

A GUIDE TO... DEVELOPING YOUR MISSION

No one trains and works like the Marines to win wars for our country.

And the Marine Corps culture? Unparalleled.

That's why I've borrowed lessons from the Marines to run Gravy Solutions. In fact, the secrets I've learned from Colonial Derek Lane of the Marines ended up doubling our revenue speed.

Col. Derek Lane serves as the Commanding Officer of the Marine Corps' Communication-Electronic School, known as the MCCES.

He's responsible for training every communications Marine in the Marine Corps. They have an aviation command and control community that they train. He's responsible for the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, Calif., where the Marine Corps trains its linguists. And then there's a few centers of excellence co-located with the primary war fighting organizations, called MEFs, Marine Expeditionary Forces.

He's basically a badass.

Lean in, get excited, and listen closely. I'm sharing the six Marine Corps lessons that we apply at Gravy to double our speed to revenue and drive our success culturally.

With a little elbow grease and a lot of intentionality, you can apply these principles to your own business to accelerate revenue and skyrocket your company culture.

Let's dive in.

#1 EVERYONE IS A RIFLEMAN (MISSION OWNERSHIP)

Every member of the Marine Corps works to fight and win our nation's wars. That's the overarching goal. Within that, each member has ownership of individual goals that feed into the larger mission.

That's why Marines live by the motto: "Every Marine is a rifleman." Every Marine is fundamentally trained to be a rifleman, because the rifleman is what's considered to be the center of gravity for the Marine Corps.

Just like our Retention Specialists are the center of gravity at Gravy. These teamplayers are essential to recovering lost revenue for our customers. Without them, our organization would fall. So, it's mission critical that every team member has their own mission, based on their unique job title and skill sets, to support the Retention Specialists efforts. That can be through marketing and bringing in new customers, managing technology and software, dealing with customer complaints and concerns, creating an effective work culture, and more.

This is adapted from the same idea within the Marine Corps. Every Marine knows that the infantryman is at “the tip of the spear.” And the shaft of that spear is nothing but a support apparatus.

The riflemen have to be enabled to accomplish their mission — critical capabilities.

If there’s confusion in the ranks, if people don’t understand what the common end-state is or the overarching objective of the organization, they’re difficult to lead, because they’re confused.

Define your business’s mission, understand your company’s center of gravity (or “rifleman”), and establish supporting missions each employee can own to lead you to your desired end-state.

#2 CREATE SPEED (DECISION MAKING)

For the marines, speed is critical. You have lives on the line, which means you can’t afford to hesitate or pause to make decisions.

Col. John Boyd, an Air Force Officer in the 1950s, came up with a method for decision making in a fast-paced, unpredictable environment that they preach within the Marines. It’s called The OODA loop, and it goes like this:

- Observe
- Orient
- Decide
- Act

This loop requires you to filter available information, analyze the significance within the given context, and then make and confidently execute on a decision.

The most important and likely overlooked step in our professional lives is the Orient stage. It’s easy to collect observed data in the first step. However, the second step of the OODA loop requires understanding the context of the information you’re observing. Are there biases?

Only until you observe and orient the information can you then decide and act.

This model works exceptionally well for the ever-changing environment Marines must operate in, but it also reflects the necessary speed and agility start-up businesses need as well.

The best part of the OODA loop is that, well, it’s a loop. As new information surfaces, you can run through the loop and adjust as needed.

#3 SOW THE SEEDS OF CULTURE EARLY

The Marine Corps’ strong culture and heritage have been born in the blood of fallen Marines. It’s undeniable, and it begins day one, at bootcamp or all throughout Officer Candidates School. They teach the history of the organization to every entry-level Marine.

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It's part of getting employees on-mission and speaking the same language.

Even if you're just getting started as a start-up, explain where you came from and how you got here. Going backward to examine a company's history isn't something that happens very often in the corporate world — but it should.

Your history forms the backbone of your company culture.

#4 STORYBOARDING

Every other week, Col. Derek Lane provides his commanding General with his SITREP, or Situation Report. All of his subordinate commanders then provide him with a storyboard for every one of those SITREPs.

This acts as a level of internal validation that people are doing what is desired of them. And leaders get to ask the question, "How does what they're telling me fit in with the greater goals?" It's an accountability check and helps form an action plan.

If someone isn't on track or onboard with the desired end-state, this presents an opportunity for that to come up. You'll identify whether someone is tracking toward their goals or not. You'll see where the situation is today and what needs to be done to reach your goals.

Understanding your current situation and creating a storyboard is one more actionable step you can take toward breaking down and creating visual milestones toward your business's desired end-state.

#5 REWARD AND RECOGNITION

If you've seen an experienced Marine in uniform, you've seen the ribbons and medals proudly pinned on the left-hand side of their uniform.

The Marines are experts at using reward and recognition to reinforce culture.

These ribbons and medals recognize superior individual performance that bettered the institution. Turns out, Marines will do a lot for that recognition.

We've applied this same principle at Gravy. We get together as a group three times a year to celebrate and give away awards based upon our core values of what people do.

*IT'S WORTH THE TIME
AND COMPANY-WIDE
EFFORT TO CREATE
EMPLOYEE STORYBOARDS
THAT ILLUSTRATE YOUR
JOURNEY TO REACHING
YOUR COMPANY GOALS.*

(And everybody can't get an award, because if everybody gets one, then it's meaningless.)

We don't celebrate the person who sold the most. We celebrate the people who live out the values of the organization. Because what you reward literally, is what gets repeated.

So within your organization, reward what you value. Then you'll see more of it.

#6 HANDLE CONFLICT LIKE OIL AND WATER

Marines all function very similarly. They're trained to! This is extremely helpful when it comes to conflict. However, Col. Lane says, "Two people that don't get along, they're oil and water. Separate them."

If you're doing the right thing, everybody's not always going to be onboard. But if you're doing the right thing, there's nothing or no one to fear.

When experiencing conflict, the best thing you can do is lead by example. Ductus exemplo is the Latin motto for Marine Officer's Candidate School, which means leadership by example.

Anyone that you lead will quickly see through you if you're smoke and mirrors and you say the right things but don't 'do the do'.

While you always hope there won't be conflict in your business, it's only the nature of working with humans. Address conflict like you handle oil and water — and then lead with integrity, forgiveness, and humility.

It'll spread.

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