

Running Head: Ethical Dilemmas in the Army

Ethical Dilemmas in the Army

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Abstract

People face ethical dilemmas everyday. While serving as the course manager for the Civil Affairs Advanced Individual Training, I experienced a very difficult dilemma. Guidance from the chain of command conflicted with the Army Values I was teaching the Soldiers. Trying to balance the Army Values I was teaching to the students with the guidance given by the leadership placed me in one of my most difficult decisions as an instructor. This situation shows how some leaders self interests become more important than the Army's best interest.

Ethical Dilemmas in the Army

Leaders on a daily basis make decisions. Some of those decisions are easy and some are very difficult. At some point in a leader's career, they will experience an ethical dilemma. Leaders having a strong set of beliefs and values have an easier time making the correct decision in that situation. While serving as a Civil Affairs (CA) instructor, I faced such a situation. Trying to make the right decision for the Army, my Soldiers and my integrity as a Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) would not be easy.

In September 1998, I was the course manager for the CA Advanced Individual Training (AIT) at Fort. Bragg, North Carolina. At the time, I was the only instructor for the course that had a student level of about 50 students per class and four classes per year. The task organization of the unit had me responsible for course development, course management and all requirements associated with the instruction of the course. Course development included the creation of all class material to include instructor notes and slides, student handouts, practical exercises and exams. Course management included requesting all support and meeting the standards for the course. Lastly, I conducted the day-to-day instruction of the course to include 85% of the modules, exam reviews and conduct of the exams. No one in the chain of command reviewed course material and exams for accuracy nor did they officially evaluate my instruction. I had free reign of the course to conduct it as I saw fit.

This was a time before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the Army as a whole was more in a peacetime frame of mind than a combat one. Midway through my tour, my company commander and first sergeant informed me that Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) training was not the priority of the unit. The current command climate focused on the Army Physical Fitness Test scores and attrition rate. The Army used these two items while

comparing the different AIT programs. The company's policy at the time was to recycle if a Soldier failed the same exam twice or was a first time NO-GO on two exams that Soldier would recycle to the next class. In order to ensure that the attrition rate numbers were extremely low, the command took on an unofficial policy of testing Soldiers until they passed.

This policy placed me in a very awkward position between the chain of command and the students. At the beginning of the course, I conducted the initial counseling for each student and stated the official written policy. As the course progressed, some students found themselves in the situation of failing several exams. The number of students failing the exams remained at consistent levels with each class. At no point was the instruction or the quality of the test ever in question.

At this point, I started running into the ethical dilemmas and conflicts with the Army values. The first dilemma I faced was what recommendation I would make to the commander for the Soldiers who failed. This would be a test my duty and integrity. I had a duty to the Soldiers, the unit and most importantly they Army. For the Soldiers, my duty was to ensure they were competent in their Military Occupational Specialty and not let them continue if they did not meet the standard. For the unit, I had the duty to support the chain of command and execute the orders given. Most importantly, my duty lay with the Army. As an instructor for an initial entry training, I had the responsibility to ensure that Soldiers are trained to standard and can fill the ranks of the Army. If these Soldiers cannot perform their mission, then it could ultimately cost the life of another Soldier. This is the bigger picture that we all must keep in mind when making decisions. This early stage also tested my integrity. By knowing the command philosophy of wanting low attrition rate, I could take the easy or hard roads. The easy road was recommending retests for all Soldiers who failed. While the hard road was making my recommendation to

recycle as I believed that to be best for the Army and the Soldier. This dilemma always put me at odds with the Commander and First Sergeant. I ultimately made my recommendations to the commander based on what I felt to be best for the Army and the Soldier. Every recommendation was denied and I was ordered to retest these Soldiers until they passed.

This also presented a difficult situation between the students and me. After the commander granted each student a retest, the power base I had with the students slipped. The students soon learned that the standards discussed at the beginning of the course were in conflict with those of the command. The students understood that the command was concerned more with numbers than the quality of training. They also understood they were going to pass the course no matter what. The leadership was putting their needs and agenda before that of the Army.

Another dilemma the command placed me in dealt with the instruction and testing. The command leadership's expertise was Psychological Operations. They were not subject matter experts on the course. As I mentioned earlier, I was a sole instructor and developer. My integrity and honor were the values challenged this time. I was responsible for not only teaching all the material, but also test development, issue and grading. At no point, did anyone in the chain of command ever review any of the exams or check my grading of those exams. There were only two versions of each exam on hand to begin with. The command ordered me to create third and fourth versions as Soldier took the first two versions of the exam and failed. Since no one ever check my work, I could have written exams that I knew were extremely difficult to pass. On the other hand, I could create exams easy to pass knowing that it would save me more work later on. I would have done a disservice to the Army if I did not have the integrity to do the right thing and ensure that these Soldiers knew the material. My honor was at stake because the leadership

pressured me to fall in line with them. Without directly being told at the time, there was enough double talk to understand that if I did not go along with the commands unofficial policy, things could become difficult for me in the unit. I stood my ground and fought for what I thought was right.

Lastly, the leadership challenged my loyalty to the command. They felt that I should just blindly do whatever they wanted. By challenging their decisions and comments about the relevance of MOS training in AIT, the unit looked upon me as disloyal. While this attitude played into their philosophy at the time, in the end it only hurts the Army. At the first chance they had, the command moved me out of the course manager position and replaced me with someone who was a “Yes Man.”

While we all face ethical dilemmas throughout our careers, how you handle these situations that determines your success. Several ethical dilemmas challenged me while serving as the course manager. My integrity came into question a number of times as well as my honor, sense of duty and loyalty. By staying focused on the mission and the bigger picture, as well as staying true to my values, I was able to navigate through it all. The command climate at the time was more concerned with their careers rather than the future force of the Army. Having the integrity to ensure that only those Soldiers who met the standards continue with training, put me at odds with the command. The leadership’s own self-interest took front stage. It placed me in an awkward position. By placing Soldiers in positions where they must decide between the hard right and the easy wrong is bad leadership. As leaders, we must remember mission first and people always. Most importantly, we must also live by the same Army values we expect our subordinates to live up to as well.

Conclusion

Ethical dilemmas are nothing new to the Army. Soldiers have been faced with them since the very beginning. How you handle the dilemmas will determine how successful you will be in the Army and life. While faced with several dilemmas during my tour at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, I chose the hard right. I thought of the bigger picture and the needs of the Army rather than myself. At the end of the day, the Army and I were much better for it. While I was fired from this position for what some felt was my disloyalty to the command, it turned to be a blessing in disguise. By standing my ground and standing firm with my values, I was vindicated four years later as I was selected over five of my peers to come back to the same unit as the First Sergeant.