

MILITARY CULTURE

- Structured
- Standardized
- Authoritarian
- Esprit de Corps
- Focused on Mission
- Disciplined
- Service Before Self
- Political
- Mobile
- Family Secondary
- Technical
- Education

The military may defend our freedoms, but it is not a place to practice those freedoms. It is helpful in dealing with veterans and their families to understand the military culture that guides their life.

STRUCTURED – The military is extremely structure into different branches of service (Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, and Coast Guard) each with different components (Active Duty, Reserve, and/or National Guard). Each service has its own history, traditions, rank, organization and acronyms. This is a maze that can be daunting to even Active Duty family members and unfathomable to Reserve and National Guard families if they did not have prior military service. Each branch of service however does have a family support element even though they call it by different names. Generally by calling an installation and asking for the Family Support Center, you will be directed to the appropriate office for assistance. It is recommended that folks working with veterans learn the language associated with the veteran branch of service. Asking them to explain to you the language and organization of their particular branch of service is an excellent way to begin to develop rapport with a veteran.

STANDARDIZED – The military is also standardized in terms of procedures and processes, from the uniforms worn to the forms that need to be completed. Finding a source to help you understand these procedures can be essential.

AUTHORITARIAN – The military is also highly authoritarian with ranks and responsibilities clearly delineated. Generally the decision makers are the Commander (regardless of rank) and the Senior NCO (Non-Commissioned Officer) which can be called by any number of names from Top Sergeant, First Sergeant, Sergeant Major, to COB (Chief of the Boat). The services also have a strict class system that regulates professional and personal relationships between officers, non-commissioned, and enlisted personnel.

ESPRIT DE CORPS – regardless of these distinctions there exists what is known as Esprit de Corp, or a unique bond between service members. This bond is often forged and made stronger through the experience of combat. It is also reflected in the customs and traditions of the military and its branches. It is virtually liturgical. The pastor may say the “the Lord be with you” and the congregation response with “and also with you”. In the

military, a lower ranking member salutes a higher ranking individual in greeting and respect and the higher ranking individual returns the salute in greeting and recognition. We might stand for the reading of the Gospel, where the military member rises and comes to attention for the raising and lowering of the flag. We may have an installation service, where the military has a Change of Command ceremony. It all contributes to establishing a common identity, standards of conduct, and marking rites of passage, which are a necessary part of establishing Esprit de Corps.

FOCUSED ON MISSION – The military is a missional organization, meaning its sole purpose for existence is to accomplish its mission. Family and personnel concerns are always secondary to the mission. As such its responsiveness to family needs is in direct proportion to how the service sees this as supporting the mission and the war fighter.

DISCIPLINED – Discipline is the watch word of the military and refers both to the needs for self-discipline, the discipline of the service, and above discipline in carrying out the commands of the civilian authorities. There is no more serious situation for the organization than a break down in discipline.

SERVICE BEFORE SELF – Sacrifice is a hallmark of the military life. Military members and their families sacrifice for the nation, and for each other sometimes forsaking freedoms and rights enjoyed by the civilian community such as the ability to campaign for political candidates and speak out for or against public policies while they serve.

POLITICAL – This does not mean that the services are apolitical. They compete with each other and other governmental agencies for budget dollars and promotions to the higher ranks are made by civilian politicians and appointees.

MOBILE – The military is an extremely mobile society often requiring military members and their families to move every three to four years sometimes to overseas locations. This creates tremendous disruption and pressure on military families, and often denies them the benefits of extended family support.

FAMILY SECONDARY - Despite of the great strides the services have made in the past 20 years in improving family support, the old adage of “If the military had wanted you to have a family they would have issued you one,” often still applies. Family needs are secondary to needs of the service. This is best illustrated by the need to shift medical to non-military sources when medical personnel are deployed to support military missions.

TECHNICAL – The military is increasingly a technical organization as the nation relies more on technology and less on manpower to win its wars. This results in high levels of technical abilities and increased pressures on military families as fewer military members share and increasing duty load.

EDUCATION – It also should be understood that the military values education. Certain branches of the service will not take personnel who do not have at least a high school diploma, and promotion to the higher grades requires a minimum of a bachelor degree for the enlisted corps and a master’s degree for the officer corps.