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THE WARRIOR ETHOS – STEVEN PRESSFIELD

“No, my friend,” said Alexander, setting a hand on the man’s shoulder and making him sit again. “For you are Alexander, more even than I.”

The Marine Corps exhumes something that is intangible and nearly impossible for one to grasp except through indoctrination – The Warrior Ethos. The Warrior Ethos is the foundation of the Marine Corps. The word Ethos is taken from the Greek root word ethics. Essentially it is a code of conduct, a guide, or a foundation of direction.

Steven Pressfield explains *The Warrior Ethos* as something that “evolved to counter the instinct of self-preservation.” Pressfield believes that the Ethos enlists three innate impulses: Shame, honor and love.

In Pressfield’s book, *The Warrior Ethos*, he analyzes specifically the methods used in ancient Sparta. Pressfield believes that the embodiment of the Warrior Ethos within the Spartan culture came from certain virtues – courage, honor, loyalty, integrity, selflessness and others, that were derived from Spartan women. During the first two chapters of the book Pressfield examines the way of life for the women of Sparta and their expectations of their warrior men. Pressfield writes, “The lioness hunts. The alpha female defends the wolf pack. The Warrior Ethos is not, at bottom, a manifestation only of male aggression or of the masculine will to dominance. Its foundation is society-wide. It rests on the will and resolve of mothers and wives and daughters – and, in no few instances, of female warriors as well – to defend their children, their home soil and the values of their culture.

For the Marine Corps, the embodiment of the Ethos is found within the infantry. However, it is through this that the Marines Corps ensures that, “every Marine a rifleman” emphasizes the Marine Corps belief in The Warriors Ethos. In many ways the Marine Corps resembles ancient Sparta in its virtues and values.

Pressfield continues to say that, “courage – in particular, stalwartness in the face of death – must be considered a foremost warrior virtue.” This idea is the foundation behind the concept of never surrendering and fighting to the death.

Pressfield covered a wide range of topics in his breakdown of *The Warrior Ethos*, including tribes, gangs and terrorists, and the two potentially dangerous attributes of the tribal mindset: “Shadow tribalism or “criminal tribalism”. However, it is my opinion that the two most important chapters in the book for a Marine fall in the middle of the book: The Opposite of Fear is Love, and Selflessness.

The Opposite of Fear is Love relates to Marines in the passion that we display through our actions. Whether it is stories of wounded Marines getting back in the fight or a lifesaving action by a Marine on leave, Marines exemplify a spirit of love in place of fear. We have a love for our comrades that runs so deep that we do not want to let them down. Where do we indoctrinate this love you might ask? Simply through our reliance on small unit leadership. From our first day as a recruit to our last day as a Marine, we are initiated as teams, as units, not individuals.

It is through love in the place of fear that a warrior paves way to what could be considered the most noblest of warrior virtues: Selflessness.

Pressfield writes that the central tenet of the Warrior Ethos is that the group comes before the individual. Because selflessness produces courage it binds men together and proves to each individual that he is not alone. When I first enlisted in the Marine Corps I didn't understand the culture that I was embracing, but after graduating SOI-West and training with my reserve unit I have begun to understand the culture I am embracing is not just a military culture. It is a Warrior Culture. For the Marine Corps that means the unit is above the individual as well as accomplishment of the mission is above the individual.

Marines embrace the Warrior Ethos through our ability to overcome and endure adversity. Pressfield writes, "The hardest thing in the world is to be ourselves." He goes on to explain that, "Directed inward, the Warrior Ethos grounds us, fortifies us and focuses our resolve." For the Marine, the Warrior Ethos, our Ethos, is one that does not discriminate against race, background, gender, or MOS. Instead it is a guide of our heart. One that we "enlist in our inner cause the virtues we have acquired through blood and sweat in the sphere of conflict – courage, patience, selflessness, loyalty, fidelity, self-command, respect for elders, love of our comrades (and of the enemy), perseverance, cheerfulness in adversity and a sense of humor, however terse or dark."

Steven Pressfield's *The Warrior Ethos* is a practical guide for all Marines. It provides us with a framework of what our Ethos should be, as well as past and present examples of some of the greatest warrior cultures.