

## THE BOTTOM L.I.N.E: HOW THE RETIREE AND ACTIVE DUTY COMMUNITIES CONTINUE TO STAY CONNECTED

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How do you see or view retirees? What's your perception of retirement? Do you assume that most retirees are interested in gardening, golfing, fishing, or rocking on the porch? Do you define retirement as a time to play, or do nothing, or as an endless vacation? According to the Association of American Retired Persons, 45 percent of all pre-retirees expect to continue working into their 70s or later. Nearly half of all Americans age 55 and over volunteered at least once in the past year. Of those ages 75 and older, 43 percent had volunteered at some point in the previous year.

The retirement years are becoming a time of high activity and purpose. We may be out of the service, but we are not served out—still serving. We may be retired, but we are in no way tired. It's not time to retire; it's time to refire. Though we grow older, slow down a bit and go through our senior moments, we still use our talents and skills to help others. Like academic graduation, retirement is a time when we move on to new, bigger and better things.

I want to spill the beans and share with you the bottom L.I.N.E of how the retiree and active duty communities continue to stay connected.

The first letter "L", indicates how we are connected to a legacy. Were you aware that Frank Woodruff Buckles, America's last living World War I veteran was recently laid to rest in February? Buckles' death marked the end of an era, as the last "doughboy" made his way home. He was the last living connection we had to an important part of our history. Our wake up call, lest we forget, is that no matter what our background, where we live, or when we started our military careers; one of our commonalities is the mission of defending our country. Considering the generations of long past, protecting our freedom is a tradition going back to George Washington and the beginning of this country. We cannot afford to forget those who came before us. We're the recipients of blessings and reap incredible rewards from what was sowed. The phrase in our Airmen's Creed, "I am faithful to a proud heritage, a tradition of honor and legacy of valor," connects us to this legacy. It reflects on the past history of the Air Force.

The next letter, "I", is for identify. We not only embrace retirees' legacy, we also identify with their commitment, service and sacrifice. The successes of the past are what make military service what it is today and as a servicemember, understand the past so you can be more successful in the future. Retirees helped to pass on freedom from generation to generation, serving our country. We owe them our honor; the only reason we are here is because a lot of servicemembers are not.

Another letter is “N”, needlessly nudging this generation [i.e., 99 percent of Americans] to carry the mantle forward into the 21st century--an eternal flame. While identifying with retirees’ commitment, service and sacrifice, you, our active duty military, press on beyond our foundation without complaint. Proof of you building upon that foundation, the U.S. Armed Forces consistently ranks among the top five most trusted professionals, garnering recognition ahead of lawyers, journalists and politicians. You may also know that less than one percent of Americans serve in uniform today, but you bear 100 percent of the burden of defending our nation. While the accolades of the “greatest generation” are deservedly well known, an online edition of The Atlantic Monthly stated, “important differences between today’s military and the military before the Second World War are: first, it is [all volunteer and] far larger -- some six times the size of the 244,000-man active-duty military of 1933. Second, it is frequently used as an instrument of national policy (e.g., Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, etc.). Possibly a third major difference is its quality: for the first time in the nation’s history the joint U.S. military team is generally regarded as the best in the world. Retirees share in this praise because of the foundation of success that you helped to establish.”

We’ve come to our last letter, “E”, which is for endure. While the torch is eventually passed and the work left to others, you remain steady in carrying out your duties, enduring challenges and fulfilling your mission. Regarding being steady, steadiness always comes from a firm base. Like a skyscraper being constructed high into the sky, the builders must first dig low to give it a solid foundation. Only then can the structure rise to its full height. What is your base or foundation: duty, honor, country; integrity, excellence, service; mental, social, physical or spiritual pillars? As we, retirees and active duty members, endure challenges, know that trouble is temporary, local and changed by your own effort ... your performance, communications and relationships. Hardness, rejections, difficulties, and pressures will crop up. Yet, these challenges are temporary. As in our 10-year effort to slay al-Qaeda’s leader Osama bin Laden, stay persistent and faithful. Never give up! Don’t let your guard down. Do not quit until you have fulfilled your goal! Keep on until you have done all that you were sent to do. You’ll be able to say you’ve done your best ... Hats off to you! You rock!

We owe the security and freedom that we enjoy to the members of our armed forces and their families. In helping to bridge the retiree and active duty communities, the bottom L.I.N.E. is we hold common ground in embracing the LEGACY of defending our country; we IDENTIFY with the commitment, service, and sacrifice required to preserve and secure our liberties; we are needlessly NUDGED to soldier on with the torch of leadership which has been passed by those who came before us; we ENDURE challenges by fighting the good fight, finishing the race, and keeping the faith. Thus, our connectedness comes full circle because when we transition from the military, in effect, we hand off to those who follow us to take our place. They will then carry on the mantle of defending our nation beyond, beyond and we will be retired ... and loving it! Every exit is an entry. ‘Retirement’ is not the end; it’s the beginning. Still serving?