

1995

Strong Military Through Morale, Welfare, and Recreation

Liz Lerner

Bowling Green State University

Beth Neilson Smith

Bowling Green State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/visions>

Recommended Citation

Lerner, Liz and Smith, Beth Neilson (1995) "Strong Military Through Morale, Welfare, and Recreation," *Visions in Leisure and Business*: Vol. 13 : No. 4 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/visions/vol13/iss4/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ScholarWorks@BGSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Visions in Leisure and Business by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@BGSU.

**STRONG MILITARY THROUGH MORALE,
WELFARE, AND RECREATION**

BY

MS. LIZ LERNER

**BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY
BOWLING GREEN, OHIO 43403**

AND

MS. BETH NEILSON SMITH

**BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY
BOWLING GREEN, OHIO 43403**

ABSTRACT

Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) is an element within the military to help achieve better base mission preparation. The focus of a program is upon effective use of resources to stimulate involvement. This helps to blend the MWR and the individual's objectives. An important component of MWR is the individual and the family and the quality of life in the military.

INTRODUCTION

After job security, the second and third reasons for the retention of military personnel is morale, welfare, and recreation (MWR), and family services. However, the primary reason why people leave the military is family separation. The goal of MWR is to improve fitness, enhance unit and community cohesion, promote family well-being, and provide for quality of life. Recreation programs have been refocusing to serve as commanders' tools to help

promote quality, force retention, physical readiness, and "esprit de corps". These general objectives are often individualized by a base to support a particular mission's support objectives.

OPERATIONAL LEVEL

Morale and welfare is a mandated program with three categories of programs: A, B, and C. Category A programs are supported totally by congressional appropriations. Category A programs are those activities that directly support the mission, such as physical readiness. This type of program includes such facilities as gymnasiums with necessary fitness programs. Category B programs indirectly support the mission and are partially funded through congressional appropriations. Examples of the types of programs and facilities that are associated with these are movie theaters and dances. Category C programs and facilities must generate their own funds because they are not appropriated and indirectly support the

mission. These include the clubs, restaurants, outdoor centers, and travel programs. Consequently, Category C clubs are struggling because of their tremendous fixed costs and the guidelines which the clubs must follow. For example, the clubs cannot promote alcohol with specials such as nickel beer nights or "drinks with Lincoln." As a result, these clubs have difficulty competing with establishments off base which do promote alcohol. Because of this, Category C facilities overseas do better because, in the States, personnel can go off base and find competing activities. Overseas, personnel are more likely to stay on base at MCO clubs, for example, because of price and the better sense of community.

Each of the branches of the service emphasize morale, welfare, and recreation in varying amounts to achieve their mission. Morale, welfare, and recreation is being questioned because of Department of Defense budget cuts. With fewer appropriated dollars, auditing of all military programs and operations is necessary. MWR specialists must focus upon accountability and justification of programs which directly support the missions of the bases in a more tangible and realistic domain. Although the primary focus is on outcomes from programs, the underlying theme is fiscal accountability. Traditionally, the types of facilities and programs that have been offered include recreation centers, outdoor recreation, youth activities, information, tour and travel, sports, music and theater, arts and crafts, bowling, golf, libraries, child care centers, community service projects, seasonal parties, special entertainment, teen clubs, and special events. Professionals also have the latitude to respond to the individual needs of clients to develop specialty programs based upon individual needs. However, with the current refocusing of programs, the diversity of

programs may be diminished. The primary question is one of overlap and duplication, and the contribution of the program to the overall mission. Military budget cuts have created a new focus upon quality of programs, especially trying to respond to the new thrusts of stressful work environments. The focus is not only upon quantity, but also upon quality to meet individual needs to support the military mission.

IMPLEMENTATION

To meet these objectives, it is extremely difficult to motivate and involve individuals at the programmatic level. Standard programs have to be adapted by a base to fit the needs of the military personnel in that indigenous region. The success of the morale, welfare, and recreation staff depends directly upon their ability to be creative and adapt their programs to the needs of their particular clients. Marketing is always a primary concern to involve a high percentage of military personnel and their families. Communicating with the employees is extremely important to the development of the foundation. The first step is an awareness problem: developing a good marketing campaign within the military. (According to one study, the saliency of the traditional flyer or brochure each is less than three percent of the personnel in terms of market saturation or knowing about the program.) The more innovative and creative the initial marketing or awareness program, the better the involvement. The personal approach, such as marketing in cafeterias to inform the personnel and invite them to become involved in programs is most effective. This will assist to overcome the apathy of the clients in response to the program. Apathy is a direct result of employees not understanding the importance of the

program and its contribution to the mission of the base. An initial marketing campaign, again, serves as awareness and also as an outreach to help employees understand the role of recreation within their lives. Consequently, it serves as a catalyst for the accomplishment of their personal objectives. Mechanisms must be found to encourage employees to "buy into" the program. Therefore, involvement and participation will be increased. This also will create an improved understanding of the program and its role in assisting them to accomplish both personal and mission objectives.

Needs assessment for marketing is essential in the building of a program base. The programmer should understand the clientele and the types of programs that will stimulate interest and involvement in the program. This type of information assists the programmer in understanding how to reach the client. Programs need to be interpreted for clients so they can see its direct relationship to their life on the base. Consequently, this information must be utilized to educate top management as well as middle management regarding the needs of personnel. A consistent philosophy from this data must be integrated into top and middle management style to educate the personnel to the importance of MWR to each individual and the mission of the base. There must be a sincere effort by management to be responsive to the needs of the employees and to make individuals feel that their contribution is important to the overall mission of the base. A key to making individuals feel important is recognition, which will help them "buy into" the program. A system of recognition needs to be organized so that individuals' accomplishments are viewed as valuable to their unit.

RESOURCES

At the center of any discussion of resources is personnel. Military recreation is very fortunate in having a complement of well-trained professionals. However, as in any employee service operation, the volunteer is essential to the program delivery system. The key element in recruiting and retaining volunteers is recognition and appreciation so that volunteers see their importance to the activity. Otherwise, volunteers may "burn out" easily and drop out of the program. Another important element in making volunteers feel important is showing appreciation for them by doing little things for them such as sending valentines and birthday cards. "Little things" make a difference in people's lives and make them feel valued. When someone's daughter gets married, for example, programmers can post the notice on the employee bulletin board or publish it in the base newsletter. People feel honored by this type of recognition and are enthused to come to work. Informal recognition is important, but it's important to be recognized formally. For example, following one special event program, each volunteer received an appreciation letter signed by the CO and were recognized in front of their peers at Quarters.

In order to develop a good volunteer base with expertise, programmers need to network and identify the skills that each individual in the organization has from bottom to top. Each employee may have an important contribution to the program, regardless of their job status. In fact, many have skills that directly translate into quality programs. The military recreation program "levels the playing field" because its basic idea is contribution without association to rank or position in the organization.

Those who volunteer for programs or who become involved with military recreation may have an easier transition to civilian life after leaving the military. The military recreation program serves as a preparation program for eventual retirement or early retirement. Individuals may not realize the benefits that they had in the military until they return to civilian life. In fact, many do not realize the benefits that they have while in the military, such as insurance, child care, family services, 30 days paid vacation a year, etc.

In addition to the human resources in MWR, the other two essential elements are finances and facilities. Financial resources are dependent upon Congress' support of MWR programs as well as the importance of MWR programs to the base commander. Category A programs are typically standard and are a part of the expected package. Categories B and C programs differs greatly among the various military installations. It is important to note that the marketing program and its effectiveness has a direct relationship to the allocation of dollars on the base. Also, it must be noted that many programs are conducted with limited funds but good support from the personnel. These are two factors that influence the financial resource.

Many military installations have excellent recreational facilities. These facilities were established as infrastructure before mandate downsizing occurred. In the past, the military was well funded with appropriations and, during those times of prosperity, the military established many excellent recreational facilities for the personnel. This, at the time, was considered a benefit and an attraction to being in the military. It was a recruitment tool that was used effectively during earlier eras. In the late 1980's, as the Cold War began to wind down, government began to question the size of the military

and its role in the new world order under the Bush administration. Downsizing became an effective tool during this time to make the military more efficient. Corrective downsizing upon MWR has been primarily financial. Programs do not have as much money to implement the variety of programs that occurred in the past. These cutbacks have caused a tremendous amount of stress in the military. The military was once a very secure career. Lack of security is directly related to morale. At times, this type of stress also relates to increased incidents of spouse and child abuse. MWR serves as an important extension to assist in alleviating this stress.

MISSION OBJECTIVES/TRENDS IN THE FUTURE

Primary trends that influence mission objectives are the nature of the payment of the MWR staff. Many of the appropriated-funded recreation jobs are being transferred to nonappropriated funds. Military MWR will always be a part of military services, but changes are beginning to be reflected in the funding and security of the programs. Programs that are funded in creative ways perish in this nonappropriated system. The essential element during these times of instability is the ability to be creative, putting a "new twist" on old programs. MWR's creativity must be applied in such a way that the mission objectives are achieved. It is important to help them become motivated to come to work and help them feel that they are a valuable part of the organization. Creativity is the element that can generate this motivation. This assists programmers in tailoring a message to incorporate both the organization as well as the individual's needs. Communication is essential and must be integrated at each of the command levels.

While there is a formal power structure, the informal power structure makes the organization function and work. It is the informal power structure in which MWR assists. The individuals work not only for money and security, but also to make a contribution. The role of the MWR director is to capture the hearts of the employees and channel this motivation into individual and organizational goals. This must be channeled into the socio-political structure of the organization. Caring must be visible and tangible and expressed from the top of the management positions through middle management to the lower levels. It may include such little things as cards, visiting family and friends during sickness, shaking hands outside the plant fence, or any other visible means that shows appreciation and support for the personnel.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of MWR is to develop a sense of belonging so that personnel feel valued and recognized for the work that they do. MWR also serves as a quality of life for the individuals and their families. Mission objectives must be integrated into MWR programs. However, at times the individual's needs are forgotten at the cost of development of the mission objectives. Therefore, the MWR department must help integrate the humanistic aspect into the mission objectives. Quality of life is created from MWR to create a stronger community, enhance mission objectives, and therefore, build a stronger military.