

believe, but believe that you may understand.” Knowing what the call means is the reward of trusting its message.

"Semper Fi"

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My nephew, Brian Cavuto, is a twenty-two year old young man who enlisted in the Marines immediately after high school. Through my interview questions and research, I learned about recruiting practices and factors that influence an individual to consider military service as a career. A common thread in my conversations with Brian and in my research is the contrast between the idealities of this vocation and the reality of this work environment. In spite of these contrasts, however, those who choose military service, and in particular the Marine Corps, generally describe their experience as a vocation, and this paper will focus on how this impacts a soldier's life throughout his career.

Brian told me that he initially decided to enter military service when his college plans were thwarted by economics. He admitted to having other options available, such as entering into the workforce at a minimum wage job and saving for college, but for him, there were others factors that led him to his choice. Certainly the financial incentives offered for new recruits were instrumental in his decision, but there was another reason as well. Brian believed that serving in the

U.S. Marines would broaden his experiences and help him to develop maturity. He chose that branch of the military because of their reputation as an elite group of military professionals. He also referred to a sense of honor associated with military service. His family background includes his grandfather who served in the Air Force until retirement age, an uncle in the FBI and another uncle who serves on the New York City Police Department.

Similar feelings are echoed in the research materials used for this paper. Many people are enticed by the benefits afforded to those who choose to enlist. These include college funds and job security in an uncertain job market. In other instances, however, the recruit is expecting a transformation to occur. He seeks a respect from others that is missing in his personal life. Some individuals are attracted to the physical training and are drawn to the Marine Corps by the image of the strong, physically fit soldier (Croizat 1997). Still others are searching for avenues for their personal values; "a sense of identity, of community, the sense of common principled purpose and the moral certainties.... that America is losing." (Wood 16) Also, as demonstrated in the marketing done by our military, a key reason people choose military service is their desire to serve their country. While certainly an altruistic motive, upon close inspection, one can find those who are more focused on personal recognition than the military ideal.

Military service can mirror non-military life in the occupations available, such as those who are employed performing routine tasks like mechanical work, secretarial duties or technical support. A glaring difference, however, is that the personnel involved are also trained soldiers who are combat-ready and who could be sent into dangerous situations with little warning. They can be faced with leaving their families behind when called into combat, often for a tour of at least six months. Not only does this impact the military serviceman, but also his wife and children must be prepared to deal with his prolonged absence and the uncertainty of his return.

The military does efficient advertising to strengthen its recruitment efforts. Television highlights the elite forces and programs geared to enhancing the self-worth of the potential recruit. Often, military life is portrayed as harmonious exchanges between soldiers amidst the grueling execution of a Special Forces mission. They focus on how military service instills a sense of pride and accomplishment rarely found in the mundane workplace of corporate America. Little emphasis is placed on the risks or sacrifices one makes.

Wood (1994) explores the popular image of a Marine, contrasted with their actual experiences. This author travels with a Marine unit from basic training throughout their first year in the service. The journalist writing this story demonstrates how the young

men adapt to a way of life that is not always what they may have anticipated. As Brian also notes in his interview, the expectations of a new recruit often are in conflict with the harsh realities of military training and military service. The young man or woman enters with a preconceived notion of the experience and then is confronted with a reality that can be daunting, both physically and emotionally. The recruit has no personal freedom. Contrary to the life he left behind, he cannot stop and relax if he is tired. Every minute of the day is scheduled, with most days beginning at 5:30 am. Besides learning the unique vocabulary of the military, "the words 'I' and 'me' or 'my' [don't] exist anymore." (Krulak 15). Lesson number one is that you don't spell TEAM with an I.

Hamblen and Norton (1993) refer to how when an individual chooses to enter the military, he joins an institution. There are benefits to being a part of this group, such as training, experience and few of the financial burdens that face those employed in other fields. Housing, meals and medical care are entitlement to those who serve. However, there are negative factors as well. As a member of the military, you are subject to rules and regulations that can be restrictive and are often uncompromising. More significant are the risks involved in military service. The rewards can be offset by the ever-present possibility of serious injury or death, either in a war effort or simply during a peacetime training exercise.

To this end, the choice merits consideration as a vocation or a calling. Such a sacrifice is rarely found in any other field. Interestingly, Brian acknowledges this in our interview, and in doing so, presents a view supported in my research. In his interview, he explained that even among those who may not have felt a sense of “duty to one’s country” initially, there is a tacit understanding of the patriotism and responsibility that is part of military service. In reading about the Marines whose lives are detailed in the books used for my research, it is evident that even the most reluctant patriot develops a sense of pride and accepts the risks involved. It is also important to note that this does not imply complacency or a lack of fear, but rather an understanding that in the role of one whose career choice is to protect his country, personal safety has no guarantee (Krulak, 1998).

In choosing a military career, it is apparent that the individual should be taking all these factors into consideration. For those entering the military for a short duration, the goals may be different from those who choose to remain soldiers throughout their careers. But the same issues exist for both. While the time frame may be briefer for some, the sacrifices, challenges and risks are present for all. As my nephew related in his interview, it is these very sacrifices, challenges and risks that promote the development of leadership in a mature, responsible adult.

In the article read in class, Meilander discusses vocation and the dedication to the mission in spite of personal distractions or sentimental attachment. Much can be said in this same vein about military service. There is no room for relationships or emotion swaying one from the responsibilities of their assignment. In his article, "The Divine Summons" (1), Meilander refers to the definition of vocation as "a summons or strong inclination to a particular state or course of action." In my research and during my interview with Brian as well, this theme is repeated when recounting one's reasons for entering the military. Even giving credence to the importance of the incentives available to those who are interested in military service, if those who choose this life do not recognize and accept the nature of this field as a vocation which can exact the highest price for those who accept that responsibility, they are doomed to be frustrated, inefficient soldiers.

When researching the idealistic views of military service, one finds that, for some, there is the expectation of personal recognition and heroic acclaim. While not necessarily unrealistic, the military trains recruits as a team with cohesion as a common denominator. Individuality is frowned upon and the goal of basic training and the drill sergeant is to form a unified group committed to the common cause. Leadership is developed, but only after each recruit realizes the importance of unity and teamwork. Those seeking individual honor or

heroism are generally redirected by this process or do not survive the rigorous training regimen (Wood, 1994).

One of the areas explored in my interview with Brian was the effect of the terrorist attacks of September 11th on the number of people interested in military careers. This was done in an attempt to determine if the swell of patriotism that followed the attacks created increased enthusiasm and support for military service. Brian reported that he was aware of an immediate surge in enlistments just after that September morning, but he also commented that he had read that numbers were now returning to previous levels. If one views the idealities of service contrasted with the realities, this may actually reflect a more mature response to the situation.

A desire to serve one's country is to be applauded, certainly, but making a decision to seek a career in the military demands more than that. It should not be a decision based on emotions. An individual must be cognizant of the overwhelming obligations of military service. The soldier often lacks control over his personal destiny. His mission takes priority over family and personal goals. That is the essence of a vocation. Not everyone who feels a dedication to his country is prepared for that challenge. Even the most sincere patriot may not be able to accept the limitations to personal freedom that military service requires.

When contrasting reality with the idealistic view of life in the military, it is important to recognize that each individual will have a different perspective on the idealities, but the realities will remain constant. The desire of an underweight loner to emulate a handsome, physically fit soldier dressed in a crisp pressed uniform may be what prompts interest in a military career. He may be equating success with the uniform and the prestige of the military. For some of these individuals, the training programs will prove too physically demanding. For others, the isolation will be more than they can handle. Still others will resist accepting the ultimate authority of the military command.

In reviewing the research materials, it is possible to gain insight into the argument for vocation over labor in the required reading of the Bhagavad-Gita. Arjuna is a soldier who must face the reality of combat against his kinsmen. He struggles with the knowledge that he must kill the “ teachers, fathers, sons and grandfathers, uncles, grandsons, fathers and brothers of wives and other men of our family.” (Miller 25). Krishna then counsels him about his responsibilities as a warrior, saying “ Look to your own duty; do not tremble before it; nothing is better for a warrior than a battle of sacred duty. . . . If you fail to wage this war of sacred duty, you will abandon your own duty and fame only to gain evil.” (34). In order to meet the challenges of his role as a soldier, Arjuna must distance himself from his emotions and heed the calling of his destiny. Many soldiers today are faced with feelings of misgiving

and distress over the loss of life that occurs in combat, but they answer the call in spite of these emotions because they recognize their obligation toward what they have come to believe is the greater good.

Even someone who is engaged in this occupation solely as a means to an end is still forced to make these difficult choices. Ultimately, their dedication to their responsibilities may be less of a factor, but it is unfair to assume that their work is just a labor. Responding to the harsh realities of war requires one to act in a manner that may be contrary to one's personal beliefs in order to achieve the required end result. Whatever personal motivation was involved in their initial decision, their success or failure as a soldier depends upon their ability to meet the challenges associated with the duties of a soldier.

Those who enter a career in the military may be choosing a vocation or may simply be traveling on a path to achieve some personal goal. The ideals of the individual are key to determining which type of situation applies. Those who are well informed of the rigors of military training and the sacrifices involved will be better prepared to make an appropriate decision. Once in military service, the outcome depends upon how well that person responds to the challenges he faces. Ultimately, however, all of those who serve honorably, no matter what led them to that decision, are answering a call to a vocation.

A career in the military is uniquely different from civilian occupations. Honor, duty, sacrifice and a sense of camaraderie that rarely exists elsewhere are the words and phrases often used to define military service. In the prologue of one of my research materials (Croizat xv), the author explains his definition of a military service career, stating, "Such is the essence of the military profession, where duty and country are tangible realities and interdependence strengthens bonds among its members."