



IMPROVING THE RETENTION OF FIRST-TERM ENLISTEES IN THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my husband, Michael. Words cannot express my gratitude for your love and support over the past three years. Without you, I never would have started this process - let alone finished it. Thank you for cheering me on in triumph and always being there to bolster me in failure. You are the greatest teammate and champion I could've hoped for.

To my beloved boys, Luke and Callum. You won't remember these years or the many nights you joined me in class. But it is my hope that when you look back on this time, you will be reminded that you are capable of anything you put your minds to. And whatever you set out to do, you will never face a new challenge alone.

To my parents, Joe and Suzanne. You instilled in me a love of learning from a young age, and you taught me that the hardest things in life are often the things most worth doing. You've been the first to celebrate with me at every milestone along the way, no matter how small. This accomplishment is decades in the making and it all started with you.

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To my project sponsors, Lieutenant General James Glynn and Colonel Eric Reid. Thank you for giving me this opportunity. It is my sincerest hope that this project contributes in some small way to the larger mission you are undertaking. The Marine Corps is made better for your efforts.

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In loving memory of my grandmother, Carole Gray, who dedicated her life to learning. I know how immensely proud you would be of this accomplishment, and I wish I could share it with you.



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ABBREVIATIONS

AVF	All-Volunteer Force
DC	Deputy Commandant
DoD	Department of Defense
EAS	End of Active Service
EDIPI	Electronic Data Interchange Personal Identifier
FD2030	Force Design 2030
IRR	Individual Ready Reserve
JEPES	Junior Enlisted Performance Evaluation System
M&RA	Manpower and Reserve Affairs
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
MPP	Manpower Plans and Policy
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NDS	National Defense Strategy
PCS	Permanent Change of Station
PME	Professional Military Education
SMCR	Selected Marine Corps Reserve
TBS	The Basic School
TM2030	Talent Management 2030
USMC	United States Marine Corps



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Deputy Commandant (DC) for Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA) oversees the recruitment, retention, and management of all uniformed personnel of the United States Marine Corps (USMC) – currently more than 170,000 active duty and 35,000 reserve personnel worldwide. The DC, M&RA also plays a central role in the success of the Force Design 2030 change initiative through the development and implementation of Talent Management 2030, the largest overhaul of the USMC personnel system since 1985.

PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Currently, the Marine Corps lacks sufficient Marines in grades E-5 and E-6 to meet operational needs across the force. In most cases, Marines at these ranks have between five and eight years of active duty service. This discrepancy indicates higher-than-desired attrition within the population of interest. Plainly, too few Marines are reenlisting upon completion of their initial contract. Mid-level leadership requires institutional knowledge and operational competence that can only be developed over time, meaning the recruitment of an entry-level Marine cannot effectively address the identified personnel shortages. In the USMC's effort to rebalance recruitment and retention, first-term enlistees will be a critical focus for the long-term health of the enlisted talent pipeline.

BACKGROUND

Since 1985, the USMC has intentionally defined itself as a young force with high turnover at the junior-most ranks. Indeed, nearly 52% of Marines are aged 20-24

compared to 34% in the Army, 35% in the Navy, and 31% in the Air Force (Reid, 2021). This model is largely incompatible with the highly technical threat environment detailed in the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) (Mattis, 2018) and will become increasingly untenable as recruitment challenges persist (Cancian, 2023).

Extant literature has identified a number of likely drivers for voluntary separation from active duty service, including spouse un- and underemployment (Strong et al., 2022), lack of career flexibility (Panetta et al., 2017), and failure to incentivize critical skill development (Reid, 2021). However, previous research has not addressed “buyer’s remorse” among service members who make the decision to voluntarily leave active duty. Closing this gap in the literature may facilitate more effective retention strategies and greater creativity in military personnel policies to bolster the future force.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This project addresses the following questions:

1. When asked 12+ months after end of active service (EAS), what are the primary reasons that first-term Marine Corps enlistees cite for leaving active duty?
2. How do Marines feel about their decision to leave active duty?
3. What proportion of these Marines are interested in returning to active duty? If yes, what barriers have prevented them from doing so?

METHODS

This research leveraged data collected using a newly developed survey intended to measure separated Marines’ perceptions, experiences, and affinity for service 12+ months following their exit from active duty. The dataset included a sample size sufficient for a 99% confidence level with a 5% margin of error.

FINDINGS

My findings are as follows:

- **Dissatisfaction with the command climate is the most commonly cited reason for leaving active duty service after the first enlistment.** Attrited first-term enlistees commonly reported a lack of accountability among Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs), as well as the perception of unequal standards for junior enlisted Marines.

- **Marines are mostly satisfied with the decision to leave active duty service.** Only 20% of Marines expressed regret over the decision to voluntarily EAS. 90% reported that their expectations of civilian life have been met or exceeded.
- **Marines are, to some degree, open to the possibility of returning to active duty service.** More than half of the sample reported some openness to returning to active duty service. However, Marines commonly question their eligibility (16%) or struggle with the process to return (12%).
- **The civilian sector offers greater satisfaction in critical dimensions around quality of life, pay/benefits, and career advancement.** Respondents highlighted promotions and performance evaluations as drivers for their dissatisfaction with the Marine Corps.
- **A majority of Marines would still choose to enlist knowing all that they know now.** Separated Marines generally feel pride in their uniformed service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

My recommendations are as follows:

- **Conduct targeted personal outreach to all respondents who indicate a propensity to return to active duty service.** Providing direct clarification of eligibility and the process to return to active duty is critical in converting interest to action.
- **Review existing survey instruments for the use of the term “command climate” and replace with more specific answer sets.** Inclusion of a more illustrative option set in all USMC surveys will provide greater visibility into the issue such that the Marine Corps may make substantive changes to drive increased retention.
- **Incorporate duty station preference as a required component of the Talent Management Dashboard for consideration in the issuance of new orders.** As military families face an increasing frequency of forced relocations (Pallas, 2023), providing the opportunity to rank order available billets will have a significant effect on both service member and family satisfaction with military life.
- **Develop and disseminate a policy for crediting the informal development of critical skills in the performance evaluation process.** Updated Junior Enlisted Performance Evaluation System (JEPES) guidance will improve transparency in promotions and empower the USMC to leverage critical skillsets.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

The Deputy Commandant (DC) for Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA) within the United States Marine Corps (USMC), Lieutenant General James F. Glynn, is the senior official responsible for USMC personnel recruitment, retention, and management. His command oversees more than 170,000 active duty and 35,000 reserve personnel worldwide.

Figure 1: Primary Marine Corps Bases



Source: United States Marine Corps. (n.d.). *Primary base communities* [Map]. Marines.mil. <https://www.marines.mil/portals/1/Images/the%20corps/Map.png?ver=TrK306dN8VI-jRMwkPraNg%3d%3d>

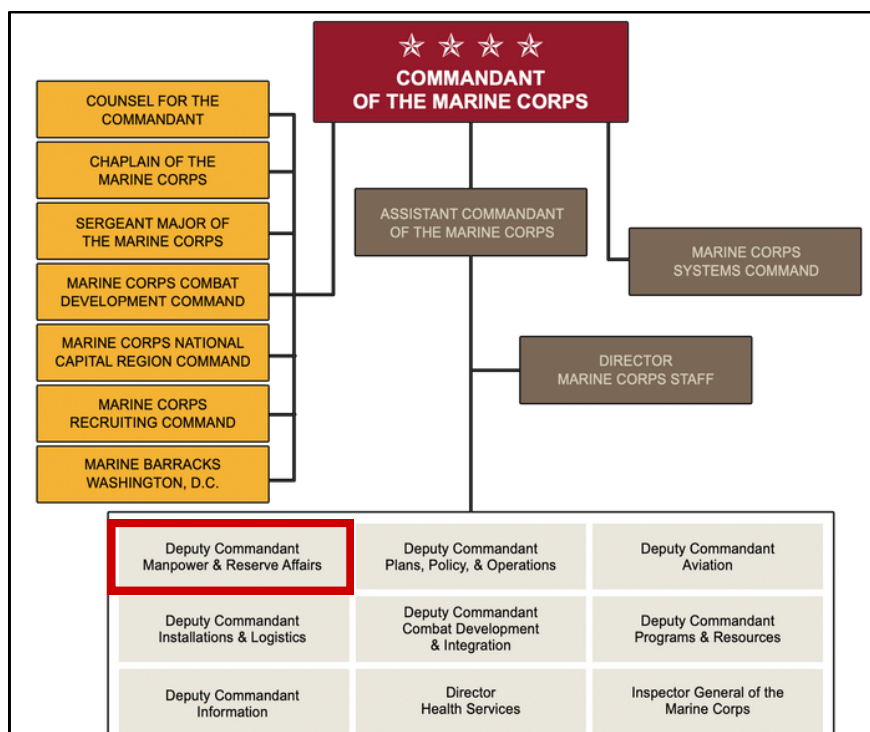
Under the DC, M&RA, eight separate divisions address issues related to military personnel management and Marine Corps family programs. The Manpower Plans and Policy Division (MPP) supervised this project with additional support from the Reserve Affairs Division, both located at Headquarters Marine Corps in Quantico, VA. Per Marine Corps Technical Publication 3-30G, dated 24 January 2020,

MPP “is responsible for determining comprehensive manpower needs, while preparing plans, policies, programs, and instructions on manpower matters to facilitate the Commandant’s policies and decisions” (Mullen, 2020, p. 3-2).

Successfully meeting its mission requires the Marine Corps to maintain a ready force composed of the correct mix of occupational specialties and military ranks. The existing military personnel strategy in the U.S. has been in place since the Cold War, largely driven by the enlisted personnel management and reporting guidance released by the Department of Defense (DoD) in January 1985. However, the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) details a new threat environment characterized by rapid technological changes and near-peer competition with nations like Russia and China (Mattis, 2018). The existing personnel system is optimized for conventional warfare in Europe and is largely incompatible with anticipated future conflicts (Berger, 2021).

It is important to distinguish that, although M&RA hire and maintain civilian employees, they are not responsible for human resources activities or strategy for the USMC civilian workforce. The DC, M&RA only addresses issues related to uniformed military personnel and their families.

Figure 2: Organization of Senior Leadership in the USMC

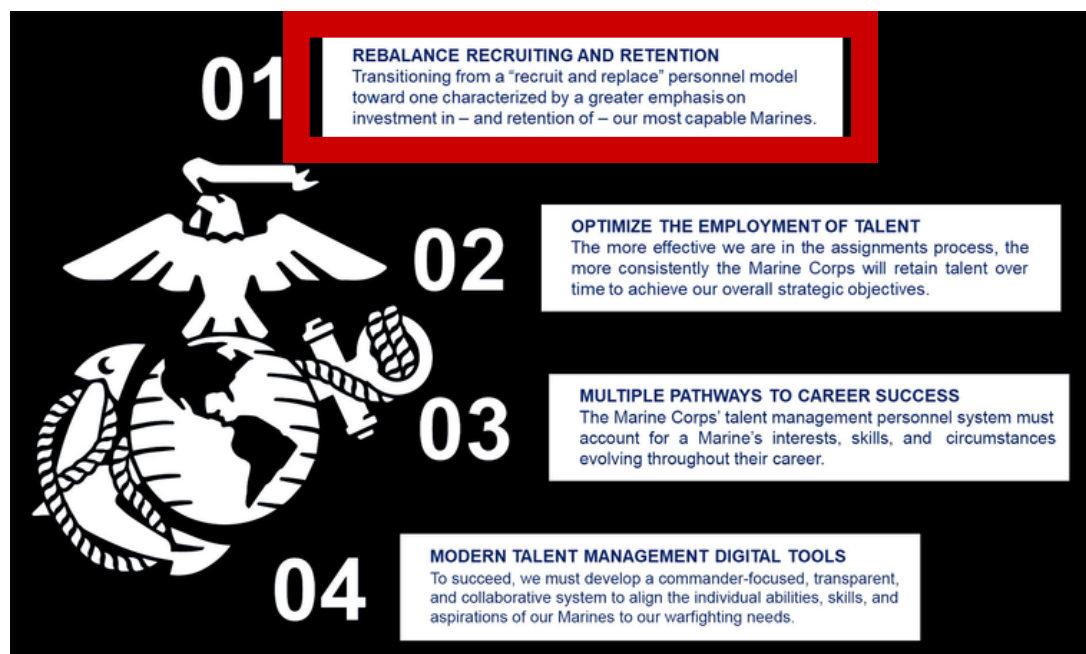


Source: United States Marine Corps. (n.d.). *Headquarters Marine Corps* [Organizational chart]. Director, Marine Corps Staff. <https://www.dmcs.marines.mil/>

PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

In 2020, the Marine Corps initiated a strategic transformational effort to better meet new threats. Force Design 2030 (FD2030) - developed by General David H. Berger, 38th Commandant of the USMC - details a vast restructuring that will impact everything from the structure of a combat battalion to the types of technologies prioritized for investment. This includes unprecedented changes to the personnel management system, specifically laid out in Talent Management 2030 (TM2030).

Figure 3: Talent Management Campaign Lines of Effort



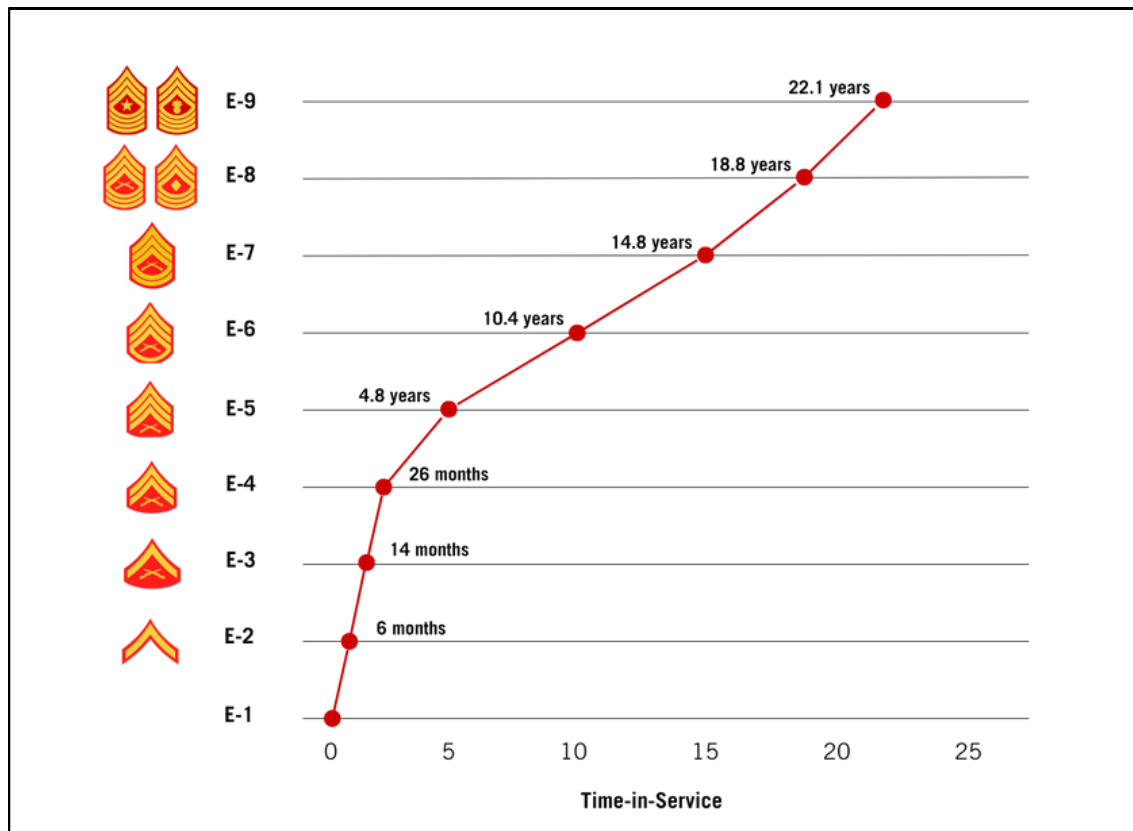
Source: United States Marine Corps. (n.d.). *Talent management campaign lines of effort* [Infographic]. Talent Management. <https://www.marines.mil/Talent-Management/>

Proposed updates include new enlistment and retention incentives, alternative paths to entry for critical skill sets, and an increased focus on technical professions. Ultimately, the successful implementation of TM2030 will depend heavily on recruiting and retaining the right Marines.

AREA OF INQUIRY

Currently, the Marine Corps lacks sufficient Marines in grades E-5 and E-6 to meet operational needs across the force. In most cases, Marines at these ranks have between five and eight years of active duty service. This discrepancy indicates higher-than-desired attrition within the population of interest. Plainly, too few Marines are reenlisting upon completion of their initial contract. Mid-level leadership requires institutional knowledge and operational competence that can only be developed over time, meaning the recruitment of an entry-level Marine cannot effectively address the identified personnel shortages. Therefore, the USMC must focus on retaining Marines at the first point of reenlistment to preserve critical skills and meet operational requirements.

Figure 4: Average Time-in-Service at Promotion



Data Source: Indeed Editorial Team. (2023, October 13). *US Marine Corps promotions: How to advance*. Indeed. <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/marine-corps-promotion>.



**"TALENT
MANAGEMENT IS THE
ACT OF ALIGNING THE
TALENTS OF MARINES
WITH THE NEEDS OF
THE SERVICE TO
MAXIMIZE THE
POTENTIAL OF BOTH -
INCREASING MARINE
CORPS COMBAT
CAPABILITY AND
READINESS."**

-General David Berger, 38th Commandant

LITERATURE REVIEW

My literature review provides a two-pronged evaluation of the context in which the Marine Corps is undertaking this significant structural and cultural overhaul. First, I identified the historical, political, and strategic impetuses for the change initiative. Then, I focused on the known drivers for military retention as identified in extant literature.

The initiation of Force Design 2030 (FD2030) signals a significant shift in how the service perceives the external threat environment and its own role in our national defense. Arguably, the Marine Corps has not undergone a change initiative of this magnitude since the interwar period between World War I and World War II. During that time, the service developed the staff, doctrine, and infrastructure necessary to adapt to modern methods of waging war (Clifford, 1973). As during the interwar period, the present Marine Corps seeks to address shifts in the cultural, political, and economic landscape in which it is situated. Specifically, the force is moving focus from inland combat in the Middle East to coastal operations in the Indo-Pacific (Berger, 2020).

FD2030 outlines a comprehensive overhaul of Marine Corps strategy and culture aimed at better addressing the present and future threat environment as detailed in the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS). The strategic plan addresses every aspect of the institution, to include key capabilities, changes to unit structures, and significant changes to recruiting and retention philosophies (Berger, 2020). As of this writing, the USMC has successfully transitioned to larger infantry battalions, established the new Marine Corps Information Command, received Congressional support for a greater number of amphibious ships, and more (Berger, 2023).

Of particular import for this research is Talent Management 2030 (TM2030), a pillar of the larger FD2030 initiative. Released in 2021, TM2030 details the changes to the Marine Corps personnel management system necessary to maintain a ready force and meet evolving operational needs as detailed in the NDS and FD2030. The plan emphasizes the importance of developing critical skillsets, leveraging appropriate incentives for continued service, and fostering a culture of equity across the USMC (Berger, 2021).

Updates to the force's personnel management system have occurred more recently than have wider structural and doctrinal changes. Prior to the conceptualization of FD2030 and related efforts within the USMC, the Department of Defense (DoD) undertook its most recent overhaul of the personnel management system in 1985 with DoD Instruction AD-A269 411: Enlisted Personnel Management Planning and Reporting. Per the 1985 Instruction, the Marine Corps developed itself as a young force with high turnover - limiting the proportion of Marines who retain beyond their initial enlistment term to roughly one quarter of total enlistees (Reid, 2021). Recent data suggest that the Marine Corps has succeeded in this effort, retaining roughly 25% of first-term enlistees (Berger, 2021, p. 6). As a result, Marines are significantly younger and more junior than their counterparts in the other military services. Indeed, nearly 52% of Marines are aged 20-24 compared to 34% in the Army, 35% in the Navy, and 31% in the Air Force (Reid, 2021, p. 22). However, the Marine Corps arguably cannot confront the technologically sophisticated threat environment detailed in the 2018 NDS while maintaining this young and inexperienced force.

“The existing system is profoundly wasteful of human capital, expelling three of four Marines at the very time when they have proven compatible with military service and are just entering their physical and mental primes.”

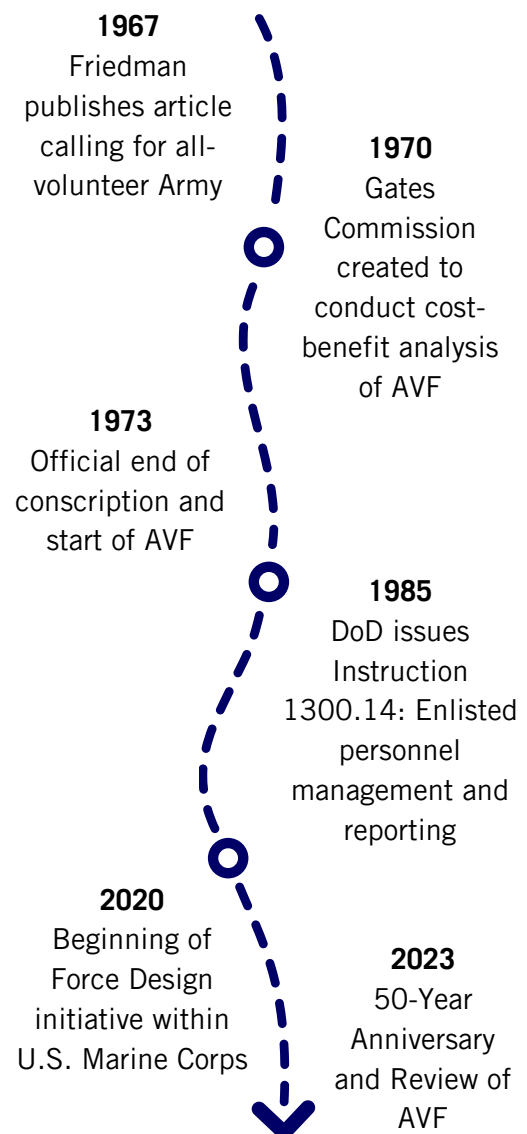
- Colonel Eric A. Reid, USMC

Particularly as the military relies more heavily on highly technical skills, turnover is increasingly costly both monetarily and for military readiness. Military personnel costs have grown substantially since the conception of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) in 1973. Indeed, the cost of military labor has increased 581% in the past 50 years - significantly more than the 370% overall inflation that occurred over the same period (Cancian, 2023, p. 255). The Congressional Budget Office's analysis of the 2023 Future Years Defense Program predicts an additional 16% increase in military personnel costs over the next ten years (Arthur & Woodward, 2023, p. 10). The fiscal costs of high turnover are further compounded by growing recruitment challenges. The pool of eligible recruits is steadily shrinking, with an estimated 71% of Americans ineligible to serve and a staggering 91% uninterested in serving (Wharton, 2023).

Simply, this model of "recruit and replace" is no longer sufficient to address great power competition and keep pace with rapid technological changes in warfare (Berger, 2021, p.6). Coupled with growing military recruitment challenges, these strategic shifts indicate an urgent need for improved retention and the development of Marines already in the system. To address this, TM2030 calls for a shift from the existing industrial-age manpower system to a nuanced talent management system that capitalizes on each individual Marine's unique ability to contribute to the mission (Berger, 2021). Increased first-term retention is a central tenet of the intended philosophical shift.

A successful transition to talent management hinges on a nuanced understanding of how and why Marines make the decision to separate. **Previous research identified a number of likely drivers for voluntary separation from active duty service.**

Timeline of the Military Personnel System





A 2022 study found a statistically significant relationship between work-family conflict and voluntary separation from the military (Woodall et al., 2022). Per Woodall, financial stress in particular has a measurable impact on military satisfaction for both the spouse and the service member. Spousal concerns about finances also generate an increase in work-family conflict (Woodall et al., 2022, p. 12). Military families report challenges with food insecurity (Asch et al., 2023), spouse un- and underemployment (Strong et al., 2022), and the growing frequency of forced relocations (Pallas, 2023). Further, although dual income families are becoming the norm in American society (Pallas, 2023), only 38% of respondents to Blue Star Families' 2022 Military Family Lifestyle Survey reported having access to adequate childcare to facilitate a spouse working (Strong et al., 2022, p. 84). Military spouse unemployment reached 32% in 2022, despite 74% of the population having a bachelor's degree or higher (Sonethavilay et al., 2022).



Additionally, career progression within the Marine Corps and the wider United States military is largely inflexible, with a highly prescriptive path to promotion that is primarily time-based (Panetta et al., 2017, p. 58). The current system does not provide a pathway to lateral entry for experienced professionals with desired skills, nor does it encourage service members to move laterally within the system into new, more desirable Military Occupational Speciality (MOS) designations (Berger, 2021). Retention challenges are further compounded when the promotion tempo is slow, particularly for first-term enlistees (Buddin et al., 1992).



Finally, the existing personnel system fails to appropriately incentivize the development of critical skills and capitalize on its investment in training. A previous study observed positive retention effects among officers who acquire significant firm-specific knowledge early in their careers (Glaser, 2011). Similar effects are observed within the enlisted ranks, wherein only 3% of Marines who reenlist and attain MOS proficiency are lost to non-EAS attrition (Reid, 2021, p. 25). These findings suggest that high turnover is not only costly, but also results in a self-perpetuating cycle of first-term attrition.

How might the Marine Corps mitigate these challenges to effectively address voluntary attrition? The Gates Commission argued that the “first indispensable step [in establishing an AVF] is to remove the present inequity in pay of men serving their first term in the armed forces” (Gates et al., 1970, p. 2). Pay remains a strong consideration – retention of first-term enlistees increases by an estimated 15 to 20 percent when military pay increases 10 percent and civilian pay remains constant (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness [OUSD P&R], 2012, p.8). Nevertheless, recent trends in both recruitment and retention suggest increased pay on its own is not sufficient to solve the military’s challenges. Indeed, military personnel received a 4.1% pay raise in 2023, but only the Marine Corps had met its recruiting and retention goals for 2023 as of October (Novelly et al., 2023).

A 2019 study succeeded in creating a high-fidelity predictive model for military attrition. However, the model only provides information about the volume of attrition, not the drivers behind it (Pechacek et al., 2019). And although previous studies have identified several contributors to military attrition, none have examined what I refer to as “buyer’s remorse” – regret for any reason over the decision to leave active duty. Closing this gap in the literature may facilitate more effective retention strategies and greater creativity in military personnel policies to bolster the future force.



CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on Becker's Human Capital Theory (1962) in conjunction with the tenets of behavioral economics as conceptualized by Cohen and Dickens (2002). Extant literature indicates that there is indeed a meaningful relationship between perceived economic alternatives and the decision to leave active duty military service, as posited in these foundational works. However, previous applications of Human Capital Theory and behavioral economics in a military context produced largely contradictory findings.

Glaser's 2011 study of officers in the Marine Corps sought to measure the impact of professional military education (PME) on career retention. Glaser's analysis included more than 10,000 non-pilot Marine officers who commissioned between 1980 and 1990, all of whom remained on active duty until at least 2005. The study established a positive correlation between PME early in a Marine's career and the total length of their active duty service.

Specifically, Glaser's data indicate that better performance in The Basic School (TBS) is associated with a stronger propensity to retain. Indeed, those who finished in the fifth and sixth sextiles of TBS performers left military service at a higher rate than those finishing in the first and second. He attributes this to a greater investment from the individual in the learning process resulting in the acquisition of more firm-specific human capital. Per Glaser, these findings support the notion that once a Marine accumulates a large amount of firm-specific human capital, the opportunity cost of separation is high enough to deter attrition (Glaser, 2011, p. 245). These findings are consistent with the central tenets of Becker's seminal work and other studies that have since applied the framework.

Alternatively, Magnum and Ball (1989) found that those who received military training had higher earnings than their civilian-trained peers within two years of leaving military service. The study followed more than 2,000 young people from 1979 to 1984 identified using the National Longitudinal Surveys – Youth Cohort. Those included in the study were not enrolled in formal education at the time of the initial interview in 1979.

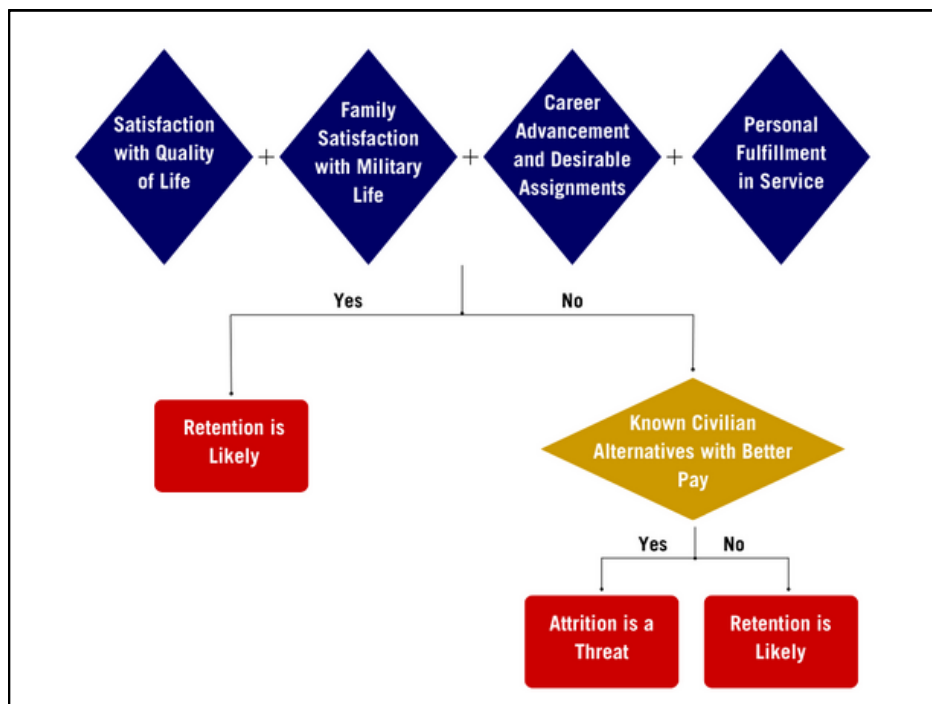
Despite an observed skills transference of less than 50%, those who received military training ultimately reported higher earnings than their peers who received civilian job training (Magnum & Ball, 1989, pp. 236-237). These findings suggest that military training is highly valued in the civilian sector and, for those who do not wish to pursue higher education, the pursuit of military human capital may yield greater economic outcomes than any civilian alternatives – contrasting with Glaser’s findings.

These largely opposite findings support the assertion that our understanding of military retention decisions is incomplete. While economic drivers are certainly part of the equation, pay and benefits are only one consideration.

Plainly, extant literature does not sufficiently explain patterns in military retention and the complex interactions between economic opportunity, quality of life, and pride of service. I argue that, rather than being a primary decision point, economic opportunity is a secondary decision point that only occurs when one of the known contributors to service member satisfaction is absent or insufficient.

The following diagram illustrates the relationship between the primary and secondary decision points. I argue that outside economic opportunity only becomes a consideration when one or more of the following criteria are not met: (1) the service member is satisfied with their quality of life, (2) the service member’s family is satisfied with military life, (3) the service member perceives adequate opportunity for professional development, upward mobility, and/or desirable assignment, and (4) the service member feels motivated by their service.

Figure 5: Theory of Military Attrition



If all these criteria are met, retention of the service member is highly likely. Alternatively, failure to meet one or more of these criteria may drive the service member to begin considering options outside of the military. Economic drivers become meaningful at this second stage of the decision process and are increasingly influential with each additional unmet criterion at the first decision point.

This study provides only a preliminary examination of this proposed conceptual framework. Significant additional research is necessary to better understand the relationship between these primary criteria for retention and the influence of economic alternatives as a secondary influencer for service member attrition. For example, once a service member has begun considering alternatives to service, does their understanding of the civilian sector drive greater dissatisfaction in one or more of the primary criteria for retention? Are there other unacknowledged or unknown primary influencers driving retention decisions? These are just two of many lingering questions that merit further exploration.



PROJECT DESIGN

PROJECT QUESTIONS

Although the Marine Corps regularly surveys Marines upon exiting active duty service, they have not collected data on a longer time horizon. To test the organizational hypothesis that attrited Marines experience frequent buyer's remorse, the project questions assess perceptions, experiences, and affinity for service after the Marine has been separated for a year or longer.

The project addresses the following questions:

1. When asked 12+ months after end of active service (EAS), what are the primary reasons that first-term Marine Corps enlistees cite for leaving active duty?
2. How do Marines feel about their decision to leave active duty?
3. What proportion of these Marines are interested in returning to active duty? If yes, what barriers have prevented them from doing so?

DATA COLLECTION

The primary source of relevant data is a new survey instrument that I developed using existing USMC survey questions in conjunction with several new questions aimed at measuring sentiment and perception (see Appendix A). As an established measure, the USMC survey is presumed to be reliable and valid. The survey was distributed through official USMC channels to all eligible Marines. I was then provided with a de-identified dataset for analysis.

The population of interest includes Marines who meet the following criteria:

- Only completed one enlistment
- Exited active duty service between one and four years ago
- Received an honorable discharge
- Classified with a separation code that allows for reenlistment
- Currently serving in a Selected Marine Corps Reserve (SMCR) or an Inactive Ready Reserve (IRR) status

Within 72 hours of launch, the survey gathered a statistically significant sample at a 95% confidence level. Within one week of launch, the survey gathered a total of 843 responses. With an estimated population of 50,000, this sample size is sufficient for a 99% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. Of those responses, 65% were fully completed surveys with the remaining 35% being partially completed to various degrees. On average, respondents completed 75% of the survey.

An unexpected and auspicious outcome of my work is the integration of my survey design into the USMC's regular research activities. My survey will be distributed to all Marines who meet the eligibility criteria for the foreseeable future. Internal planning is ongoing for how best to leverage new data upon completion of my work.

The new survey instrument asks many of the same questions as the existing exit survey but prompts Marines to consider their answers based on their experiences in the 12+ months since exit. Additionally, given the USMC's interest in evaluating the process for re-entry to active duty service, I included questions about each participant's desire to return and their understanding of the process. This was the first time the Marine Corps had collected data of this kind.


Although outside the scope of this research, collecting the respondent's Electronic Data Interchange Personal Identifier (EDIPI) enables the USMC to connect this new dataset to each Marine's demographic, job performance, disciplinary, and other existing records. They may also connect new survey data to the exit survey data collected at the time of separation, enabling USMC staff to measure changes in perception that have occurred over the 12+ months since separation. Use of these supplementary datasets will contribute to a greater understanding of the population of interest that may be used to better target attrition interventions.

DATA ANALYSIS

As a starting point, I generated descriptive statistics to identify the most frequently cited motivators for separation and the average satisfaction level with various aspects of both military and civilian life. These measures were first calculated cumulatively for the whole population of respondents. Then, the same measures were input into crosstabs to identify differences across multiple dimensions (e.g., the motivators for separation for those who are not willing to return to active duty compared to those who are). Data generated by these crosstabs provided additional insights that informed more targeted recommendations. A collection of crosstabs and summary tables is available in Appendix B.

Due to the volume of partially completed surveys, I recorded an n-value for each survey question prior to creating crosstabs and generating findings. This was critical to ensure that all crosstabs were calculated using the correct proportionality. To account for differences in response rates for each individual survey question, n-values also appear throughout my findings and recommendations.

Finally, I conducted an unstructured analysis of the open-ended responses provided by survey participants. The review was conducted using keyword searches derived from extant literature, including command climate, family, pay/compensation, promotions, and mental/physical health. The written commentary contextualized the quantitative data and provided valuable insight into how attrited Marines perceive their time in service and their motivations for separation.

A full-page photograph of a soldier in camouflage uniform and tactical gear, including a helmet with a night vision device and a rifle, standing on a dirt path in a wooded area. The soldier is looking directly at the camera. The background shows other soldiers in the distance and trees under a clear blue sky.

"FUNDAMENTALLY,
REFORM IS NEEDED
SIMPLY BECAUSE
THE SYSTEMS IN
PLACE TODAY
CANNOT DELIVER
THE FORCE NEEDED
FOR THE FUTURE."

-Leon Panetta, 23rd Secretary of Defense

FINDINGS

Five key findings emerged from my analysis of the available survey data. I consider Findings 1-3 to be primary findings, providing direct answers to the project questions. Findings 4 and 5 are considered secondary findings, intended to provide additional insight into the problem of practice and further inform the USMC's ongoing retention efforts.

Finding 1 (PQ1): Dissatisfaction with the command climate is the most commonly cited reason for leaving active duty service after the first enlistment.

63% of survey respondents (n=617) cited dissatisfaction with the command climate as one of the reasons they chose to end their active duty service in the Marine Corps. Many respondents elaborated on this issue in their freeform comments. Marines reported a lack of accountability for NCOs and Commissioned Officers and the belief that standards are applied differently and more rigidly to the junior enlisted population. One respondent said:

“ The command climate has become an insult to the traditions of the [M]arine [C]orps, there are many who [sic] inflated marines who use the responsibilities entrusted to them to abuse the system to make it cater to their favor. ”

Respondents perceive higher ranking Marines using their positions of authority to benefit their own interests rather than make decisions that benefit the unit and the junior Marines who fall under their purview. And although Marines are encouraged to anonymously report problematic behavior by leadership through command climate surveys, several respondents lamented the lack of response to and change resulting from these surveys.

“ Many commanders and senior enlisted do not care about input from juniors because they think any input is automatically bad and [a] means to undermine or insult them.

The other most commonly cited reasons for leaving active duty were Other [Negative Experience] (41%), accept or find a job other than active duty military (37%), attend school or training (37%), and family (32%). The proportion of respondents who cite family as a driver for voluntary separation aligns with Woodall’s (2022) findings on the role of work-family conflict in military satisfaction.

Crucially, the use of “dissatisfaction with the command climate” as a standard answer choice in exit surveys results in nonspecific and largely unactionable data. As noted by a USMC representative during our discussion of preliminary findings, this option may be selected to represent anything from hazing at the unit level to frustration over denied leave requests. Thus, M&RA are unable to make meaningful changes based on these data because the individual Marine’s definition of command climate is unknown.

Finding 2 (PQ2): Marines are mostly satisfied with the decision to leave active duty service.

When asked to reflect on the decision to leave active duty service, only 20% of respondents (n=617) reported feelings of regret, with an additional 22% reporting neutral feelings. Overall, respondents have positive feelings about the decision to EAS in lieu of reenlisting for a second term. This finding is counter to both my own hypothesis and the organizational hypothesis.

Notably, 45% of respondents (n=593) said their time in the civilian sector has been better than expected. Only 10% reported that their expectations of the civilian sector have not been met. These data suggest that Marines have a realistic understanding of life outside of the Marine Corps and are making the decision to separate from active duty based on a mostly accurate assessment of their alternative options. This is likely contributing to the lack of “buyer’s remorse” around the decision to EAS.

Further, of the 58% of respondents who did not express regret about the decision to EAS, nearly one third stated that they “did not like Marine Corps service.” One respondent noted that the reality of service did not match what they were told to expect by Marine Corps advertising and in conversations with recruiters.

“ Make life in the [M]arine [C]orps feel the way it looks on commercials and the way recruiters tell you it is. Some of us enlisted to be warfighters but instead got undeployable units (recruiters dont [sic] mention those).

This finding suggests that Marines may not have realistic expectations of service at the time of first enlistment. I argue that this also contributes to the observed lack of buyer’s remorse upon leaving active duty service. This finding merits further exploration, particularly as the Marine Corps implements new strategies for determining a recruit’s MOS suitability.

Finding 3 (PQ3): *Marines are, to some degree, open to the possibility of returning to active duty service.*

55% of respondents (n=591) indicated some level of openness to the possibility of returning to active duty service. When asked about barriers for returning, 43% answered that they are “interested, but have not fully decided.” This population represents a significant opportunity for the USMC to engage with individual Marines and convert their cursory interest into action towards reenlistment. One respondent stated that they even reconsidered returning to active duty over the course of the survey “due to nostalgia.”

Table 1: Barriers to Returning to Active Duty

Interested Marines reported the following additional barriers for returning to active duty service:	
They are too busy.	22%
They do not believe they are eligible.	16%
The process is confusing/cumbersome.	7%
They don't know how to begin the process.	5%

Strikingly, of those Marines who are open to returning to active duty, roughly 39% cited attending school or other job training as one of the reasons for their initial separation. This is a slightly higher proportion the population that is definitely not interested in returning to active duty, wherein 33% of respondents cited school/job training as one of the reasons they chose to EAS. The USMC may benefit from collecting additional information about what, if any, education or job training was ultimately completed. This population may be uniquely suited to leverage newly acquired skills upon returning to active duty service.

Finding 4: The civilian sector offers greater satisfaction in critical dimensions around quality of life, pay/benefits, and career advancement.

On a scale where 1 equals “better in the civilian sector, 2 equals “about the same,” and 3 equals “better in the Marine Corps”, 12 of 16 dimensions received a score of less than 2. Respondents strongly favored the civilian sector for quality of life (1.16) and amount of personal/family time (1.18). Respondents also favored the civilian sector for fair performance evaluations (1.49) and promotion opportunities (1.50).

Pay and benefits are central in both academic literature and in wider conversations about military retention (Novelly et al., 2023; OUSD P&R, 2012). Indeed, survey respondents regularly rated pay and benefits as better in the civilian sector than in the Marine Corps.

“ The main reason I left was money. I was able to make way more as a civilian with my skills. If there was a bonus for specific MOSs that were in demand I might have stayed.

However, it is important to note that several other critical dimensions of career and personal satisfaction beyond pay and benefits were rated more highly in the civilian sector.

Table 2: Civilian Sector Comparisons

In your opinion, do you think the following are better or worse in the civilian sector (compared to the Marine Corps?)					
	Better in Civilian Sector	Neither better nor worse	Better in the Marine Corps	Unsure/No Opinion	Average Score
Job security	15%	22%	58%	5%	2.45
Health care benefits	27%	19%	49%	5%	2.23
Retirement benefits	24%	25%	35%	16%	2.13
Racial/ethnic relations	21%	43%	21%	15%	2.01
Vacation time	46%	17%	34%	3%	1.87
Job training	40%	30%	27%	4%	1.87
Freedom from discrimination	31%	42%	15%	13%	1.82
Gender relations	30%	41%	10%	19%	1.75
Education and training opportunities	51%	24%	21%	4%	1.69
Freedom from harassment	46%	35%	8%	11%	1.56
Promotion Opportunities	56%	24%	11%	10%	1.50
Fair performance evaluations	55%	31%	7%	7%	1.49
Hours worked per week	72%	16%	8%	4%	1.34
Pay and compensation	79%	11%	7%	3%	1.25
Amount of family/personal time	85%	9%	4%	1%	1.18
Quality of life	86%	9%	3%	2%	1.16

Multiple respondents shared anecdotes of a peer they perceived as less competent being promoted over them. Many feel the promotion system relies too heavily on physical fitness tests and other metrics that do not speak to the leadership qualities of the Marine.

“

There's no incentive for those good marines who work hard, they're all paid the same and often times the staff are too busy in their offices to recognize who actually works hard on a day to day basis so when it comes to awards and promotions they just pick their favorites.

It felt like everyone was just doing and saying what was needed to get promoted and no one actually cared about their marines. And those of us who did care about our marines never stood a chance of promoting.

”

These findings suggest that Marines commonly find the promotion and evaluation processes to be opaque, subjective, and ultimately unfair. Resulting frustration and discouragement may be contributing to higher than ideal attrition.

Finding 5: A majority of Marines would still choose to enlist knowing all that they know now.

If given the opportunity to go back in time and make a different decision, 69% of respondents (n=581) would still make the decision to enlist. Only 11% reported that they definitely would not choose to join the Marine Corps knowing all that they know now. One respondent reflected on their time in service with great pride.

“ I look at my time in [the] military with pride and would have made the choice to enlist 100 times out of 100.

This is an exceedingly positive outcome, particularly in light of growing recruitment challenges that are driven by declining interest in service (Wharton, 2023). Although these data don't support the argument that Marines are likely to encourage others to enlist, we may reasonably assume that most Marines in this population do not actively discourage service upon returning to civilian communities.

This may also indicate that a lack of pride in service is not driving sub-optimal retention, but rather attrition is a result of inadequate personal, professional, and family satisfaction with military life. Further research is needed to fully conceptualize pride of service, including its contributing factors and how it is or is not affected by the other retention drivers posited in my proposed conceptual framework.



RECOMMENDATIONS

I offer four recommendations derived from my findings and supported by existing literature to bolster the USMC’s ongoing retention efforts.

CONDUCT TARGETED PERSONAL OUTREACH TO ALL RESPONDENTS WHO INDICATE A PROPENSITY TO RETURN TO ACTIVE DUTY SERVICE.

The USMC should conduct an ongoing outreach campaign that reaches Marines with a propensity to return to active duty service within 120 days of expressing interest. Roughly half of the survey’s respondents indicated some degree of openness to returning to active duty service, presenting a valuable opportunity to make individual connections and convert interest to action. Given respondents’ commonly cited barriers for returning to active duty (see Table 1), the communication plan should include individually relevant information including an emphasis on their eligibility and the steps necessary to initiate and complete the process. Whenever possible, Marines should also be personally connected with a prior service recruiter who can assist with any further questions and reduce the time burden for the Marine to complete the process.

To the extent allowable within the confines of existing personnel policy, the USMC should also consider offering incentives that are well-aligned with the individual Marine’s expressed motivators for returning to active duty. These may include a reenlistment bonus for certain MOSs, the option to select their first duty station

after returning to active duty, or the opportunity to move into a different MOS with minimal impact on career timing. Literature suggests that the use of these targeted incentives may contribute to improved quality of life and increased perception of opportunities for career advancement (Panetta et al., 2017; Strong et al., 2022). This, in turn, will drive greater long-term retention.

As of this writing, M&RA personnel have made 242 phone calls to Marines identified by the survey as interested in returning to active duty, with 11 of those individuals beginning the process to do so. A sustained 5% success rate in converting interest to action will have a meaningful effect on the enlisted talent pipeline.

REVIEW EXISTING SURVEY INSTRUMENTS FOR THE USE OF THE TERM “COMMAND CLIMATE” AND REPLACE WITH MORE SPECIFIC ANSWER SETS.

I recommend that the term “command climate” be removed from all exit surveys, including that which was developed for this project. This recommendation is derived from both the data collected as part of this study and ongoing conversations with USMC officials throughout. Although “dissatisfaction with the command climate” emerged in the data as a strong motivator for voluntary attrition, this alone cannot answer the primary project question in an actionable way. Further research is necessary to achieve greater visibility into the issue such that the Marine Corps may make substantive changes to drive increased retention. The use of “command climate” is likely obscuring underlying causes of dissatisfaction that may occur unequally across the enlisted population.

Based on extant literature and the qualitative data collected, more illustrative response options may include:

- Length of work hours
- Hazing and other physical harm
- Verbal abuse and/or harassment
- Discrimination in the workplace
- Lack of unit family support

Further insight may be gathered from existing command climate surveys conducted across the force in the past five years. Although these data are contextually bound, patterns may emerge illuminating systemic issues that contribute to dissatisfaction.

It may also be fruitful to leverage existing data from the biennial Department of Defense Active Duty Spouse Survey to examine how work-family conflict (Woodall et al., 2022) may be influencing a Marine's satisfaction with their command.

INCORPORATE DUTY STATION PREFERENCE AS A REQUIRED COMPONENT OF THE TALENT MANAGEMENT DASHBOARD FOR CONSIDERATION IN THE ISSUANCE OF NEW ORDERS.

The Marine Corps should, to the greatest extent practicable, provide junior enlisted Marines with the option to rank-order available duty locations prior to the monitor issuing permanent change of station (PCS) orders. Although this is common practice for officers ahead of a relocation, junior enlisted Marines are not presently provided the opportunity to rank-order available billets. The introduction of the new Talent Management Dashboard will facilitate this type of communication and provide Marines with greater visibility into the duty assignment process.

The recommendation is directly supported by the survey data collected wherein nearly 70% of all respondents (n=484) indicated that input in duty location would be a motivator for returning to active duty. Particularly as military families face an increasing frequency of forced relocations (Pallas, 2023), providing the opportunity to rank order available billets will have a significant effect on both service member and family satisfaction with military life. Indeed, in many circumstances, this may reduce the number of relocations a family faces by allowing the Marine to express interest in a new billet in the same location. And, in the event that it is not possible for the Marine to remain in the same location or if the family prefers to relocate, the family will have greater agency in the PCS process. The will meet the needs of the Marine Corps by filling critical vacancies while also improving long-term retention rates by improving family satisfaction with military service.

Critically, it should be clearly communicated that providing duty location preferences is not a guarantee that orders will be issued to one of the Marine's preferred locations. Creating a sense of increased transparency in the process is contingent on effective communication with the Marine and their family. This communication should be sent directly to the Marine via email and be included as a disclaimer in the Talent Management Dashboard when the Marine enters the portal to provide duty location preferences.

DEVELOP AND DISSEMINATE A POLICY FOR CREDITING THE INFORMAL DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL SKILLS IN THE PERFORMANCE EVALUATION PROCESS.

Although the implementation of the Junior Enlisted Performance Evaluation System (JEPES) marks a significant shift in how performance is assessed and rewarded among junior enlisted Marines, it lacks formal recognition of skill development that occurs outside of structured settings. Currently Marines receive credit for informal PME that is completed in MarineNet and in college/vocational courses, but not for learning that occurs by other avenues like Khan Academy, Coursera, and even YouTube. The Marine Corps should amend the JEPES guidance to include promotion points for the development of measurable technical and other skills – regardless of the learning avenue. Guidance for awarding promotion points should be disseminated force-wide with training administered to all Marines responsible for conducting JEPES assessments.

Implementing and communicating this change is likely to have a non-negligible effect on sustaining the enlisted talent pipeline. 28% of survey respondents cited dissatisfaction with promotions as one of the primary reasons for their voluntary separation, with another 44% indicating that changes to the promotion system would motivate them to return to active duty. These data strongly suggest that increased transparency in the promotion system would drive both increased retention and greater success in prior service recruitment.

Ultimately, meaningfully rewarding Marines for self-initiated learning that matches their interests and contributes to the success of the force will combat the perception that the most valued Marines are those who “run fast.” The Marine Corps may also benefit from increased retention effects among Marines with high levels of PME (Glaser, 2011) as the junior enlisted population is motivated to undertake continuous learning. Implementation of this change will require minimal resource investment and potentially yield high returns in enlisted talent.

A US Marine helicopter, likely a Sikorsky UH-60 Black Hawk, is shown in flight against a clear sky. The helicopter is white with "MARINES" written on the side. The background is a red, hazy landscape. The number "08" is in the top right corner.

CONCLUSION

As the United States shifts its focus to near-peer competition with China and Russia, it is paramount that the Marine Corps optimize its personnel strategy to leverage the right talent in the right ways. TM2030 presents a unique opportunity to enact substantive changes across the force to improve military life and career satisfaction for Marines and their families.

Particularly in light of ongoing recruitment challenges, targeted retention will be a critical component of these change efforts. This is especially true of first-term enlistees who are vital to the health of the enlisted talent pipeline. My research illuminates simple but meaningful updates to the personnel system that will drive increased retention in this essential population.

The Marine Corps remains the premier fighting force in the world, and it is the Marines who make it great. Continued success depends upon the USMC's ability to cultivate talent, adapt to change, and provide fulfillment to Marines and their families. In the words of one Marine, ***"we are the Few the Proud for a reason."***

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Special thanks to the many talented Marines whose photography appears throughout this report.

Cover: Staff Sergeant John Martinez
Page i: Sergeant Karis Mattingly
Page ii: Corporal Anthony Pio
Page iii: Staff Sergeant Kelsey Dornfeld
Page 1: Corporal Maximiliano Rosas
Page 3: Corporal Aidan Hekker
Page 5: Lance Corporal Matthew Morales
Page 6: Staff Sergeant Kelsey Dornfeld
Page 11: Corporal Logan Beeney
Page 14: Lance Corporal Larry Babilya
Page 17: Sergeant Sarah Nadeau
Page 18: Corporal Mark Morales
Page 23: Corporal Elliott Flood-Johnson
Page 27: Unattributed
Page 28: Corporal Paley Fenner
Page 30: Sergeant Juan Carpanzano



“Some people spend an entire lifetime wondering if they made a difference in this world. The Marines don't have that problem.”

-President Ronald Reagan

APPENDIX A: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Thank you for your time in completing this survey. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may choose to exit the survey at any time. None of the responses you provide will affect your current or future service in the USMC.

M&RA wants to better understand why Marines choose not to re-enlist upon completing their initial four-year active-duty commitment. Your perspective may inform future improvements to the Marine Corps personnel management system and the process for returning to active duty from a reserve status.

The results of this survey will be tied to your exit survey, as well as other data about your time serving on active duty. All information will be stored on secure USMC servers and will not be available to commanding officers or other immediate decision makers.

To give your consent to participate and begin the survey, please enter your EDIPI.

The following questions ask you to reflect on your decision to leave active duty service. Please answer from your current perspective, 12+ months after exit.

(1) When you reflect on your time serving on active duty, your feelings are now:

- Very Positive
- Somewhat Positive
- Mixed
- Somewhat Negative
- Very Negative

(2) What are the top three reasons you believe you decided to leave active duty service after your initial obligation?

- o Accept/find job other than active duty military
- o Interservice transfer
- o Joining Marine Corps reserves
- o Retire
- o Attend school/job training
- o Start my own business
- o Family
- o Did not like Marine Corps service
- o Dissatisfaction with promotions

- o Dissatisfaction with command climate
- o Dissatisfaction with race relations
- o Dissatisfaction with gender relations
- o Other [Positive Experience]
- o Other [Negative Experience]

(3) To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "I wish I had remained on active duty rather than separating after my initial obligation."

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

In this section, we ask about your experiences in the civilian sector since leaving active duty.

(4) In your opinion, do you think the following are better or worse in the civilian sector (compared to the Marine Corps)?

	Better in the Civilian Sector	Neither better nor worse	Better in the Marine Corps	Unsure/No Opinion
Promotion opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Amount of family/personal time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hours worked per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vacation time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Job training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education and training opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pay and compensation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health care benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Retirement benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quality of life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Job security	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fair performance evaluations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Freedom from discrimination	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Freedom from harassment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Racial/ethnic relations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender relations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

(5) Your time in the civilian sector has been:

- Better than expected
- About as expected
- Worse than expected

The following questions ask about your interest in returning to active duty and your perception of the process.

(6) Are you interested in returning to active duty service in the future?

- Definitely not, I am not interested in returning to active duty.
- Probably not, but I am open to it.
- Maybe, but I need more information.
- Yes, but I have questions about or have not yet begun the process.
- Yes, and I have begun the process.
- I'm unsure or have no opinion.

Display This Question:

- **If** Are you interested in returning to active duty service in the future? = Yes, but I have questions about or have not yet begun the process.
- **Or** Are you interested in returning to active duty service in the future? = Maybe, but I need more information.

(7) What has prevented you from beginning the process to return to active duty service? Check all that apply.

- o I don't know how to begin the process.
- o The process is confusing/cumbersome.
- o I don't believe I am eligible.
- o I am too busy.
- o I am interested but have not fully decided.

Display This Question:

- **If** Are you interested in returning to active duty service in the future? = Definitely not, I am not interested in returning to active duty.
- **Or** Are you interested in returning to active duty service in the future? = Probably not, but I am open to it.
- **Or** Are you interested in returning to active duty service in the future? = Maybe, but I need more information.

(8) What, if anything, would motivate you to return to active duty service? Select all that apply.

- MOS-specific bonuses
- Opportunity to change MOS
- Input in duty location
- Input in tour length
- Enhanced tuition assistance/civilian education benefits
- Changes to the promotion system
- Special duty assignment
- Greater investment in on-base facilities (including barracks, fitness center, and chow hall)
- Fewer PCS moves

In closing, please consider your overall experience serving on active duty in the Marine Corps.

(9) If you could go back in time knowing all that you know now, would you still choose to enlist?

- Definitely not
- Probably not
- Might or might not
- Probably yes
- Definitely yes

(10) Is there anything else you think M&RA should know in order to better support enlisted Marines?

APPENDIX B: DATA SUMMARY TABLES

Table B1: Expressed Regret

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "I wish I had remained on active duty rather than separating after my initial obligation."	
Strongly Agree	7%
Somewhat agree	13%
Neither agree nor disagree	22%
Somewhat Disagree	14%
Strongly Disagree	43%

Table B2: Motivators for Voluntary EAS

What are the top three reasons you believe you decided to leave active duty service after your initial obligation?	
Dissatisfaction with command climate	63%
Other [Negative Experience]	41%
Accept/find job other than active duty military	37%
Attend school/job training	37%
Family	32%
Dissatisfaction with promotions	28%
Did not like Marine Corps service	21%
Dissatisfaction with gender relations	8%
Other [Positive Experience]	7%
Joining Marine Corps Reserves	7%
Start my own business	4%
Interservice Transfer	3%
Dissatisfaction with race relations	3%
Retire	0%
<i>Note: These values do not sum to 100%, as this is a multiple selection question.</i>	

Table B3: Willingness to Enlist Again

If you could go back in time knowing all that you know now, would you still choose to enlist?	
Definitely yes	51%
Probably yes	18%
Might or might not	13%
Probably not	7%
Definitely not	11%

Table B4: Civilian Sector Expectations

Your time in the civilian sector has been:	
Better than expected	45%
About as expected	45%
Worse than expected	10%

Table B5: Civilian Sector Comparisons

In your opinion, do you think the following are better or worse in the civilian sector (compared to the Marine Corps)?				
	Better in Civilian Sector	Neither better nor worse	Better in the Marine Corps	Unsure/No Opinion
Job security	15%	22%	58%	5%
Health care benefits	27%	19%	49%	5%
Retirement benefits	24%	25%	35%	16%
Racial/ethnic relations	21%	43%	21%	15%
Vacation time	46%	17%	34%	3%
Job training	40%	30%	27%	4%
Freedom from discrimination	31%	42%	15%	13%
Gender relations	30%	41%	10%	19%
Education and training opportunities	51%	24%	21%	4%
Freedom from harassment	46%	35%	8%	11%
Promotion Opportunities	56%	24%	11%	10%
Fair performance evaluations	55%	31%	7%	7%
Hours worked per week	72%	16%	8%	4%
Pay and compensation	79%	11%	7%	3%
Amount of family/personal time	85%	9%	4%	1%
Quality of life	86%	9%	3%	2%

Table B6: Motivations for EAS Among Respondents Who Would Not Enlist Again

What are the top three reasons you believe you decided to leave active duty service after your initial obligation?	If you could go back in time knowing all that you know now, would you still choose to enlist?		
	Total Sample (n=617)	Probably Not (n=134)	Definitely Not (n=212)
Accept/find job other than active duty military	37%	10%	9%
Attend school/job training	37%	12%	8%
Did not like Marine Corps service	21%	13%	20%
Dissatisfaction with command climate	63%	25%	24%
Dissatisfaction with gender relations	8%	3%	3%
Dissatisfaction with promotions	28%	1%	13%
Dissatisfaction with race relations	3%	1%	2%
Family	32%	8%	5%
Interservice Transfer	3%	0%	1%
Joining Marine Corps Reserves	7%	1%	1%
Other [Negative Experience]	41%	11%	14%
Other [Positive Experience]	7%	0%	0%
Retire	0%	0%	0%
Start my own business	4%	1%	0%

Note: These values do not sum to 100%, as this is a multiple selection question.

Table B7: Motivations for EAS Among Respondents Open to Returning to Active Duty

What are the top three reasons you believe you decided to leave active duty service after your initial obligation?	Are you interested in returning to active duty service in the future?		
	Yes, but I have questions about or have not yet begun the process (n=54)	Maybe, but I need some more information (n=47)	Probably not, but I am open to it (n=182)
Accept/find job other than active duty military	31%	38%	40%
Attend school/job training	31%	38%	46%
Did not like Marine Corps service	7%	9%	14%
Dissatisfaction with command climate	44%	51%	71%
Dissatisfaction with gender relations	7%	6%	8%
Dissatisfaction with promotions	20%	32%	34%
Dissatisfaction with race relations	2%	2%	3%
Family	33%	30%	32%
Interservice Transfer	7%	4%	2%
Joining Marine Corps Reserves	9%	13%	5%
Other [Negative Experience]	41%	53%	40%
Other [Positive Experience]	9%	9%	8%
Retire	0%	2%	1%
Start my own business	0%	0%	3%

Note: These values do not sum to 100%, as this is a multiple selection question.

Table B8: Willingness to Return to Active Duty Compared to General Sentiments About Service

When you reflect on your time serving on active duty, your feelings are now:	Are you interested in returning to active duty service in the future?					
	Definitely not, I am not interested in returning to active duty	I'm unsure or have no opinion	Maybe, but I need some more information	Probably not, but I am open to it	Yes, and I have begun the process	Yes, but I have questions about or have not yet begun the process
Very Positive	30%	6%	10%	26%	7%	16%
Somewhat Positive	28%	5%	8%	42%	1%	12%
Mixed	44%	2%	8%	29%	3%	7%
Somewhat Negative	58%	3%	8%	19%	4%	1%
Very Negative	74%	0%	2%	12%	0%	3%

Table B9: Motivators for Return to Active Duty Among Respondents Open to Returning

Are you interested in returning to active duty service in the future?	What, if anything, would motivate you to return to active duty service? Select all that apply.									
	Changes to the promotion system	Enhanced tuition assistance/civilian education benefits	Fewer PCS moves	Greater investment in on-base facilities	Input in duty location	Input in tour length	MOS-specific bonuses	Opportunity to change MOS	Special duty assignment	
Yes, but I have questions about or have not yet begun the process	24%	31%	15%	28%	76%	19%	52%	54%	46%	
Maybe, but I need some more information	36%	36%	30%	40%	70%	36%	53%	51%	26%	
Probably not, but I am open to it	47%	32%	27%	42%	68%	41%	69%	48%	30%	

Note: These values do not sum to 100%, as this is a multiple selection question.