

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188		
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 13-04-2013		2. REPORT TYPE Master of Military Studies Research Paper		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) September 2012-April 2013	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Millennial Challenge: Retaining the Millennials After 2016		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER N/A			
		5b. GRANT NUMBER N/A			
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER N/A			
6. AUTHOR(S) Mahar, Todd E., Major, USMC		5d. PROJECT NUMBER N/A			
		5e. TASK NUMBER N/A			
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER N/A			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) USMC Command and Staff College Marine Corps University 2076 South Street Quantico, VA 22134-5068			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER N/A		
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A			10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) N/A		
			11. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER N/A		
12. DISTRIBUTION AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES N/A					
14. ABSTRACT Following the current drawdown, the Marine Corps will face retention challenges because it has not adapted sufficiently to overcome the challenges resulting from the interaction between the Marine Corps organizational culture, the changing information technology environment, and the Millennial Generation nuances. The Marine Corps has invested manpower, time, and money on how to better recruit this new generation and as a result, the recruiting force has successfully adapted its procedures but that is where the adaptation stopped. Recruiting, development, and retention must be synchronized in order to stabilize the impact on the force. To account for the Millennial Generation's persona, the Marine Corps must utilize more effective mediums such as social media to communicate strategic messages to the force to avoid misinterpretation. It also needs to expand its education programs to offer more opportunity for continuing education while in service, mentoring program to address the Millennial Generation's need for feedback and guidance, and retention programs to allow for additional opportunities for continued growth to entice further retention.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Millennial Generation, Retention, Development, PME, Mentoring, Force Messaging, Drawdown, Organizational Culture					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:		17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Marine Corps University / Command and Staff College	

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING SF 298

a. REPORT Unclass	b. ABSTRACT Unclass	c. THIS PAGE Unclass	UU	39	19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code) (703) 784-3330 (Admin Office)

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

MILLENNIAL CHALLENGE: RETAINING THE MILLENNIALS AFTER 2016

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Executive Summary

Title: Millennial Challenge: Retaining the Millennials After 2016

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Thesis: Following the current drawdown, the Marine Corps will face retention challenges because it has not adapted sufficiently to overcome the challenges resulting from the interaction between the Marine Corps organizational culture, the changing information technology environment, and the Millennial Generation nuances.

Discussion: In FY 13 the Marine Corps has already seen a decrease in reenlistment submissions and approvals. If this current trend persists in the fiscally constrained environment the Marine Corps will face additional challenges in 2016 when the drawdown is complete and the retention goals stabilize. In preparation for that time, the Marine Corps must look at its current force shaping efforts, enlisted development programs, and retention programs against the nuances of the Millennial Generation Marines to determine if it must adapt its organizational practices to meet the retention challenges.

The two driving factors that had the greatest influence on the Millennial Generation are helicopter parents and technology. Millennials are conditioned for parental involvement and seek mentoring and feedback as reinforcement. They are self-confident and believe they can make an impact in the world because of that positive reinforcement from their parents, and they have been pushed towards higher education as a means to secure a decent livelihood. From technology they have learned that knowledge is not power; it is accessible to everyone. They have become technically savvy in their own right and are socially connected via the internet.

The Marine Corps has invested manpower, time, and money on how to better recruit this new generation and as a result, the recruiting force is better educated and has successfully adapted its procedures but that is where the adaptation stopped. Recruiting, development, and retention must be in synch in order to stabilize the impact on the force. This study examines the programs associated with Millennial Marine development and retention to assess whether or not they harness the potential and power of the Millennial Generation.

Conclusion: To account for the Millennial Generation's persona, the Marine Corps must utilize more effective mediums such as social media to communicate strategic messages to the force to avoid misinterpretation. It also needs to expand its education programs to offer more opportunity for continuing education while in service, mentoring program to address the Millennial Generation's need for feedback and guidance, and retention programs to allow for additional opportunities for continued growth to entice further retention. Implementing change takes time before the effects of that change are realized in an organization. The Marine Corps must adapt to the Millennial Generation now in order to mitigate future challenges in retention.

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Preface

My recent experience on recruiting duty dealing with Millennial Generation applicants highlighted how generational differences and the Marine Corps' organizational culture combine to create a complex problem that requires adaptability to overcome. Before we can come up with viable solutions, we must shed the lens that we have been conditioned to view things through in order to investigate what is possible. The Marine Corps is at another critical period in its history due to the drawdown, fiscal constraints, operational environment and managing a generation of Millennials that are very different from previous generations.

Special thanks to my wife Amy and two great kids, Evan and Callee, for loving me and the Marine Corps and for sacrificing so much for both. Thank you to Dr. Rebecca Johnson for her mentoring throughout the MMS process and thank you to the Marines on recruiting duty for their tireless efforts in a thankless but vital job of continuing the Marine Corps through the accession of quality young men and women who will do our nation's bidding under the Marine Corps' Colors.

The Millennial Marine Retention Challenge

Our All-Volunteer Force is built upon a reasonable opportunity for retention and advancement; unplanned and unexpected wholesale cuts undermine the faith and confidence in service leadership and create long-term experience deficits with negative operational impacts. Such an approach would no doubt do significant long-term damage to our ability to recruit and maintain a quality force.¹

For the past decade the Marine Corps has enjoyed the luxury of meeting and exceeding its retention goals without serious concerns. As the above statement from Marine Corps Commandant General James Amos illustrates, there is a growing concern about how the current drawdown will impact the maintenance of the All-Volunteer Force. In addition to the drawdown another concern for the Marine Corps should be the intricacies of developing and retaining the Millennial Generation. It is a definite concern for civilian employers and has been the subject of a multitude of studies and books. There is a growing gap in the civilian workplace where “more than 60 percent of employers say that they are experiencing tension between employees from different generations—more than 70 percent of older employees are dismissive of younger workers’ abilities.”² To the contrary, “50 percent of younger employees are dismissive of the abilities of their older coworkers,” and in some cases these effects have been a debilitating factor to the organization.³ Understandably, the Marine Corps would not experience the same dynamic to the extent the civilian organizations do as a result of the institutional structure and Uniform Code of Military Justice that binds it, but to think that this dynamic doesn’t exist or impact the Corps would be to disregard group dynamics in general. The Marine Corps recognizes the intricacies associated with the Millennial Generation and has devoted extensive effort and money through its partnership with the J. Walter Thompson advertising firm on researching the Millennials in respect to recruiting,⁴ but it continues to rely on the Corps’ institutional culture as the primary means for retention.

The Marine Corps' legacy and organizational culture have withstood the test of time, and the Marine Corps continues to take individuals from society, indoctrinate them into its culture, provide the nation a force in readiness, and return them to a place in society. The Marine Corps has done this with generation after generation with the belief that its organizational culture will supersede the underpinnings of generational attributes and without realizing a need to drastically adapt to meet the intricacies of a particular generation. Since the advent of the Information Age, the world and its peoples have evolved exponentially through the use of technology. Technology impacts peoples' development in various aspects of their life from how they communicate, interact and learn to how they move, eat and support themselves. Technology affects whole generations and its interaction with preceding and future generations. The Millennial Generation is the first generation to develop entirely in the Information Age with information literally at their fingertips and being surrounded by technological advances. Generations prior to the Millennial Generation have experience prior to the Information Age and that experience influences the way they embrace technology and how they understand and interact with the Millennial Generation that has known nothing other than life in the Information Age.

The question at hand is whether the Marine Corps has adapted sufficiently to the changing information environment and the generation that has greatly been the product of it or if there is even a need for the organization to do so. The Marine Corps has not considered the study of its current enlisted development and retention programs as they relate to retention as an immediate concern due to the international security environment, the U.S. economic woes, and the opportunities created by military service. Following the current drawdown, the Marine Corps will face retention challenges because it has not adapted sufficiently to overcome the

challenges resulting from the interaction between the Marine Corps organizational culture, the changing information technology environment, and the Millennial Generation nuances.

This paper will examine the current force shaping efforts designed to draw down the Marine Corps from its authorized Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 end strength of 202,100 to the directed end strength of 182,100 at the end of FY 2016⁵ and the impacts of such measures on the future retention of the Millennial Generation Marines. It will next look at the Marine Corps' approach to developing enlisted Marines through the lenses of its professional military education program (PME), off-duty education opportunities, and mentoring program, to determine if they are optimal to retain the Millennial Generation Marines. Finally, this paper will study the Marine Corps' retention programs to examine their effectiveness.

The Problem Dynamics

On the surface, the Marine Corps is entering a transition period following a prolonged period of conflict much like it has many times throughout its history. A deeper analysis reveals difficulties that have not previously existed due to the dynamics between the strength of the economy, technology, generational nuances, and Marine Corps organizational culture. The Marine Corps has a responsibility under Title 10 United States Code⁶ to grow and shrink in size based on the international security environment and the requirements of the nation. The completion of large scale operations in Iraq, the current transition out of Afghanistan, and the cuts to defense spending have left the necessity of 202,000 Marine Corps end strength in question and resulted in a directed drawdown.

Following the end of the Cold War the Marine Corps shrunk from 196,000 in 1989 to 172,000 by 1999 with the majority of the cuts happening between 1992 and 1994.⁷ In a report by the Congressional Research Service dated March 30, 2012, Lawrence Kapp (a specialist in

military manpower policy) makes an assertive statement of caution that if the current drawdown is conducted in a manner that undermines job satisfaction, has the perception of limited career prospects, or if the economy offers a better alternative for jobs then “the services may face a more challenging recruiting and retention environment in three to five years.”⁸ Historically, both recruiting and retention trends have drawn correlations to the strength of the civilian job market and military compensation packages.⁹ During fiscal years 2005 through 2007, recruiting challenges coincided with relatively low unemployment rates, the ongoing Global War on Terror, and renewed societal focus on higher education. In 2008 the national economy took a downturn that was marked by an unemployment rate of 7.6 percent in January of that year. Increased military spending on recruiting and retention programs coupled with the economic situation helped revitalize efforts and stabilize the attainment of recruiting and retention goals.¹⁰ Current employment statistics from the Department of Labor show a downward trend in the unemployment rate from 9.6 percent in 2010 down to 8.9 percent in 2011 and most recently to 8.1 percent in 2012.¹¹ If Kapp’s prediction is accurate, the rising job market condition has already been met which leaves job satisfaction and career prospects as the remaining two conditions still in a state of flux. These two areas need to be the Marine Corps’ focus to mitigate Kapp’s prediction from coming to fruition. Technological advances and the impacts the advances have on society add complexity to the situation.

In Thomas Friedman’s book, *The World Is Flat*, he describes ten “forces” that have contributed to the “flattening” of the world that began in 1989 with the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Friedman defines this concept in terms of an equalized environment where individuals are empowered by technological advances and now have the opportunity to be competitive on a global scale. He further emphasizes that this phenomenon is unlike other technologic

revolutions the world has experienced due to the breadth and speed in which the “flattening” is occurring.¹² Friedman highlights the magnitude of the “flattening” when he states,

It is not simply about how governments, business, and people communicate, not just about how organizations interact, but it is about the emergence of completely new social, political, and business models. “It is about things that impact some of the deepest, most ingrained aspects of society right down to the nature of the social contract,”...¹³

By this estimation, the world has changed more quickly and drastically than it has ever before, and the impacts of this technological revolution can be seen in virtually every aspect of life. The speed in which change has taken place created or widened generational gaps between those generations that existed prior to the Computer Age and those that came into existence after.

The term generation has varying definitions depending on the source. Webster defines it as: a body of living beings constituting a single step in the line of descent from an ancestor, or a group of individuals born and living contemporaneously.¹⁴ Authors Megan and Larry Johnson define generation in their book, *Generations, Inc.* as “a group of individuals born and living contemporaneously who have common knowledge and experiences that effect their thoughts, attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors.”¹⁵ The latter definition will be the one referred to in this paper because it expounds on the influences that lead to generational norms resident in every generation, and the reasons why each generation differs from one to the next. Each generation is distinguished by their birth years, and generational grouping varies depending on the source but only differs marginally. For the purposes of this study, the generational groupings referenced are:

<u>Generation</u>	<u>Birth Years</u>
Baby Boomer Generation	1946-1963
Generation X	1964-1979
Millennial Generation	1980-1999 ¹⁶

Birth years may signify each generational time period, but in defining a generation we must look at the memberships' common beliefs and location in history to gain a better understanding of the "generational persona".¹⁷ A generational persona, as depicted by authors Neil Howe and William Strauss in their book *Millennials Rising*, embodies "attitudes about family life, gender roles, institutions, politics, religion, culture, lifestyle and the future."¹⁸ This generational persona provides a perspective to look at the world through that generation's lens.

It is important to understand the connection between the common knowledge and experience each generation has with how that generation views the world and their place in it. We are all a product of our experiences and up-bringing, so in order to better understand the generational nuances, it is important to look at the attributes of the parents' generation as it affects how they raise their children and also look at what happened in the world during the developmental years of a particular generation because it effects how they view the world. The combination of both these factors leads to generational traits that are characteristic to that generation and help produce the generational persona. For example, Baby Boomers were influenced by the women's liberation movement that led to dual income households that gave rise to the "Latchkey Kids" of Generation X who are characterized as being more independent as a result.¹⁹ To gain perspective from the Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial Generation, each generational persona is defined.

The Baby Boomer Generation, the largest generation prior to the Millennial Generation, can be further divided into two sub-groups. The first Baby Boomer sub-group reached adolescence in the 1960's and were affected by events like the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War, assassinations of national leaders, and the lunar landing as well as internal social change from the Civil Rights Act, Women's Liberation Movement, and Woodstock. The latter Baby

Boomers sub-group reached their adolescence in the 1970's and experienced equally influential events such as the Kent State shootings, Watergate, radical movements, Roe v. Wade, and the advent of the Information Age. The collective experience of the Baby Boomers led to a generational persona of mistrust and lack of confidence in the government, questioning authority, equal rights views, abortion and birth control prevalence, and the advent of television to influence the population.²⁰ This experience synthesized into how Baby Boomer parents raised their children.

Generation X was the first product of the Baby Boomer Generation, and significantly smaller than the Baby Boomer Generation due to birth control, abortion, and women entering the workplace in force. The Generation X developmental years of the late 1970s to the 1990s were marked by catastrophic events like the Challenger disaster, the stock market crash, and the Exxon Valdez oil spill as well as the significant world events of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Gulf War, and beginning of the dotcom boom. Generation X's development was also influenced by the rise of the dual income family, the stock market crash, the upsurge in divorce rates, and the evolution of television as a medium to help occupy and assist in education. As a result, Generation X took on the persona as more independent, more technologically savvy, and more open minded to equality. They were driven towards higher education, but more skeptical of the security of staying with one company for a career and became more accustomed to a non-traditional family situation.²¹ Although sequential generations, Generation X and the Millennial Generation have different developmental factors that led to different generational personas because they are the products of the different sub groups of the Baby Boomer Generation and the "flattening" of the world.

The Millennial Generation, totaling 76 million strong,²² is the largest generation on record, and is the product of the latter Baby Boomer Generation sub-group and early Generation X members as well. Advances in medicine increased conception through fertility drugs (sometimes producing multiples), and provided alternative means of conception through in vitro fertilization and surrogates while it also decreased infant mortality.²³ Parents went to extraordinary measures to have children, and produced a “wanted” generation.²⁴ During their developmental years in the late 1990s and 2000s, the Millennials bore witness to the Oklahoma City Bombing, Columbine shooting, 9/11 attacks and subsequent War on Terror, and Amber Alerts that demonstrated to them that the world is not a safe place.²⁵ Parents went to great lengths to protect and nurture their children and became very involved in their children’s lives to show them just how much they were wanted and loved.²⁶ This “helicopter parenting”²⁷ created a dependency condition contrary to the independent condition characteristic of Generation X. While helicopter parenting had a significant impact on the Millennial Generation’s persona, another substantial factor was the rapid technological advances.

The advent of the computer occurred well before the Millennial Generation; however, the technological boom was in full swing and the “flattened world” is the only world the Millennial Generation knows. Technological advances in computers, information, and communication means allowed the Millennials to actively participate in the flattened world as they grew up. The Millennial Generation hasn’t known a world without televisions, personal computers, cell phones, or hand held devices. A Pew Research Center study in 2010 surveyed 3001 American adults ages 18 and older and found that of the Millennial Generation participants, only 1 percent did not own a device like a cell phone, computer, game console, or hand held; whereas the average for all adults surveyed was 9 percent.²⁸ Unlike other generations who received

information from defined channels, for the Millennials, information no longer came from top down but was accessible at their fingertips, and that information became increasingly difficult for their parents to regulate.²⁹ Technology has allowed them to connect via social media and maintain relationships and networks around the world. Millennials don't need to embrace technology; it comes naturally to them and is a way of life.

It is important to clarify the Millennial Generation's persona to understand the world from the Millennial's perspective to connect with them and retain them in the Marine Corps. The two driving factors that had the greatest influence on the Millennial Generation are their helicopter parents and technology. From their parents Millennials see the utility of a balanced work and family life. They are conditioned for parental involvement and seek mentoring and feedback as reinforcement. They are self-confident and believe they can make an impact in the world because of that positive reinforcement from their parents, and they have been pushed towards higher education as a means to secure a decent livelihood.³⁰ From technology they have learned that knowledge is not power; it is accessible to everyone.³¹ They have become technically savvy in their own right and are socially connected via the internet. They communicate via the means available and don't value face to face interactions as much as previous generations. As the authors of *Managing the Millennials* describe, the "Millennials are the most socially and diversely tolerant generation ever, the most educated and technologically savvy generation ever, and the most sheltered and structured generation in our country's history."³²

Having detailed the three distinct Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial generations, each generation's persona creates challenges to coexistence and cohesion within the same organization. An even greater challenge is how to do it in the Marine Corps with its

organizational culture and structure. The Marine Corps prides itself on the capability to “Make Marines, Win Battles, and Return Quality Citizens,”³³ which speaks to the Marine Corps’ claim that the organization has the ability to influence adult men and women so drastically that they create Marines and quality citizens before returning them to their communities. By Marine Corps doctrine, “All officers and enlisted Marines undergo similar entry-level training which is, in effect, a socialization process. This training provides all Marines a common experience, a proud heritage, a set of values, and a common bond of comradeship. It is the essential first step in the making of a Marine.”³⁴ In a 13-week indoctrination program at a Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD), an individual screened by a recruiter and Military Entrance Processing Center (MEPS) from all US states, territories, and walks of life is stripped down to his or her social core and re-educated in the values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment.³⁵ This transformation from civilian to United States Marine is the foundational step in an attempt to shed an individual’s preconceptions and assimilate him or her into the Marine Corps culture and organization.

The organizational pyramid structure in the Marine Corps requires the base of junior enlisted Marines to be the foundation upon which the organization is balanced. The age requirement for non-prior service new accessions (17-28 year olds)³⁶ means that this foundation will predominantly, if not solely come from the same generation. As per the 2011 Marine Corps Almanac’s Active Duty Enlisted Age Distribution breakdown, of the 181,134 Marines, at least 156,788 met the age to be considered Millennial Generation Marines. That is over 86% of the entire active duty enlisted population.³⁷ This Marine population represents the future leadership of the Marine Corps. Since 1998, the Millennial Generation began to fill the ranks of the Marine Corps as they came of enlistment age. Upon the end of the initial cohort of Millennials first enlistment term, the War on Terror erupted and measures were emplaced to extend active

portions of enlistments (Stop Loss) or incentives were offered for retention. As the US commitment in Afghanistan draws down so in turn does the requirement for additional end strength while at the same time, due to the nation's financial situation, the budgetary flexibility also is coming to a conclusion. The Marine Corps must look for alternatives to mitigate future retention challenges.

At current time, even with lower retention goals that allow the organization to be selective on who to retain, the Marine Corps is already experiencing retention challenges. A retention summary provided by Marine Corps Manpower Enlisted Retention Section summarizes data for total reenlistment submissions, approved reenlistments, and the remaining needs for Fiscal Years 2008 to 2013. The data is broken down into First Term Alignment Plans (FTAP) or enlisted Marines in their initial contract and Subsequent Term Alignment Plan (STAP) for enlisted Marines beyond their initial contract. This data snapshot was taken at the end of January (end of first FY trimester) for each year to display the current retention trends against historical trends. For FTAP from FY 09 to FY 12, the percentages of submissions for reenlistment (based off of the FY FTAP goal) were above 90% and the executed reenlistments were above 83%. In FY 13 the percent of submissions fell to 80% while the executed reenlistments fell to 74%. The Marine Corps has not seen these low levels since FY 2008 when it struggled to meet retention goals.³⁸ If this current trend persists in the fiscally constrained environment the Marine Corps will face additional challenges in 2016 when the drawdown is complete and the retention goals stabilize. In preparation for that time, the Marine Corps must look at how its current force shaping efforts, enlisted development programs, and retention programs coincide with the nuances of the Millennial Generation Marines to determine if it must adapt its organizational practices to meet the retention challenges.

Managing Millennial Marines' Perceptions

Since war is at base a human enterprise, effective personnel management is important to success. –MCDP-1 Warfighting

At the beginning of Fiscal Year 2012, the Marine Corps active component end strength was 202,100 and by the end of Fiscal Year 2016, the Marine Corps directed end strength will be 182,100. This equates to a 20,000 Marine drawdown in a five-year period. In his 2012 Report to Congress on the Posture of the Marine Corps, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James F. Amos, laid out his plan while also voicing his concerns:

As we reduce end strength, we must manage the rate carefully so we reduce the force responsibly. We will draw-down our end strength by approximately 5,000 Marines per year. The continued resourcing of this gradual ramp-down is vital to keeping faith with those who have already served in combat and for those with families who have experienced resulting extended separations...³⁹

It is evident that General Amos is concerned about the method by which the drawdown is executed to keep faith with Marines and their families. The challenge the Marine Corps faces is reducing end strength in a responsible way while managing perceptions that it has maintained faith with its Marines. The question is whether it can do both in the current environment and what are the impacts to future retention if it cannot. The conflict between maintaining faith with Marines and their families while having to reduce the size of the Marine Corps will create retention challenges because of the involuntary nature of the Enlisted Career Force Controls Program, and the failure to effectively communicate with the Millennial Marines to manage perceptions.

As part of its measured drawdown approach, the Marine Corps adjusted its recruiting and retention goals through Fiscal Year 2016 to reach the directed End Strength with the expectation that normal attrition and retention will mitigate the need for involuntary separations. In order to ensure the desired pyramid structure the Marine Corps utilizes force shaping tools. The Enlisted

Temporary Early Retirement Authority (TERA) Program, Enlisted Voluntary Separation Pay (VSP) Program, Voluntary Enlisted Early Release (VEERP) Program, and Enlisted Career Force Controls (ECFC) Program are currently in effect and designed to shape the force by grade and numbers. The TERA, VSP, and VEERP Programs are incentivized to encourage voluntary separation while the ECFC Program is more involuntary in nature. Although not clearly involuntary separation, the ECFC enforces the “up or out” methodology where service members who fail to promote reach service limitations and are forced to separate or retire depending on whether or not they meet retirement prerequisites. More blatant involuntary separation measures are still a possibility but studies have shown that involuntary separations have detrimental effects on future retention and the Marine Corps has avoided taking these measures in favor of incentivizing voluntary separation.

The Enlisted Career Force Controls Program is not a new drawdown measure but is part of the normal attrition force shaping tools. The Marine Corps implemented the measure in 1985 as an effort to improve Career Force management. Historically, the ECFC Program has been successful in actively shaping the force by grade and MOS and stabilizing retention to standardize promotion opportunity across all MOS's.⁴⁰ Although it has been in effect since 1985, the recent change to service limitations from 13 years to 10 years targets the sergeant population of the Millennial Generation. To mitigate the affected population's discontent, the Marine Corps implemented measures to grandfather those Sergeants who were previously passed for promotion prior to the policy change and honor all existing contracts. Regardless of the grandfather measures, as the sergeant service limitation reduction to 10 years continues, the underlying involuntary nature of ECFC will continue to surface.

The involuntary nature of the ECFC is accentuated by the decreasing opportunity for promotion. Three major factors combine to determine promotion opportunity. The number of Marines the Marine Corps is authorized to select for promotion to the next higher rank and the selection percentage the Marine Corps desires to maintain will direct the total number of eligible population for any given year and impact the promotion zone (determined by date promoted to current rank) for each year. For example, if the Marine Corps desire is to maintain a consistent selection rate of 64% for the population in the promotion zone then as the number it is authorized to select decreases then it must decrease the eligible population and manipulate the promotion zone to coincide. Historically, the Marine Corps has maintained a 64% selection rate to staff sergeant for in zone sergeants and has manipulated the zones based upon the number they are authorized to select (see Table 1).⁴¹

Table 1: Staff Sergeant Promotion Board Statistics

Year	Authorized to Select	Total Eligible in Zone	% Selected
2012	1588	1883	64.1%
2011	2741	3253	63.8%
2010	3339	4088	64.6%
2009	3332	3775	64.9%
2008	3722	4004	64.9%
2007	4304	5236	64.4%

This decreased promotion opportunity for sergeants combined with the service limitation change to the ECFC means that many sergeants will face involuntary separation measures due to their inability to promote to staff sergeant prior to reaching 10 years of service. If the Marine Corps continues to grandfather and waive the service limitations then it will face challenges

maintaining the pyramid structure. Regardless, the ECFC and decrease in promotion opportunity will have cascading effects on the sergeant and below population with respect to job security and potential for advancement. As depicted in the FY 13 Enlisted Retention Survey, promotion opportunity is already a top influence in the decision to leave the Marine Corps.⁴² The ECFC Program has the potential to be the most damaging program to the future retention of the Millennial Generation Marines because of the perceived break in trust and lack of stability. Although neither the Commandant's intent nor the ECFC intent is to break trust with the Marines, the possibility that trust has been broken must be managed effectively to mitigate future retention challenges. As the force shaping measures increase, communication is essential to managing perceptions but must reach the intended audience with the intended message.

In the information environment we find ourselves in today, information is readily available to anyone with a connection to the World Wide Web via computer or hand held device. The Millennials are the most technology savvy generation to date since they have never known a world without computers, the internet, cell phones and the ability to instantly connect across the world at their fingertips. The Millennials are a connected generation, with vast social networks who rely on accessible information from many different sources whereas the Marine Corps is an organization reliant on structure and a chain of command to pass information and command messages. Concerns for operational security leads to information being passed on a need to know basis. These two outlooks clash and in the Marine Corps, the organizational outlook trumps the individual's. The Marine Corps is resistant to embracing social media as a leadership mass communication tool to communicate with both the public and the force, but effective use of social media can ensure that strategic messages reach the intended audiences and decrease misunderstanding or misinterpretation.

The President and Vice President of the United States have official Twitter accounts for strategic messaging but as of 19 January 2013, the Commandant of the Marine Corps does not. Many may wonder why it matters if the Commandant communicates to the force using social media as a mass communication tool. Others see it negatively impacting the chain of command. A recent example of the importance of clear communication to the force can be found in the implementation of the service uniform Fridays. On 3 January 2013, the Commandant directed that all Marines will wear the appropriate seasonal service uniform on Fridays while in garrison. Also on 3 January, Dan Lamothe, a staff writer for the Marine Corps Times, reported that the change may be related to a “push to improve military appearance and weed out overweight Marines across the service.”⁴³ Subsequent discussions on the uniform change indicate that a driving factor behind the decision was to transition the force mindset from continuous combat duty to include other garrison duties as well. The Duffel Blog offers a more outlandish viewpoint about the same topic.⁴⁴ Even though clearly meant for comedic purposes, it represents a misinterpretation General Amos never intended. In this instance, because General Amos never communicated his intent directly to the force, other sources for information can make their interpretations available to Marines for consideration. Had the Commandant sent a strategic message to the force using social media, there would have been little room to misinterpret his intent for the change. During the drawdown, it is important that the Marine Corps manages perceptions to avoid misinterpretations similar to those described above. Not all information needs to or should be communicated directly from the Commandant to the force however, because the Millennial Generation Marines who make up the majority of the force are connected and tuned into social media, it should be considered as a viable option to ensure the intended message is received by the intended audience.

This section demonstrated how the involuntary nature of the Enlisted Career Force Controls Program targets the sergeant population. The ECFC combined with reduced promotion opportunity for sergeants will have detrimental effects on retention considering that major influences in the Millennial Generation Marines decision to leave service are job stability and opportunity for promotion. We also saw how failure to communicate an intended message to the intended population can fuel misinterpretation and lead to varying perceptions. When considering these factors and current fiscal environment, the Marine Corps also needs to evaluate its current programs to determine if they resonate with the force and factor into the decision to reenlist.

Developing Millennial Marines

All commanders should consider the professional development of their subordinates a principal responsibility of command. Commanders should foster a personal teacher-student relationship with their subordinates... Commanders should see the development of their subordinates as a direct reflection on themselves. –MCDP-1 Warfighting

With job stability and promotion opportunities in decline and the civilian job market on the rise, the Marine Corps needs to ensure there are sufficient reasons to make Marines want to stay in the Corps. From their generational persona we saw that Millennials were conditioned by their parents to seek mentoring and feedback as reinforcement and have been pushed towards higher education as a means to secure a decent livelihood.⁴⁵ The Marine Corps can look to these generational proclivities as a pathway to entice Marines to retain. This section assesses the Marine Corps Enlisted Professional Military Education (EPME), Off-Duty Education, and Mentoring Programs to determine if changes need to be made to enhance their effects on the Millennial Generation Marines.

The Marine Corps places a premium on the continued development of Marines and by their doctrine levies a responsibility on the commanders to ensure it happens. The Marine Corps is also a rank-structured organization that is reliant on that structure to function effectively and maintain good order and discipline. As per the Marine Corps Manual, “The special trust and confidence, which is expressly reposed in officers by their commission, is the distinguishing privilege of the officer corps. It is the policy of the Marine Corps that this privilege be tangible and real; it is the corresponding obligation of the officer corps that it be wholly deserved”.⁴⁶ Every Marine is a rifleman;⁴⁷ however, there is a divide (as in every armed service) between officer and enlisted. The differences begin in the pre-requisites and qualifications but continue on through entry level training and continued development. When sworn into service, the differences can immediately be demonstrated by the oaths each group takes whether the Oath of Enlistment or the Oath of Office.⁴⁸ The increasingly complex battlefield for which Marines train has necessitated decentralized operations and responsibilities. Non-Commissioned Officers hold the same if not more responsibility and autonomy during the current conflicts than Commissioned Officers held in previous ones. Commandant Krulak’s “Strategic Corporal” has turned into a strategic Marine at all ranks due to the World Wide Web and its ability to provide immediate information to a dispersed population. The Marine Corps’ approach to enlisted development maintains the divide of yesteryear without accounting for the leveling of the expectations between officers and enlisted and the requirements of the Millennial Generation for further development. The Marine Corps offers a mixture of distance learning, resident and self-education programs to ensure the opportunity for the widest audience to participate. The contention lies in the effectiveness of the distance learning program which lacks the appropriate

feedback and discourse mechanism to achieve the desired understanding and addresses the Millennial Generation persona.

For instructors at The Basic School, the six-month entry level PME all Marine Officers attend, education in the Socratic Method of instruction is part of the Instructor Education Program and the preferred method for educating newly commissioned officers. The Socratic Method is a shared dialogue between teacher and students in which both are responsible for pushing the dialogue forward through an exchange of questions to achieve a level of understanding.⁴⁹ The Socratic Method is the preferred method to teach newly commissioned officers but EPME requirements are still taught through distance learning and Marine Corps Institute (MCI) courses. Understandably the Socratic Method is not easily understood or practiced but the discourse approach can be implemented for more effective education. The only feedback mechanism for MCI courses is whether the answer to a question is right or wrong but there is no exchange with the student as to why they got it wrong or possibly misunderstood the concept being tested.

The Marine Corps established EPME requirements considered pre-requisites for promotion to the next higher grade.⁵⁰ These foundational requirements for each grade are still taught through an on-line course where there is little to no feedback or interaction with an instructor. One recommended change comes from the established Marine Corps Mentoring Program (MCMP) that will be discussed later in the paper. The construct of the MCMP is ideally suited to conduct the required EPME outside of the resident PME requirements. Part of developing future leaders is to educate them on how to educate. Of all the requirements of the MCMP, PME is not specifically addressed but is essential to developing the future leaders of the Marine Corps. Mentors can conduct the instruction in an individual or small group setting that is

conducive to a Socratic approach and at the very least, offers an opportunity for a discourse between student and teacher. This setting is also geared towards the Millennial Generation as it provides the feedback and reinforcement they have grown accustomed to from their parents. It provides them an environment to feel like a part of a team and demonstrates a genuine concern for their development not offered by an on-line course. Millennials have been pushed and conditioned by their parents to strive for higher education more as a fact of life vice a privilege. They possess an internal drive for self-improvement that can be satisfied through the EPME progression as well as off-duty higher education.

When the Millennials were recruited they were told of the educational benefits through joining the Marine Corps. They were briefed on the Post 9/11 GI Bill, Tuition Assistance Program, and other programs like the Service Member Opportunity Colleges Marine Corps (SOCMAR) and the United Services Military Apprenticeship Program (USMAP) to entice them to join. This also addressed many of theirs and their parents' concerns about going to college instead of the military and showed them that both can be executed either sequentially or simultaneously. However, the last decade of conflict increased the deployment cycles, decreased the dwell time and effectively decreased the opportunity for off-duty higher education for Marines. As the deployment cycles stabilize and the Marine Corps returns to pre-war operation levels, the opportunity for continuing education will increase. During this transition period, the Marine Corps can adjust the frame in which it operates to build in time for Marines to pursue a degree.

By definition, off-duty education implies that to continue higher education an individual must do it in their off-duty time. Due to the varying unit training and operations cycles it is extremely difficult for Marines, especially in operational units, to take advantage of off-duty

education opportunities. Much like the recent service uniform Friday policy implemented in January 2013, the Marine Corps can dictate a day for Marines to be given the opportunity to attend classes at satellite campuses, local institutions or via on-line programs. It would not replace the current opportunity to enroll in off-duty programs but would enhance the individual's ability to participate in a larger variety of them.

Another challenge to the off-duty education program is that it is on the individual to seek out information and navigate through the procedures to be able to participate in the program. There is a competition for time in respect to off-duty education and Marine requirements that leads to units not openly encouraging participation in the programs. The Marine Corps maintains the mindset of "Mission First, Marines Always"⁵¹ to where taking care of Marines is intertwined with the mission. In the same respect, continuing individual higher education can also be intertwined with standard operating procedures but it will take institutional change to accomplish the task.

In order to implement this policy it would require a change to the institutional approach to off-duty education and institutional operating procedures. By encouraging Marines to participate in higher education programs, educating them on how to participate and offering them realistic opportunities to participate, the Marine Corps will build increased institutional educational capacity within the force more conducive to higher level thought and innovation amongst all ranks. It will also realize the assertions that were made to Millennial Generation when they enlisted. Along with PME and off-duty education, an essential piece to improving the development of the Millennial Marines lies in the Marine Corps Mentoring Program.

As a "wanted" generation, the Millennials parents have nurtured them with feedback and reinforcement throughout their lives; more so than any other generation. They are conditioned to

receive this and have come to expect it even as they enter the workforce. In 2006, the Marine Corps introduced the Marine Corps Mentoring Program to enhance their counseling program and address the challenges that surfaced within the force resulting from prolonged combat and operational deployments.⁵² This program is ideally suited for the Millennial Generation feedback and reinforcement needs but it needs to be implemented and maintained for the program to achieve its desired effect. An April 2010 study by the Military Leadership Diversity Commission (MLDC) assessed mentoring programs across the services and reported that it was unclear whether or how the Marine Corps monitored compliance with program directives.⁵³ As with every policy, a policy will not be effective unless it is enforced.

Aside from the compliance issue, the program itself is directive in nature to where Marines are assigned mentors vice selecting them. There is no pre-requisite or qualification process to become a mentor and no quality assurance that the mentor will be effective in the relationship with the mentee. To substitute for a lack of pre-requisites and qualifications, the Marine Corps provides a comprehensive guidebook in an effort to fill the gap. This prescriptive 149 page guidebook focuses on the Marine Corps' Core Values but contains references to a wide range of troop leading issues.⁵⁴ In the 2010 MLDC study, the effectiveness of the MCMP was brought into question resulting from a 2007 Marine Corps Climate Assessment Survey where less than 50 percent of those surveyed responded positively to a question whether their mentor had a positive impact in their Marine Corps Life. The study recommended that the Marine Corps examine its mentoring program to improve the quality of mentoring provided to Marines but as of yet, there have been no changes to the original order and directives.⁵⁵

Possible causes of the program ineffectiveness are the absence of an accountability mechanism to ensure program compliance and the assignment of mentors due to lack of training

and qualifications to be a mentor. A search of the Inspector General of the Marine Corps website did not produce a reference to the MCMP. Out of the 127 Functional Area Checklists, there was no checklist for the MCMP. If the Marine Corps wants to ensure compliance then MCMP needs to be an Inspector General Inspection item. To improve the quality of mentors, the Marine Corps needs to institutionalize the training and certification of mentors. Noncommissioned officers and above should be the pool of mentors to select from as a result of their experience and proven ability evident from their promotion to that rank. To assist in identifying potential mentors, a remark by the Reporting Senior in the case of fitness reports or in the comments box in the case of proficiency and conduct markings for Corporals, should be required indicating the individual Marine's ability to be a mentor. Once trained and certified, the certification is annotated in a mentor's Basic Training Record (BTR). The changes to the Inspector General Program and to the selection, training and certification of mentors would lead to a more effective MCMP and provide the feedback and reinforcement to the Millennial Generation for which they are accustomed to.

Considering the importance the Marine Corps places on the development of its Marines, the Marine Corps must adapt its institutional approach if it wants to retain the Millennial Generation Marines. This requires a willingness to change organizational culture and operating procedure to coincide with the changing environment and Marine Corps population. The adjustments to the Enlisted Professional Military Education (EPME), off-duty education and mentoring programs will maximize the potential of the Millennial Generation and help retain them as the future leadership. Changing the approach to developing the Millennials alone will not entice them to re-enlist. The current retention programs also need to be assessed to ensure they are palatable to the Millennials to further entice them to reenlist.

Retaining Millennial Marines

Our All-Volunteer Force is built upon a reasonable opportunity for retention and advancement; unplanned and unexpected wholesale cuts undermine the faith and confidence in service leadership and create long-term experience deficits with negative operational impacts.⁵⁶

During the Force Shaping Efforts section of this paper, the Millennials desire for job security and promotion opportunity was discussed in relation to the Enlisted Career Force Controls. Another characteristic of the Millennial Generation is their desire for a balanced work and family life along with continuing their education. Incentivizing retention to a population that seeks both variety and stability within an organization in a fiscally constrained environment poses a challenge to the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps already offers reenlistment incentives, educational incentives, and career enhancement programs that align with the Millennials needs; however, other programs such as the Congressional Fellowship Program and apprenticeship program expand the variety of opportunities available to Marines and may further entice the Millennials to retain in service. The issue is that the majority of these other programs are only available to a select few. The Marine Corps must expand its reenlistment educational incentives and add internship and sabbatical programs to aid in retaining the Millennial Generation or it will struggle to maintain force structure and quality following the drawdown.

The current reenlistment educational incentives as listed in the Enlisted Retention section on the Marine Corps Manpower and Reserve Affairs website are the SNCO Degree Completion Program (SNCODCP), United States Military Apprenticeship Program (USMAP), Military Academic Skills Program (MASP), Tuition Assistance (TA) and Transfer of Educational Benefits (TEB). The recommended expansion of the educational incentives focuses on the SNCODCP and opening it up to noncommissioned officers as well. By Marine Corps Order

1560.21D Ch1 that specifies the details of the program, the program is based on the need for SNCOs “with skills in specific educational disciplines above those associated with normal grade and MOS requirements. The program provides staff noncommissioned officers an opportunity to obtain baccalaureate degrees which fulfill Marine Corps’ requirements, and concurrently satisfy personal educational goals.”⁵⁷ Other than expanding the number of allocations so that SNCO opportunity would not be degraded and including noncommissioned officers in the population, the specifications in the order would remain in place. This would effectively allow first term Marines with another opportunity to further their education and stay in the Marine Corps without applying for an enlisted to officer program. The Marine would use his or her individual education benefits such as the Post 9/11 GI Bill or tuition assistance to defray the cost of the degree program and avoid an additional funding requirement for the Marine Corps. The degree completion program would also allow the Marine to vary his or her life experience by attending a college or university for the 18 months permitted by the order and upon successful completion of the program, the Marine would return for their four year payback obligation. This should not detract from the Marine’s competitiveness for promotion as it demonstrates propensity for higher level learning and the Marine will have ample opportunity to demonstrate performance in his or her MOS. Another program that can be implemented to provide variety and a different life experience would be an internship program.

Like the SNCO Congressional Fellowship Program, an internship program can be implemented along the same guidelines to allow NCOs and SNCOs an opportunity to work alongside Federal Agency counterparts and expand their knowledge base. The internship program would be with Federal Agencies in order to ensure the legality of the enlistment contract with the Federal Government while also increasing Marine Corps’ inter-agency

integration. Upon the completion of the two year internship, the individual would return to the Marine Corps for a four year pay back tour much to the same effect as the degree completion program. The internship program can also be associated with the USMAP as an opportunity to intern in their apprenticeship field. Both options have positive benefits for the individual Marine and the Marine Corps itself with increased experience in a particular field and building relationships with other agencies of the Federal Government. The options allow them to continue education and make them more competitive for promotion. The associated pay back tours would put the individuals four years closer to retirement and make a decision to leave the Marine Corps much more difficult.

The final option to offer variety and stability to the Millennial Generation Marines is to implement a sabbatical program upon the end of the first term of active duty. The standard contract that a non-prior service applicant signs upon initial enlistment is for eight years. The difference is the breakdown of service between the active component and Inactive Ready Reserve (IRR) component of the Marine Corps. The standard enlistment contract is four years in the active component and four years in the IRR although it is dependent upon the program they enlist for. Some programs, i.e. MOS, have a longer active portion due to the length of training required prior to their first assignment. The IRR portion of the contract begins when the applicant is sworn in at the Military Entrance Processing Station and joins the Recruiting Station's Delayed Entry Program (DEP).⁵⁸ When a first term Marine ends active service (EAS), it is specifically for the active portion of their contract but they will still be transferred to the IRR for the remainder of their contract.

If a Marine selects the sabbatical incentive for reenlistment, then upon their initial EAS, they would be transferred to the IRR for a period of two years during which they will fall under

the IRR regulations and into the Veterans Administration programs. The Marine Corps can still track the individual's status while on sabbatical through the required IRR musters. Upon completion of the sabbatical, the Marine would follow the Marine Corps Prior Service Program procedures for their return to active duty and fulfillment of their subsequent enlistment.

Implementation of a sabbatical program would allow the Marine the opportunity to do something else for two years while under contractual obligation to return to active duty and thus provide another option for Millennial retention.

In 2016 upon achieving the 182,100 end strength, the Marine Corps will be challenged to retain the Millennial Generation with its current retention and career enhancement programs. The Millennials desire for variety and stability give them a propensity to attrite from the Marine Corps in search of fulfilling other life goals in a more stable career. If the Marine Corps wants to increase the probability of retaining the best of the Millennial Generation, then it must expand its educational incentives and add internship and sabbatical programs or it will struggle to maintain force structure and quality following the drawdown. All of the recommended initiatives would create additional manpower management challenges in tracking individuals in the programs against Operating Force and Supporting Establishment requirements, but the potential retention benefits would outweigh those challenges.

Act Now, Benefit Later

The Millennial Generation is the largest generation to date and will be the future of the Marine Corps for some time to come. The Marine Corps has entered a critical transition and interwar period. As it begins to drawdown forces, transition out of Afghanistan and conform to the fiscally constrained environment, the Corps will need the Millennials to carry it through the period and shape the future but to do that, it needs to be able to retain the best and brightest the

generation has to offer. The first Millennials, born in 1980, reached enlistment age in 1998 and during their first enlistment, the U.S. entered a period of prolonged conflict. In 2003, the Marine Corps implemented a stop loss policy that involuntarily extended Marines on active duty in order to concurrently meet the demands of Operation Iraqi Freedom and other global commitments. From 2007 to 2009, the Marine Corps grew the force by 27,000 Marines to achieve authorized end strength of 202,100 two years ahead of schedule.⁵⁹ Following 9/11 and throughout the build to 202K, monetary incentives were effective in enticing the Millennials to enlist and reenlist. Many of those same individuals the Marine Corps pursued will fall victim to the drawdown and as a result, take a negative impression of the Marine Corps back home to spread via their social networks. At the end of FY 2016 when Marine Corps achieves the directed 182,100 directed end strength, it will be challenged to continue to retain the Millennials due to a lack of monetary and other incentives that are palatable to the generation.

The Millennial Generation is like no other generation due to the technological advances, world events, and parental influences that shaped their development. The Millennials are a technologically savvy, connected generation that has a need for feedback and reinforcement as they continue their education and search for a stable career. The Marine Corps' organizational structure and culture are not ideally compatible with the Millennial Generational norms. The Marine Corps has thus far resisted the need to adapt to address the intricacies of the Millennial Generation because there hasn't been a need to do so but that time is coming. Unfortunately, before the need is realized by the organization, it may be too late.

There have been numerous civilian studies and books written on the complexity of the Millennials and the challenges of managing them in the workplace. The Marine Corps has invested manpower, time and money on how to better recruit this new generation and as a result,

the recruiting force is better educated and has successfully adapted its procedures but that is where the adaptation stopped. Recruiting, development, and retention must be in synch in order to stabilize the impact on the force. This study examined the programs associated with Millennial Marine development and retention to assess whether or not they harness the potential and power of the Millennial Generation. The Marine Corps prides itself on legacy and tradition that lends itself to resistance to organizational change but it also takes pride in its ability “to cope—even better, to thrive—in an environment of chaos, uncertainty, constant change, and friction”⁶⁰ on the battlefield.

To account for the Millennial Generation’s persona, the Marine Corps must utilize more effective mediums such as social media to communicate strategic messages to the force from top down and ensure widest dissemination of information to avoid misinterpretation. It also needs to expand its education programs to offer more opportunity for continuing education while in service, mentoring program to address the Millennial Generation’s persona need for feedback and guidance, and retention programs to allow for additional opportunities for continued growth to entice further retention. Implementing change takes time before the effects of that change is realized in an organization. The Marine Corps must adapt to the Millennial Generation now in order to mitigate future challenges in retention.

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