



I really don't like talking about my military service. I am definitely proud to have volunteered and served in the Marine Corps; yet my honorable discharge reminds me of so many who gave so much more. I am not a hero, but I have served with heroes.

It's still odd to be asked about my service. At least half of my friends have a connection to the military. To me, it's not special: it's life. If you truly believe in something, you don't talk about it, you act on it. That attitude led me to the Marine Corps in 2001. When I left the service after four years of active duty, I knew I wanted to stay true to my ideals and make a positive difference, but I wasn't sure how to achieve that goal.

It took years for me to settle on what I would do with my life to impact the world. After all, what's "impossible" to a Marine?

I realized education has been my passion since I was a child. I have pictures of myself tutoring my little brother, my 5th grade classmates, and even my fellow Marines in my MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) school. I am soft-spoken, but nothing makes me raise my voice louder than the education debate in America and the focus on symptoms of a problem, as opposed to the root of the problem (that's another article). My own convictions and background made the choice to become a teacher quite clear.

Fast forward several years after I earned my honorable discharge. Shortly after taking charge of my own class for the first time, I found myself using skills and mindsets I learned in the Marines. There are definitely some differences, but there are also similarities which may surprise you.

# How the Marine Corps Prepared Me

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In some ways, the military helped prepare me to be a teacher. Here are some of the parallels I have found (not in a particular order of importance or relevance):

## 1. You are always on duty.

Although there are definite work hours, the work always creeps into personal life.

I used to shine boots, prep uniforms, work out, and look out for fellow Marines in my off time. I could also be called back to the base on short notice for some emergency. I am glad to say I am no longer called back to my work station with only an hour's notice. Now my work just follows me around, whether I am at school, at home, or at a family gathering. I find I need to quickly respond to a parent email, administrative question, or student concern. In order to be effective, teachers and military members know "you are always on duty."

## 2. "Not my job" or "I did not have time" is not an acceptable excuse.

Mission accomplishment is always a theme in the military. We all worked towards goals/missions at the platoon level, company level, and other levels so every action contributed toward the greater mission of protecting the U.S. Constitution against all enemies. Educators do not take an oath of service, but the dedication to a greater goal is always present in our daily actions. This goes beyond having a lesson planned for each day in class. I'm often humbled when I find out another teacher gave up his or her own time to help a new teacher develop a lesson during off hours, or stayed after school for an hour or two just to help another student, and then went home to finish the planning and grading for the next day. I know so many teachers who spend extra hours making phone calls, visiting homes, and contacting community organizations to advocate for kids and education.

Artwork by Tia, Grade 9 • Bayside High School, Virginia Beach, VA  
U.S. Marines

# ps Me for teaching

## *3. A strong team is invaluable.*

Both jobs call for new blood to bring energy and fresh perspectives. Experienced team members and leaders bring wisdom and guidance to direct new passions. In the military, a fresh-eyed private is excited and ready to prove himself. The wisdom of experienced sergeants or officers is there to help guide the private and his efforts to remain safe and be an effective member of the team. For beginning teachers, the excitement of reaching kids in new ways often puts a new spin on old practices. The expert advice and support of mentors and other teachers helps to add depth to those inspiring lessons. Experienced teachers are there to reassure new teachers after a less-than perfect day. Being a part of an effective team makes us all stronger. Because the strength of the team helps us achieve our goals, it's easy to see why high standards are the norm for teachers and service members.

## *4. People hold you to a higher standard.*

Marines are taught that a Marine is always on duty, while upholding the highest standards of integrity and civility. I've seen Marines get in trouble for the appearance of unprofessional behavior, such as being impolite to civilians, even when they are technically off duty or even off base. These rules also apply to teachers, and even legal behavior does not always meet the standards of professionalism a teacher should uphold. Because of the inherent status as a role model, good teachers are careful about social media posts and public behavior. Effective teachers model professional behavior at all times.

## *5. The job isn't based solely on monetary compensation.*

In the military, it is hard to find a reasonable salary for someone who voluntarily places her life on the line to protect the greater good. For educators, it is almost a requirement to work CEO hours for junior employee pay. Teachers believe the work is too important not to approach it with passion and purpose. Despite the sometimes misguided political decisions about compensation, benefits, and working conditions of public servants, our work is incredibly important.

## *6. Clear standards and consistency across borders create stability and security.*

Whenever a service member steps foot on a new base, he knows there are orders, processes, and rules which do not change. These processes give a sense of security. This certainty also extends to family members of an active duty person. Until recently, the certainty of military dependents did not extend to school systems. Standards varied wildly from state to state, and a move between districts meant cultural changes and curriculum changes. I am glad we are now moving towards removing this type of uncertainty with the Common Core State Standards. Clear standards of what each student should know and be able to do at each grade level help to make sure all students receive the same high quality education across the U.S.

So there you have it, my take on the similarities between military life and "teacher life." Other similarities between active duty and teaching include: the need for situational awareness (or the need to have eyes in the back of my head); spectacularly sensational (and wrong) portrayals of my job on the big screen; and the need to realize my everyday actions greatly affect people outside of my immediate family and myself. I still push myself and those left in my care to be our personal best.

Lastly, **I'm proud to work with so many people who stress over how our children are treated, cared for, and educated.** I work with people who literally stay up late and wake up early to reach every child they can every day. I'm not sure if I'm anything special, but I am happy to say I still work with heroes.

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