

# Mission Ready

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## Why Marines Never Use the “M Word”

There are a lot of very practical reasons for Marines to watch their language, especially on the battlefield. For example, he/she will never use the word “Repeat” in radio communications, for fear that it may be misinterpreted as “Retreat.” Instead, a Marine will use the phrase “I say again”—a little clumsy, perhaps, but certainly unambiguous. The Army may refer to a hole dug in the ground as a “fox hole,” but Marines balk at the term; after all, foxes *hide* in fox holes. The same hole, in Marine parlance, is a “fighting hole.” And, while Army soldiers refer to their drab, olive green, field uniforms as “fatigues,” Marines call their exact same drab, olive green, uniforms “utilities.”

There is another word you’ll never hear a Marine Corps officer, sergeant, or drill instructor use—and that is, “Manage.” In fact the word is treated with such abhorrence, it is often referred to as the “M Word.” That’s because Marines are trained to *lead*, not to *manage*.

Now, to those of us who *are* managers, the distinction may not be so obvious. Here, then, are a few of the differences between “managing” and “leading,” as seen from the Marine Corps perspective.

- Managers *push* their people. Leaders *pull* theirs’ by sheer force of personal example.
- Managers order their personnel to get the job done. Leaders *inspire*

their personnel to get the job done.

- Managers build a fire under your butt. Leaders build a fire in your belly.
- “Hands on” managers cultivate obedience. “Hands off” leaders cultivate independence and resourcefulness.
- Managers consider themselves part of an exclusive club. Leaders maintain the respect and fellowship of the rank and file.
- Managers accept credit for the success of their subordinates. Leaders turn away from the spotlight, letting it shine upon those they have the honor to lead.
- When a project turns sour, the manager asks, “Who is responsible?” The leaders says “I am.”
- You work *overtime* for a manager; you work *all the time* for a leader.
- Managers need to constantly make their presence known. Leaders inspire from afar—even from the grave.

We hope we have given you an idea of why Marines will never use the “M Word.” But before you despair, we do believe that Marine officers, sergeants, and drill instructors would be very impressed by the new breed of managers, leading the corporate mission, in today’s workplace. Now and then, though, it doesn’t hurt to remind ourselves of the differences between the “M Word” and the “L Word.”