

# Mission Ready

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## Creating a "Mission-Oriented" Culture

Is your organization a place of sharing, in which associates willingly and anonymously give of themselves without worrying about who will get the credit? Or, do you suspect that your subordinates play their cards pretty close to the vest, perhaps even withholding help from one another until they can find a way to be personally associated with the resulting success-story?

Unfortunately, in any organization in which we all contend for a limited number of promotions, the little secrets of success, acquired over years on the job, may not be readily shared with our rivals. We tend to think of the "tricks of the trade" that we have learned as our own personal property (forgetting those who may have shared with us) and see no need to qualify others for the promotion we covet. And, when we do help, we make sure everybody knows about it.

Has there ever been an organization in which all that matters is mission completion, and in which personal ambition is secondary to the overall success of the team? For those who have ever seen the Marine Corps at work, the answer is a resounding "Yes!"

In this elite brotherhood, there is a willingness to give of oneself that, at times, will give the observer goosebumps. A common sense of mission - and of personal responsibility to contribute towards that mission, *even if nobody knows about it* - runs throughout the ranks. Those who happen to be singled out for their contributions are quick to duck out of the spotlight, letting it shine upon his or her team members. Medals are worn humbly. Every Marine knows that he or she owes their personal success to the team.

This is not to suggest that the individual Marine is without ambition; those who make it a career are expected to climb up the promotional ladder. And, in today's downsized military, those promotions can seem few and far between. In its own way, a military career is much more competitive than one in private enterprise, but the "competition" is reserved for the enemy, not for one's fellow Marines. Individuals are recognized by how well their team members perform; everybody contributes as much as they can, and then some. One only has to read the combat medal citations to see how far the commitment to mission completion

can lead certain individuals. Phrases like "at great personal risk," "without regard to personal safety," and "at the ultimate sacrifice," describe the heroic measures taken by individual Marines who, at the time, did not even expect to survive their contributions to the common goal.

How can a company create an environment in which images of personal success come almost as an afterthought to getting the job done?

For starters, the organization can make it clear that the success of every manager is judged on the basis of the success of his or her own subordinates. If your own people aren't climbing up the corporate ladder, neither should you.

Companies must also make it clear that every associate is evaluated upon, and rewarded for, his or her contributions to the team effort. It seems as if every other business on the block has an "Employee of the Month" program, which is usually based on individual achievement, be it in sales, service or production. Why not implement a "Team-player of the Month" award, based on individual *sacrifice*?

Just as the National Basketball Association keeps statistics of "assists" (i.e. passing the ball off to a teammate in better scoring position, even though you might have scored the basket yourself) managers must keep a running tab of workplace "assists," and compensate accordingly. Imagine the impact upon a department if the next promotion was not just given to the top producer, but to the top "team-player." Soon, everyone would be falling all over themselves to contribute (perhaps a little ostentatiously) towards the common good.

An internal company newsletter can go a long way towards highlighting the efforts of all who were involved in a particular success. Group photos and a brief narrative of the achievement can have a threefold impact: 1) the team responsible for a significant "victory" is recognized and praised; 2) other associates learn from reading the interview how this feat was accomplished, and will try to emulate it themselves; and, 3) the self-esteem of all employees of the company goes up a notch upon the news of a "big order."

In time, your organization will evolve into more than just a place to go to work; it will become a brotherhood.