO is a good thing. One technique is to periodically select 15-20 Marines from day crew and night crew (often an entire maintenance shop) and PT with them. This yields valuable insight into your squadron's physical preparedness and also provides a great chance for small talk with the Marines.

Substance abuse is far more prevalent in our Corps than any of us would like to admit. Drug and prohibited substance abuse will bring a squadron to its knees. As a Commander, if you fail to address drug use aggressively, you might as well be condoning it in the eyes of your young enlisted Marines and Sailors. This is a prime example of the fact that what you do not say is as powerful as what you say. Drug use is a "Core Values break." Ensure your Marines and Sailors hear this from you, that you aggressively keep them honest to our Corps, and that you hold those that "break with us" strictly accountable. Your Marines and Sailors generally know who the drug users are in your squadron — they are just waiting for you to do something about it. Hold those few accountable and show the vast majority of Marines in the unit that you live by Honor, Courage, and Commitment. Consistently uphold the standards of the organization that they have pledged themselves to.



Notes for Newly Selected Colonels

- Beware — there are different types of Colonels. Those who are Chiefs-of-Staff wield the most influence, followed by Group / Regimental COs, and then G-3s. All Colonels are not created equal due to their position and influence. Navigate wisely.
- Be wary of old Colonels who have lost their zest and passion for the Corps; like old lions, steer clear of them and make things happen in spite of them.
- Being a Colonel doesn't absolve you of the requirement to meet standards, be they physical or behavioral. There is nothing worse than a fat Colonel, a Colonel that places his well-being over that of his Marines, or a Colonel who cuts corners.
- An old Colonel who resists new ideas or suggestions from subordinates is not a good Colonel.
- A Colonel who teaches and mentors while talking through the weakness of a subordinate's idea is a good Colonel.
- A Colonel, who stops a conversation with you in mid-sentence to talk to a General, is not a Colonel you can trust.
- Colonels don't yell or scream at other Colonels. You may dislike some Colonels, but they made the rank for a reason.
- Colonels don't yell or scream at enlisted Marines — they deserve better.





When in command:

- The span of your domain is too large to do the same things as you did as a LtCol. However, use every opportunity to get out and about with your Marines. *One day out of the office visiting Marines is worth two weeks reading reports.*
- Be a good listener. Offer advice — not prescriptions.
- Provide guidance up front and ask for feedback; your COs aren't mind readers.
- Resolve conflicts between subordinate Commanders immediately.
- Don't judge your Commanders on how they interact with you; judge them on how sharp and motivated their Marines are, how well that unit performs its mission, and how flexible and mission-oriented they are.
- If you have subordinate COs that question you — don't take it personally, it means you haven't provided sufficient guidance.
- Establish a climate that allows "loyal dissent."
- Priorities — your enlisted Marines, your equipment, your officers (in that order).
- In a unit, hand out 3x5 cards and ask Marines to tell you what you need to do better and what you need to change.



- You and the SgtMaj are a team — and a Group / Regimental SgtMaj is God to the Marines — he's a rock star. Young Marines don't want to be you when they are 45 — they want to be the SgtMaj. Don't take it personally.
- Ask the SgtMaj to be your eyes and ears; the more he gets out the more you will know.
- You know more than you think; teach as much as you can. Your instincts and insights have been built over a longer time horizon than most of the Marines in your unit. You have had more snaps, more playing time. Don't hesitate to help them see the patterns you do, especially if you think they are on the wrong track.
- Continue to read, a lot.
- Instill discipline, technical proficiency, and unit cohesion in your units — all else flows from that.
- PT with the Marines and target your audience; show them age means nothing in terms of physical fitness and personal appearance.
- Visit units at odd hours (2300) and on weekends; the true face of the command is evident at that time.
- If you tell a CO that you're visiting, too much time will be spent getting ready for your visit. Unannounced visits are the best visits.

Basic Responsibilities of the Unit Commander

- The moral and ethical climate in your unit.
- Accountability: It is the price you pay for the privilege of command; ensure it!
- Fostering the notion of being forward deployed is what Marines do.
- Unit readiness: tactical, material, medical, financial, family.
- Developing your Marines to be professional warriors.
- The safety of your Marines.
- Taking care of yourself.

You Must:

- Be at least as familiar with the status of your gear (aircraft, GSE, vehicles) as your maintainers — every day.
- Think ahead or your Marines will pay for your lack of foresight.
- Understand the TEEP and explain it to your Marines.
- Ensure Ops and Maintenance work together to promote predictability and stability — their plans must be aligned and realistic.
- Demand quality.

- You will be judged by the choices you make...and don't make.
- Understand the difference between taking risk and gambling.
- Train to deploy, we are of little use in Yuma or 29 Palms...be ready.
- Believe that if something doesn't seem right, it isn't.
- Exercise moral courage, somebody must be at the bottom of your FITREP profile.
- Likewise don't worry about where you will fall in the RS, RO tree. Lead.
- Remember always, YOU are servants.
- Remember the big picture.
- Trust, but verify.
- Have Fun! If you are not, they will not.
- **Leadership:** You are here because you can lead, but you have an obligation to improve the way you lead. Spend some moments every day in self-reflection. Acknowledge to yourself things you could have done better. Being introspective is a fundamental understanding by you that you are not perfect and is a cornerstone of a professional leader. Grow. Remember, you are not their friend, you are their Commander.
- **Presence:** Look at the faces of your Marines closely and often, you can tell a lot by this simple act. Communicate with your Marines during FOD walks, barracks inspections, mentoring, etc., and take every opportunity to engage, know and learn. Where you spend your time telegraphs your priorities. Be on time to meetings that support you.
- **Communication:** Understand your unit's TEEP and explain (often) how what you are doing operationally supports the goals and missions required by the TEEP. If the Marines understand why they are doing something, they will do it with more enthusiasm and dedication.
- **Education:** Build quality well-rounded Marines and citizens. Never deny an opportunity to a Marine that seeks education. Push them to get more. Ensure key billet holders are trained.
- **Responsibility:** Push it to the lowest level you are comfortable with and then do more. Be selective but be generous in your delegation. Let your XO be CO once in a while.
- **Moral Authority:** You must be credible. If you are squadron CO, get tactical and do it the right way, always. Somebody is always watching — trust me. If you are a SgtMaj, learn everything about each shop in the squadrons and live it.
- **Innovation:** Marines are entitled to do more with less; it's what makes us special. Take pride in being creative to get the job done.



- **Reaction to Bad News:** Always remember to breathe through your nose when confronted with something that upsets you. Emotional reactions in command are seldom useful.
- **Tough Decisions:** Remember, very few important decisions need to be made right away. A night's sleep has often given me clarity I otherwise wouldn't enjoy. Use the time. Call the JAG.
- **Awards:** If you're not giving them out often, you're wrong. Late awards show disorganization and lack of attention.
- **Discipline:** Enforce it in flying, maintaining aircraft, and personal lives. Do not be afraid to say, "You're fired" when needed.
- **Accountability:** If you think you will have to fire somebody, you already have. Don't delay the inevitable. You owe it to the Marine and the rest of your squadron to act.
- **Supervision:** Get to the barracks often, quiz the duties, and check the log books. Check the facilities and spot check rooms. Have an officer in uniform tour the barracks on the weekends. Fly with all of your pilots; make time for training meetings, HFCs, etc. Get in the LSO tower and wave or observe, especially at night.
- **Teamwork:** Sharing, cooperating, and communicating at the Commander level is paramount. Most endeavors in a MAG are accomplished only in this way. It's very easy for all to see a Command that covets resources. They are not the best Commanders. The best Commanders are the ones who understand that this is a team sport and there is no "getting ahead" of others.
- **Surveys:** Personally and formally brief Command Climate / EEO survey results to the squadron. Tell them what they said about themselves, you, the unit, and what you will do to fix any notable issues., then follow up with them. This paid huge dividends for me.

Parting words

- Treat everyone the same...with dignity and respect.
- When you think you have done everything you can, think again — you missed something.
- Marines are a hardy bunch, but remember, they are human beings with all the faults and needs which that entails (refer to the first and second / bullets).
- Every once in a while remind yourself that you have the best job in the world.



COMMAND IS ALL ABOUT GETTING PEOPLE TO DO WHAT
THEY THOUGHT THEY COULD NOT DO; GENUINE
COMPASSION INSPIRES PEOPLE TO THE HIGHEST LEVELS.



10 CLOSING

There are numerous books and journals describing how to achieve outstanding results in leadership, management, and command. Reading about leadership aids your developmental experience by sharing the knowledge of those who have done it before you. But perhaps most important is observing the positive traits of those leaders you admire most, and avoiding the bad traits of others.

Here are some succinct observations on leadership. A great Commander has these traits:

- Always ensure that your intent is clear and understood.
- Openness and transparency.
- Deep professional curiosity - knowledge coupled with inquisitiveness.
- Sincerity - truth to oneself.
- Approachability and humility.
- Distributing credit and accepting blame.
- Setting the example; mentally, physically, and morally.
- Enabling the success of seniors and subordinates with focused efforts and mentoring.
- Wisdom — the application of knowledge and comprehension of complex problems.

Remember...the reason that you trained so hard beforehand is so that you are prepared to do the same thing...act the same way...fly to the same standards...brief to the same level of detail...and perform to the same level of expertise WHEN YOU GO TO COMBAT! You don't fly your airplanes differently, don't drive your vehicles differently, don't brief differently in combat...you do it the same as you did it during training. Combat is not a license to throw the book on standards, safety, or NATOPS out the window...just the opposite. That said, the fact is that there will always be adjustments in combat. A good Commander will standardize those adjustments on the fly and will require his aircrew and ground crews to adhere to the adjusted standard that he / she has sanctioned.

The loss of an airplane or a tactical vehicle is just that...A LOSS. That means that it will not make tomorrow's flight schedule, or tomorrow's convoy. It cannot be used tomorrow or perhaps ever again. Be very careful when deciding whether or not to accept significant increases in risk. If the decision seems reckless or like it might be a gamble, you might be on the verge of wasting an aircraft, piece of equipment, or a life. If the Marines you are to support are truly in danger and depending on your squadron to help them turn the tide, accepting the increased risk is probably the correct decision. In that case, you are obligated to lay everything on the line for your brothers and sisters on the ground, but until that time comes, it is simply foolish and irresponsible to gamble an aircraft, a piece of valuable equipment, and / or the lives of Marines just so you can "get the X," meet your flight hour goal, etc. The key here is to know the difference. You will intuitively know when it's time.

- Remember...your job is to teach Company Grade Officers how to be Field Grade Officers...and your Field Grade Officers how to be Commanding Officers...not the other way around.
- Enjoy your job — have fun both personally and professionally. Maintain a sense of humor — in this business you are lost without one.
- In the end, take great care of your Marines, and they will take great care of you; they are your family.
- Advice offered by a Commanding Officer on check-in to a squadron was this: Fix one thing in your tour— just one thing.
- Be prepared, or be prepared to fail.
- Work hard, you and your Marine's lives depend on it.
- Be consistent, always.



Put a lot of effort into preparing your command for transition to the next Commander. I believe the mark of any Commander is how he hands over the command, how he puts the health and future of the organization above himself. Ensure your relief says, "I couldn't have asked for more" and means it. Ensure your Marines and Sailors see you work hard on their behalf to ensure their transition is a smooth one. Take great pride in doing this right — personally, professionally, and socially.

- Actions speak louder than words: live, lead, and fly the way you want your Marines to act. Being a CO should make you the best leader, pilot, parent, and person you've ever been in your life: you have hundreds of Marines to whom you are accountable.
- Put down the Blackberry. You need to take time to focus on your family and to think, lead, and learn without constant bombardment. This will also allow your subordinates to learn to deal with problems and develop the situation before immediately relying on your advice or action.
- Professionals invite outside scrutiny; make use of FLSEs, MAWTS, NSC, MALS, and CNAF to make your command better. Take your second round of surveys at about the 6-month mark in command: then you will know how your squadron is doing with you in command, not your predecessor.
- Habits are the lifeblood of individuals and organizations. Every action you take either makes you better or makes you worse. Always strive for perfection, and excellence will become a habit.

Time is your most valuable resource: give it to your people, but invest it wisely. Spend your time being present at the events you want your Marines to treat as most important. Follow the 80/20 rule: 20% of the things you do will yield 80% of the benefits. Do more of that 20%. Devote yourself to your mentorship / sponsorship program. This is your best means of taking care of your Marines and developing the next generation of leaders. Ensure mentors are part of the problem solving when things go wrong, and get the credit when things go right with their mentees.


Your leadership is an act of service. It's not about you, your name on the aircraft, the parking place, or the building. It's about the opportunity to serve each of your Marines where they are, personally and professionally. Make them better Marines, better pilots or mechanics, better citizens, better spouses and parents. A unit that has a culture of servant leadership — imbued by a servant leader will always accomplish the mission, because each Marine will do whatever it takes to support his or her squadron mates.

Enjoy your time in command! There is absolutely no better job in the Marine Corps!

<http://safetycenter.navy.mil/>



NOTES:





NOTES:

Handwriting practice lines on page 94.



Handwriting practice lines on page 95.



NOTES:

Lined area for notes on page 96.



Lined area for notes on page 97.