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LEVERAGING DIVERSITY: GENDER-BASED RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

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**LEVERAGING DIVERSITY: GENDER-BASED RECRUITMENT
AND RETENTION IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES**

Maj Rhonda Stevens

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AIM

1. The aim of this paper is to inform Chief of Military Personnel of recruiting and retention initiatives that incorporate women specific interests and if implemented by the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) will lead to the successful increase of women in the military.

INTRODUCTION

2. The Canadian Defence Policy, *Strong Secure Engaged* (SSE) released in June 2017 by the federal government commits the CAF to increasing the representation of women in the military by one percent annually, so that within 10 years, one in four military members will be female.¹ This commitment is based on creating a military that aspires to be a national leader in reflecting Canadian ideals of diversity, respect, inclusion, gender equality and an all-encompassing workforce.² The representation of women in the CAF has increased from 11.4 percent in 2001 to 15.1 percent as of February 2017, which in numbers translates to 14, 016 women out of a total CAF membership (Regular Force and Primary Reserve) of 92, 787.³ This rate of a 2.3 percent increased of women representation over the past 10 years is far below the 25 percent goal that CAF aspires to reach in the next 10 years. As can be expected, these numbers

¹ Department of National Defence, *Strong Secure Engaged Canada's Defence Policy*, (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2017), 23.

² Ibid., 20-23.

³ National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, *Women in the Canadian Armed Forces*, Ottawa: Department of National Defence 7 March 2017. <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/news/article.page?doc=women-in-the-canadian-armed-forces/izkjzqzeu>.

cause many to question the validity of the commitment with national media headlines reading “Reality Check: Is the Armed Forces’ goal to bring on more women out of reach?”⁴

Notwithstanding that the commitment in place is an ambitious one, it is achievable. A positive culture combined with positive messaging will over time breed positive recruitment results. In addition, the creation of a mentorship program as already established by many competing companies will encourage retention.

3. Multiple recruitment studies have been conducted by the CAF over the past two-three years focusing specifically on recruiting women. It is innately obvious from the findings that the current recruiting strategy in place needs to be tailored to focus on improving the recruitment process as well as raising awareness through effective messaging and familiarization programs. In addition, a retention strategy needs to be developed that includes first and foremost constant re-shaping of the culture and climate within the institution to one that embraces diversity and inclusion; a safe culture. The retention strategy should include a formal mentorship program for women. An analysis based on research findings and examples of proven successful mentorship programs that promote diversity in companies such as Nav Canada and the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE) will illustrate recruitment and retention possibilities that will lead CAF to achieving its target goal.

⁴ Amy, Minsky, “Reality Check: Is the Armed Forces’ goal to bring on more women out of reach?” *Global News*, 7 June 2017, <https://globalnews.ca/news/3510377/military-culture-women-defence-policy-review>.

DISCUSSION

Recruitment Process

4. A crucial component to successful recruiting within any organization is hiring the right recruiter. The performance of the recruiter will have a direct impact on the results achieved. The CAF needs to select recruiters not based on their performance or potential from their previous non-recruitment related employment, but to select members or veterans that possess the top qualities to be a great recruiter. Top-line findings from a CAF study that questioned 335 current serving Regular Force women about the top reasons why women are not joining the CAF revealed that there is a perception that the recruitment process lacked female and qualified recruiters and that recruiters sometimes steered women away from their primary choice of trade.⁵ All CAF recruiting centers must possess recruiters that are confident and knowledgeable members who possess a high level of interest in the recruiting mission and have exceptional communication and problem-solving skills. These selected members need to have an approachable demeanour, strong sales skills, be target driven and capable of multi-tasking.

5. Recruitment specialist and expert Dr. Jennifer Higgins offers that by focusing on improving recruitment strategies and training, organizations will exceed their recruitment goals.⁶ She adds: “The efficiency and effectiveness of the process of recruitment is enhanced by training ... Recruitment is its own arts and science, requiring outcomes data on strategies that work best within specific demographic groups.”⁷ Her research has proven that when recruiting women, targeted methods work best such as recruiting at women’s organizational events. Although CAF

⁵ Defence Research and Development Canada, *Recruitment and Employment of Women – CAF Member Perspective: Top-line Findings*, Ottawa: DRDC, 2017.

⁶ Clinical Trials Administrator, “When recruiting women, targeted methods work best,” AHC Media LLC, Atlanta: February 2008, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/758858627?accountid=9867>.

⁷ Ibid.

currently sends participants to events such as “The Sky’s No Limit – Girls Fly Too”⁸ an annual event held in Abbotsford British Columbia that exposes women to aviation, continued exposure combined with active targeting at such events is required.

6. Analysis from the annual CAF recruiting survey in 2016 concluded that women were more influenced to join through direct interaction with people such as their family and friends with CAF experience and recruiters.⁹ By contrast males tended to be influenced by non-CAF information sources. This face-to-face interaction with females suggests that CAF must commit to active recruitment all the time and get everyone involved. Furthermore, postings of longer duration for recruiters would be beneficial for the purpose of analyzing trends and to determine what works and what doesn’t. The recruitment process could then be adapted to gauge target audiences and uniqueness of various regions.

Positive Messaging and Advertising

7. A Defence Research and Development Canada study of how the public views the CAF indicates that overall familiarity and knowledge of the CAF is very limited especially amongst females.¹⁰ Approximately 70 percent of females ranging in age from 18-24 reported not having seen, read or heard anything about CAF in 2016,¹¹ which is a steadily worsened number since 2008. Of those who were aware of the CAF, most held a negative perception of how the CAF treats its members and would not favourably support pursuing it as a career. A growing body of

⁸ The Sky’s No Limit – Girls Fly Too! “From Shop Floor to Top Floor ... We’re Inspiring Female Future Leaders,” Last accessed 30 January 2018, <https://www.girlsfly2.ca/index.html>.

⁹ Human Resources Systems Group Ltd. *TA 193 – Analyses of the Annual Canadian Armed Forces Recruiting Survey*, Ottawa: 5 March 2016, iv-v.

¹⁰ Defence Research and Development Canada, DRDC-RDDC-2016-B000, *2008-2016 Trends and Challenges from Views on the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Tracking Study*, Ottawa: DRDC, 2016, 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

evidence illustrates the human tendency to prioritize negative over positive news content as humans physiologically predispose towards focusing on negative information because the potential costs of negative information far outweigh the potential benefits of positive information.¹² With recent headline articles that read: “Sexual assault in Canadian military: Women 4 times more likely than men to be attacked, report finds,” or “Halifax professor unsurprised by sexual misconduct findings in the military,” this unfavourable view amongst young people to pursue a career in the military is not surprising. CAF media relations needs to counter one for one these negative stories with positive effective messaging of success within the military using communication technology that is popular with target audiences such as social media tools and the internet.

8. Efforts need to continue to ensure Internet websites and other electronic venues that promote CAF recruiting and selection information such as *Boot Camp and Military Fitness Institute.com* contain accurate information and reflect the messages and values of the CAF organization. The example provided contains a webpage that appears when an Internet search is conducted seeking information about CAF recruitment. The page titled “Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Recruitment and Selection Overview,”¹³ appears official displaying a CAF logo, but the webpage does not communicate the inclusive nature of CAF. Borders containing images of young male recruits in the push up position frame the page. In addition, images of shirtless military men receiving a medical and of male recruits being yelled at are also posted. The

¹² Stuart Soroka, “Why do we pay more attention to negative news than to positive news?” *The London School of Economics and Political Science (blog)*, 25 May 2015. <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/why-is-there-no-good-news/>.

¹³ Bootcamp Military Fitness Institute, “Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Recruitment & Selection Overview,” last accessed 30 January 2018, <https://bootcampmilitaryfitnessinstitute.com/military-training/canadian-armed-forces-caf/canadian-armed-forces-caf-recruitment-selection-overview/>.

question that must be asked by those researching CAF recruitment using the Internet would have to be “where are the females?” Close liaison with agencies and businesses is essential to ensuring proper messaging of current CAF values and culture.

9. Perceptions and stereotypes exist in the public domain that at times portray the CAF as an organization that does not provide a flexible family and work-life balance or a safe environment for women. The CAF needs to continue to leverage on opportunities to platform current serving women who can share their positive experiences and demonstrate that these perceptions are myths. Although some profiling has already taken place, there are remarkable serving women who if considered can easily squash these misnomers. As a current serving Regular Force member, Major Megan McGrath has succeeded in climbing the Seven Summits including Mt Everest and has skied across Antarctica all whilst balancing a full time career as an engineer in the CAF. Lieutenant Colonel Catherine Marchetti is not only a Regular Force Officer and Engineer who conducted astronaut training, but she is also an accomplished athlete, spouse and a mother of two children. These examples are two of thousands that if communicated will change perceptions across the country. In profiling such members, consideration should be given to having the parents of serving female members share their impression, as this will be useful in the decision making process amongst families of young women in the midst of pursuing a career. Parents should also be invited to outreach engagements at schools, cadets or any event focused toward youth to enhance their knowledge and address their concerns.

Familiarization Programs

10. Advertising combined with familiarization programs and opportunities is essential to increasing numbers. Initiatives such as the one conducted on 5 January 2018 by Captain Leona Ahn from the Canadian Forces Recruiting Center in Edmonton are excellent for increasing visibility and targeting females. Global News Edmonton broadcasted video and shared the story of civilian women from across the prairies who were given an opportunity to experience various facets of military life whilst shadowing serving female members such as Captain Ahn who made headlines stating: “I’m a woman in the military and I love it.”¹⁴ These initiatives need to continue and expand geographically reaching every province and territory as well as encompassing the various elements.

11. Recently developed programs such as *Women in Force Program* that are designed to give women an opportunity to learn about military life before they decide to join¹⁵ are essential recruitment tools. Connecting with target audiences and enabling them to appreciate that the CAF has so much to offer will increase recruiting results. Military exercises such as *Collaborative Spirit* conducted annually by the Canadian Army¹⁶ needs to be expanded or paralleled to incorporate diverse groups. This exercise aims to familiarize key private sector stakeholders and senior federal civil servants with the army’s combat capabilities. It is conducted annually over a four-day period with a different group invited to attend each year. Such

¹⁴ Kim, Smith, “Canadian Armed Forces pushes for more women: I’m a woman in the military and I love it,” *Global News*, 5 January 2018, <https://globalnews.ca/news/3923213/canadian-armed-forces-women-military/>.

¹⁵ Department of National Defence, “A new program well-suited for women considering joining the Forces,” *The Maple Leaf*, last modified 11 August 2017, <https://ml-fd.caf-fac.ca/en/2017/08/5755>.

¹⁶ Department of National Defence, Canadian Army (CA) Tasking Order Exercise COLLABORATIVE SPIRIT (CS) 173352-Collaborative Spirit (G33 Continental), November 2017.

initiatives could easily be expanded to include for example, a deserving youth member selected by each civilian servant.

Retention Strategy - Re-Shape the CAF Culture and Climate

12. In the same manner that change needs to occur to leverage diversity and increase recruitment numbers, a culture shift within the military organization needs to take place to retain members. Military culture comprises the attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours characteristic of the institution that are rooted in traditions and customs and influenced by leadership.¹⁷ Culture is to an organization what personality is to an individual.”¹⁸ All members within the CAF need to actively embrace a culture of mutual respect and trust. This will prove to be the greatest impediment in terms of retaining members within the CAF over the next 10 years but will happen through continued education and with time. Training initiatives such as *Gender Based Awareness* and *Bystander Training* are starting points but cannot remain the sole solution. Until the positive culture change is fully realized and embraced, *Operation HONOUR* will remain the top device that will take care of victims and eliminate harmful and inappropriate sexual behaviour in the Canadian military.¹⁹

Mentorship Programs

13. Mentoring is a proven approach to drive rich learning and development that will enable desired success to be achieved. Mentorship programs aimed at increasing retention and advancing females within their profession has been proven successful by many companies. Nav

¹⁷ Michael Siegl, “Military Culture and Transformation,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, 29 (Spring 2008): 103-106. <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a518278.pdf>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Department of National Defence, “About Operation Honour,” last modified 1 August 2017, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/caf-community-support-services/op-honour-about.page>.

Canada is one company that has established an extremely successful mentorship program that could easily be paralleled within the CAF. During the Canadian Women in Aviation Conference in June 2017, the founder and president of *Elevate Aviation*, a mentorship program within Nav Canada provided the audience an overview of the programs success with retaining women in their company.²⁰ The mentorship program was inspired by a Nav Canada employee who after 16 years of working as an Air Traffic Controller in Edmonton noticed a lack of female presence in the industry. Designed to connect motivated individuals who are starting their careers in aviation with successful women (volunteers) in the chosen field, the program recognizes that having the support and guidance from someone who has personally experienced the process will enhance success. It also promotes gender balance within the industry by connecting women with a network of support. This program has been so successful that Nav Canada has been recognized as one of Canada's top 100 employers in 2018.²¹

14. The Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OPSE) is another organization that has been successful with opening doors and breaking down barriers through their OPSE's Pilot Mentorship Program for Female Engineering Graduates. The program is aimed at increasing the retention and advancement of female engineering professionals with a target of increasing the number of newly licensed female engineers to 30 percent by 2030. The mentorship program is designed to inspire and empower women in engineering through supporting women's engagement in the profession and assisting their transition to successful careers in engineering. Their pilot program, which ran between November 2015 and January 2017, was a tremendous

²⁰ The author of this service paper was a participant in the Canadian Women in Aviation Conference held in Calgary June 2017.

²¹ Nav Canada, "Valuing Diversity," Last accessed 30 January 2018, <http://www.navcanada.ca/EN/careers/Pages/Valuing-Diversity.aspx>.

success resulting in the launch of 90 mentoring relationships with 95 percent of respondents stating that the program met or exceeded their expectations.²²

15. These are just two examples of the many mentorship programs in place by civilian companies that have been successful retaining females within their organizations.²³

Implementing a similar program within the CAF will assist with connecting women with a network of support within the organization and should lead to increased retention. Retaining more women who rise through the ranks will set a positive atmosphere and lead to a culture that embraces diversity. In turn, the CAF will be closer to achieving its commitment of 25 percent women over the next 10 years.

CONCLUSION

16. Women have been serving in Canada's military for over a century playing a pivotal role in defending Canada's safety and security.²⁴ The CAF is highly regarded amongst its allies as being at the forefront of military gender integration, and in terms of the proportion of women in its military and the areas in which they can serve, Canada is recognized as a world leader.²⁵ To increase operational effectiveness and leverage diversity, the CAF has recently committed to an

²² Ontario Society of Professional Engineers, *Opening Doors and Breaking Down Barriers Highlights from Engineering Professional Success: OSPE's Pilot Mentorship Program for Female Engineering Graduates*, Toronto, last accessed 30 January 2018, https://www.ospe.on.ca/public/documents/Mentorship/WomenEngineersReport_ebook.pdf

²³ Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT). *Mentorship On Demand*. Last accessed 30 January 2018. http://www.caot.ca/site/pd/mentorship?nav=sidebar_

²⁴ National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, *Women in the Canadian Armed Forces*, 7 March 2017, last accessed 30 January 2018, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/news/article.page?doc=women-in-the-canadian-armed-forces/izkjzqzeu>.

²⁵ National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, BG-14 006, *Women in the Canadian Armed Forces*, 6 March 2014, last accessed 30 January 2018, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/news/article.page?doc=women-in-the-canadian-armed-forces/hie8w7rm>.

ambitious goal of increasing female representation in the military over the next ten years by 25 percent.

17. Although an institutional culture shift will require time, there are adjustments that can be made to the current recruitment and retention strategies that will increase results. Adjustments include: maintaining an effective and robust recruiting process, positive advertising and messaging, and continuing to expand familiarization programs. Retention strategies that focus on mentorship programs which enable females to establish solid networks as well as fostering a culture within the CAF that embraces and accepts change will be essential to keeping women in the forces. The Auditor General noted in the findings of the 2016 Recruitment and Retention report: “The military’s aspiration of having women make up 25 per cent of its uniformed personnel within the next decade appears to be just that – a dream”.²⁶ Incorporation of the proposed recommendations will see this dream become a reality.

²⁶ Bruce, Campion-Smith, “Canadian Military has no strategy to recruit more women, auditor general says,” *Toronto Star*, 29 November 2016, <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2016/11/29/canadian-military-has-no-strategy-to-recruit-more-women-auditor-general-says.html>.

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