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Ethic Thought Paper: Ethical Decision Making

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ABSTRACT

The ability to make a decision is a complex process. It involves morals, ethics, and training. As senior noncommissioned officers we are role models regardless if we like it or not. It is important that we show our Soldiers what right looks like on and off duty. An ethical decision is one in which an individual chooses the hard right over the easy wrong. This paper will address the importance of making ethical decisions and the problems that occurred when leaders failed to make such decisions. Furthermore, it will address the failure of one of my previous Battalion Command Sergeants Major to make an ethical decision which lead to a dysfunctional and broken relationship between the NCOs and Officers in the Battalion.

Ethic Thought Paper

We as professionals in the United States Armed Forces, specifically the Army, have established a standard of ethics that I am proud to be a part of. We are moving into the next century, where we will continue to be viewed not only by our Soldiers but also by civilians and Soldiers worldwide as role models. This paper will highlight the importance of ethics and ethical decision making as leaders and role models.

Although I have my own opinion of the definition of ethics, I went to the dictionary to research the correct meaning. According to the Webster's Dictionary (1993, p 224), "Ethics" is defined as a system of moral principles or the branch of philosophy dealing with right and wrong and the morality of motives and ends." In short, ethics is principal motivation behind our thoughts and behaviors. An ethical decision is one that examines the difference between hard right and the easy wrong. We as leaders should never compromise our ethics for the glory of any other person or position. We owe it to our Soldiers to show them what right looks like, regardless of the situation.

This paper will discuss the ethical decisions that senior leaders in the United States Army must make. I have personally experienced this ethical dilemma as a deployed Company First Sergeant. This situation created conflict between the Battalion Commander, the Company Commanders, the Battalion Command Sergeant Major, the S-3 Sergeant Major, and all of the Company First Sergeants.

The situation began in Fort Hood, Texas where I was the First Sergeant of Charlie Company, 3-8 Cavalry. We had just been named the First Cavalry Division Draper Award winner in the spring of 2003. Some of the categories considered for the Unit Leadership Award were PT, Awards, Promotions, Inspections, and DUI. Winning this

award meant that I had the best Company in the Division. We had just received our new M1A2 SEP Tanks (THE BEST TANKS IN THE WORLD). So we started our new equipment training tasks. The whole company went through FBCB2 training, Blue Force one tracker training, and the entire tank crewman had their own tank related tasks to complete. We had a new Battalion Command Sergeant Major assigned in March of that year. After all the training was complete, we had to prove our proficiency in our Gunnery, which consists of Tank Table IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, and XII.

My company shot real well, and as a result my Battalion Commander chose to attach us to the Infantry Battalion for the upcoming JRTC and other training and deployments. We were warned by various Command Groups that this new Battalion had issues in the Command. I saw this first hand at Fort Polk, LA. My Company Commander and I had just departed our sector the same way from the beginning of training until the completion of training. At the end of training our Infantry Battalion Commander came into our Company area, and commence to eating my Company Commander alive.

I called the building to attention. After about 2-3 minutes and realizing that my Soldiers could hear everything that was taking place between the Company Commander and the Battalion Commander, I decided to ask the Battalion Commander to please take this outside. He said alright First Sergeant. He came outside with a whole different attitude. I said Sir, what is all this about. He said your Commander left the field without my permission and left two of our flanks unsecured. I said, "Sir, you gave him the ok to leave sector when you came across the NET and announced Index, Index, Index, Acknowledge in sequence." He replied, First Sergeant thanks for pointing this out to me,

you are the first Noncommissioned Officer in 23 years to ever do that to me. “THANKS TOP”. So I went to the Battalion Command Sergeant Major and told him what had happened. His response was “He’s the Battalion Commander,” not at anytime did he say I will address the issue. We then returned to Fort Hood, TX, and continued preparing for the deployment to Iraq.

Once we got back, I noticed that none of the things I asked the Battalion Command Sergeant Major for was in place. As a heavy Armor Company First Sergeant, I needed extra supplies most of the time, for instance, extra track pads for the Tanks and double or triple the normal amount of fuel than an Infantry Company. I also needed extra connex space for my tank related parts. All the Soldiers noticed that we were not getting the support we needed from the Battalion Command Sergeant Major, so I had to keep my company motivated off the basis of (ALL WE GOT IS EACH OTHER).

Prior to arriving in Camp Taji, Iraq our Battalion Task Force experienced a whole bunch of bazaar things. Adding to a serious of unfortunate events, our Battalion Task lost three soldiers in the first four hours at the camp due to a mortar attack. My company as the Task Force main effort was forced to put tanks on patrol less than two hours after the attack. The mortar rounds stopped as soon as the tanks got out on their routes. We went on continuous operations for 10 straight days. This was unprecedented for the tanks to be ran into the ground for such long period of time. We could not maintain this pace for an extended period of time.

I voiced my concern, but the Battalion staff could not understand. I was the only person in the Battalion that was thinking of the future. We were putting thousands of kilometers on our tanks each week, and in garrison it would take years for us to get up to

a thousand kilometers on a tank. My concern was for track and track pads as well as maintenance and services time. I finally had to approach the Battalion Commander on these issues and he gave us at least one maintenance day every six days. I had talked to the Battalion Command Sergeant Major prior to that and he told me to tell my boys to suck it up. My Battalion Command Sergeant Major was also informed by me of the action of the Battalion Commander, including past issues and concerns.

The company grade officers were fed up with the way he was addressing their wives. The Battalion Commander had also cursed out the Family Readiness Group on numerous occasions. He had pushed several officers in the task force in the chest at different times. He had also thrown objects at other staff members. The final straw was when we received a new S-1(Captain) who was well connected (family and friends) and our Battalion Commander went off one day into one of his mood changes and the Captain who was not accustomed to his attitude ignored him. The Battalion Commander became upset and grabbed the Captain and attempted to throw him down on the ground. We could not believe what occurred.

The Captain left the Battle Update Briefing (BUB), and later that night asked everyone that was present for a statement of what they witnessed. The Battalion Command Sergeant Major witnessed it all and did nothing, after a few days of rumors, phone calls, and interviews we all were talked to by selected members of the Brigade Staff. Needless to say the Battalion Commander was picked up and relieved by the Division Commander four days later. The Battalion Command Sergeant Major was asked by the Division and Brigade Command Sergeant Majors, did he have any idea of these things going on in his Battalion. His response was "NO".

This really got them upset, because all the written statements by over 10 leaders from the Battalion (five 1SG's, five Company Commanders, Battalion Executive Officer, and Battalion S-1, to name a few) stated that the Battalion Command Sergeant Major was present during the incidents. From my point of view, the Battalion Command Sergeant Major if he possessed any personal courage or professional ethics would have stopped the Battalion Commander in his tracks after the first couple of events. The Battalion Command Sergeant Major owed it to the Soldiers. Additionally, even though the Battalion Command Sergeant Major did not correct the Battalion Commander from his various wrongdoings, he made the situation worst by not telling the truth to higher.

The Battalion Command Sergeant Major made an unethical decision which left a bad taste in all the leadership and the Soldiers in our unit. Since the Battalion Command Sergeants Major did not have the personal courage, to advise the Commander and to correct him when he was obviously wrong it gave the perception to the Officers that all the NCOs were weak and could not make the best decisions for our Soldiers. The actions or lack thereof of the Battalion Command Sergeant Major damaged the relationship between the Officers and the NCOs. It took us (NCOs) almost seven months to regain the trust and confidence of our Commanders.

In conclusion, it is important that as NCOs we understand that our officer counterparts wants us to be assertive in the decision making process. We should always take the hard right over the easy wrong, and always lead from the front. The inaction and lack of support by the Battalion Command Sergeant Major has motivated me to show my superiors, peers, and subordinates to continue to make ethical decisions and to lead by example. I came through the ranks with all kinds of unethical things happening to me

and to many of my fellow Soldiers and peers. I told myself that I will continue to fix my little part until I had the ability and rank to work on the bigger problems. As a Battalion Command Sergeant Major, I will do my best to ensure that everyone in my Battalion makes ethical decisions and appropriate actions are taken against those who are unethical.

References

Steinmetz, S. (1993). *Random House Webster's Dictionary (1st ed.)*, p. 224, New York:

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