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Ethics and the Soldier

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Abstract

As we strive for a higher standard, we must accept the fact that there are some Soldier among us making unethical decisions. We should careful not to over react, as in the Abu Ghraib Prison scandal. Instead, we must find these misfits, weed them out and then drive on. Our professional standards should derive from those traditional standards that have proudly made us who we are today, and balance them with the social norms in which our Soldiers come from.

Ethics and the Soldier

We as Senior Noncommissioned Officers will be the role models for future generations of Soldiers to come. As the Army continues to move into the 21st century, our ethics and moral values become our reputation, and we must make sure that we do not default. We must take another look at what makes us professionals, what we believe in and never forget that because we are Senior Noncommissioned Officers, all eyes are on us. To do this, we must go to the dictionary, and look up the definition for ethics. We want to make sure that we have the correct answer. Webster's Student Dictionary states, "Ethics. 1. The rules or standards of conduct governing the members of a profession. 2. The study of the general nature of morals and the specific moral choices an individual makes in relating to others."

I will break this definition down into parts, so we can look at them and study them. We will start with the second definition first since is more meaningful then the first. First, "specific moral choices an individual makes in relating to others." Senior Noncommissioned Officers have a duty to mentor their subordinates in a way so as to assure them that they bringing good Soldier ethics and values into the Army. Also, to train them to make the right choices even when it would

be easier to bend the rules or take a short cut. This is where the Army values come into play. These values are the best tool that we had to use as a guide to influence Soldiers; and have used them for more than two centuries. I will address Army our values as I understand them, and the way Soldiers must apply them in their every day lives as Soldiers and citizens. The first Army value is loyalty. Loyalty, defined bears true faith and allegiance to the U.S. Constitution, the Army, your unit, and other Soldiers. We need to step in and guide Soldiers to do the right thing and remind them we are loyal because there is no country or Army like ours. The second Army value is duty. Duty, defined fulfills your obligations. Soldiers must remember they have a responsibility to this country, and they must fulfill their duties no matter what they are confronted with. The third Army Value is respect. Respect, means to treat people as they should be treated. I treat you with respect, and you give me the same treatment. We are equal partners in this organization; the only difference is that I have a couple more chevrons than you have. The fourth Army value is selfless service. Selfless service requires that you put the welfare of the nation, Army, and subordinates before your own. This is the business we chose, and we must be proud of it; do not dishonor it. The fifth Army value is honor. Honor means to live up to all the Army values. If you follow all these value, your ethics will never be in

question. The sixth Army value is integrity. Integrity requires us to do what's legally and morally right. Soldier/Leader, if you lose your integrity, you will never get it back. The last Army value is personal courage. Personal courage means to face fear, danger, or adversity. You need this one just to be able look somebody in the face and tell them they are wrong. The Army values are what ethics are all about.

Second, I'll discuss what ethics are "The rules or standards of conduct governing the members of a profession." What are these rules? These are the rules and regulations that guide our conduct as we go about our duties. Sometimes they might be written down, while others are those natural standards, the norms that we had implanted in our personalities and characters as we were coming up.

At least once or twice in our careers, we have been faced with an ethical question at one time or another. We have seen our fellow

Noncommissioned Officers and officers get put into situations where they had to make ethical choices. How they made these decisions is a direct reflection on the leadership that they grew up under.

We as senior leaders sometimes lose site of the fact that being promoted into positions of leadership mandates we be a role model. We develop our subordinates ethically, and we

establish an ethical climate in our organization. We must always remember that we are leaders first and managers second. We must set the example by picking up the torch and moving out in front to lead. I have seen many rise to these positions and then get blinded by the power they have, and eventually make a disloyal decision. Let us not forget that we are always under a microscope by those that we lead and mentor. Do not be self-deceived into believing that they do not observe our actions.

So as we make decisions, let us take the time to judge our actions before we commit ourselves. Once you have done the action, you cannot go back and fix it. There will always be someone there to point out our mistakes. We must live with the outcome of those actions, and be judged by them. We must also take into account that it is not just the Soldiers we lead that judge us by our actions, but the mothers and fathers also.

In these times of war, the public and the media have us under a microscope, as we saw with the incident at Abu Ghraib Prison. Once the media got hold of the pictures of mistreatment and torture, the Army as a whole received a bad reputation. Later on, as the hearings took place, a lot of unethical decisions were discovered; none of which we can be proud of. This is something we can't continue to do; we must change our ways and get back on track with the teachings we have grown up with the Army values. The mothers and fathers are looking at us,

and if we want to get their children, we must change. Just remember they have entrusted their sons and daughters to our charge, so that we can teach them discipline and instill the ethical and moral attitude to carry them through their futures.

In conclusion, as I stated earlier, I am proud to be a part of the Army's team. I will continue to teach my Soldiers to do the right thing. As long as we remain relevant in establishing our standards and once established, we must not compromise our standards. As we strive for a higher standard, we must accept the fact that amongst us are some Soldiers making unethical decisions. We should be careful not to overreact, as in the Abu Ghraib Prison scandal. Instead, we must find these misfits, weed them out, and then drive on. Our professional standards should be derived from those traditional standards that have proudly made us who we are today, and balance them with the social norms in which our soldiers come from.

References

FM 22-100, Chapter 2 and 4; Chapter 5, Para 5-120 thru 5-138; appendix d.

FM 22-100, Chapter 3.

The Dynamics of Human Communication, pages 119-132

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