



## COMMANDING OFFICER'S POLICY STATEMENT ON OPERATIONAL STRESS CONTROL AND READINESS

When I was a captain in the 1st Marine Division preparing to deploy to Kuwait in late 2002, the Division Commanding General, then-Major General Mattis, encouraged us to ensure that we had our affairs in order so that we could fight “with a happy heart.” This sentiment is one that I have carried with me since and one that I have tried to actively cultivate in every unit to which I belonged.

In our lives, there are many things which can detract from our ability to fight with this happy heart. Sources of stress are varied and the effect of stress on individuals is varied as well. That variety, however, does not diminish the impact on the individual and this is something that I want to impress on leaders at every echelon.

Stress can snowball from a single, transitory event into a chronic state that occupies a person’s every waking moment. Frequently, this chronic stress leads to anti-social, high-risk behavior. At worst, it can lead to self-destructive behavior and suicide.

Leaders can either amplify or depressurize a situation. It is common for members of a high-performing team to suppress or deny the effects of stress. Suppressing or denying this stress, however, only serves to allow the pressure to build until one reaches their breaking point and exceeds their individual coping mechanisms.

I challenge every member of our unit to maintain a level of self-awareness of your own stress as well as the stress levels of your teammates. As life events combine to magnify the effects of stress, do not ignore the situation or hope that things will resolve on their own. The command has a number of resources that can help provide external support as internal limits are reached: the OSCAR representative, the Chaplain, Marine Family Life Counselors, and others. Seeking external help is not a sign of weakness- it is a sign of strength that one recognizes that they are facing a situation without the proper tools to cope.

- ❖ Conduct frequent coaching sessions per the battalion’s Leadership Development Program. Understand that no two individual situations are the same and that no two individuals have the same set of coping mechanisms or circumstances.
- ❖ If you know that a teammate is struggling, do not let them continue to suffer in silence and isolation. It is not a violation of trust to consult with someone for recommendations on the best way forward and may in fact help save someone’s life.
- ❖ Actively monitor and understand your own sources of stress. Recognize that there are limits for everyone and do not hesitate to leverage the many command resources to help reduce those levels to a manageable level.

Although stress is a part of life, there is a limit at which it becomes harmful and dangerous. Monitor yourself and your family members, look out for your teammates, and actively set a climate where all members can show up as part of our battalion team to fight with a happy heart.

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