

Perfect Paperwork Places Leaders in Ethical Dilemmas

Thought Paper

By

MSG Richard E. Franklin

CWO Ken Hodge

United States Sergeants Major Academy

November 16, 2005

Perfect Paperwork Places Leaders in Ethical Dilemmas

Introduction

- a) Greeting. Address the audience and identify organization and myself.
- b) Type and Classification of Brief. This is an information brief and it is unclassified.
- c) Purpose and Scope. The brief will information on ethical dilemmas that leaders at all levels are placed in by paper work requirements.
- d) Outline and Procedure. This brief will set the perfect paperwork or perceived paperwork places leaders in ethical dilemmas.

Body

- a) The dilemma of expected results on paperwork
- b) Battle Readiness Slides / Reports
- c) Maintenance Operational Rate
- d) Ways to fix reports

Closing

- a) Ask for question
- b) Summarize and conclude brief
- c) Identify the next person to brief

Perfect Paperwork Places Leaders in Ethical Dilemmas

The attitude that all statistics on paperwork has to look nearly perfect places leaders in all positions in an ethical dilemma and does not uphold the Army values. There seems to be a difference of what the truth is and what the truth for paperwork is. There is a zero defect policy that is an unspoken rule all leaders must work with even though leaders tell subordinates it is acceptable if the reported numbers are not at 100% and to turn in the information as accurately as possible. If the information is not what the higher elements believe it should be, it will rarely be accepted and usually leads to a complete re-evaluation of the information.

Submitting some kind of paperwork or report to a higher element will occur nearly everyday at every level of operations. The report could be a special request for specific numbers, usually due immediately, or data that is a part of the normal battle rhythm. This battle rhythm establishes the times that certain reports are due. The office requesting the report already has an idea of what the expected numbers on the report will look like. The leader filling the report should be doing everything they can to make sure the numbers are what the higher element wants. This could happen at any time and with any kind of report.

The ethical dilemma of what to do with this reporting system could involve many Soldiers at different levels. One simple report with good intentions could cause an ethical dilemma for several different levels. The following scenario is an example of several possible dilemmas created in just a few minutes:

1SG: "Roger, CSM. The Company's CFC number is half of all the other companies. They need looked at again and checked to verify that no one was missed who wants to donate."

CSM: "Get this done before going home today."

1SG: "Roger, CSM. That will be taken care of before COB today. The commander just stepped in."

1SG: "Yes, Sir?"

CO: "The Battalion Commander wants the data from the maintenance program rechecked; the operational readiness rate is below 90% and brigade will not accept the report like it is. In addition, call the S3 because there is a problem with Readiness numbers on the Brewer slides for the Quarterly Training Brief."

1SG: "Yes, Sir. What should the numbers look like?"

In the conversation above, it is not verbally stated what the numbers or percentages should be, just that what the unit turned in is not what is "expected". By not stating the numbers were incorrect or telling the 1SG to change them, the higher elements place the ethical dilemma at the lower level.

In the case of the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) scenario, the numbers did not look like everyone else's. All levels in the command have set goals for the program, and the perception is given that the unit with the lower level must be doing something wrong. The 1SG, now under pressure, must figure out how to meet the standard for the good of the unit. Placing a high level of attention here to raise the amount of donated money expected. Re-contacting all Soldiers to give another opportunity to donate to meet the CFC goal will have to occur.

The zero defect policy for maintenance is considered in the second scenario. Maintenance is an area that draws attention from every level. Accepting that the organization readiness rate for maintenance can go down to 90%, but anything lower is unacceptable, holds

the same connotations as a zero defect policy. The 90% becomes the lowest threshold and nothing lower can be acceptable without admitting failure. Everyone understands that equipment maintenance is extremely important and requires a vast amount of command focus, but this kind of implied standard places several Soldiers in all levels in ethical dilemmas. The operators debate whether they should even report the equipment is non-mission capable. The Executive Officer must choose to put it on the report, try to cover it up, or begin to cannibalize other vehicles to maintain the above 90% rating. Even though this will keep the numbers and reports looking good, it actually sends a false sense of readiness to the higher elements.

The same dilemmas occur with the reporting of mandatory training. Whether it is safety, equal opportunity, or individual Soldier's skills, the reports still have an expected appropriate outcome. There seems to be a never-ending list of requirements that must be met on a quarterly, semi-annual, and an annual timetable, which leaders have to make a deliberate decision on what will get done and what the unit can move or not accomplish. The leadership of a unit completely prioritizes the mandated training starting the "What is accomplished, what is expected, what is getting reported?" dilemma.

These reports do not have to become ethical dilemmas and place leaders in difficult positions. Modifying each report, or making additional notations, could remove the dilemma. Adding a section in the reports that allow the unit submitting it to justify or validate the information could eliminate some of the ethical dilemmas. The section could allow the unit to state they are aware of the expected standard, what the unit's plan is for the unit to achieve that expected standard, or justify why the information is correct and will remain. This modification could also contain additional information to increase the communication through all levels the

report must travel, i.e. “All Soldiers contacted for CFC, with the exception of PFC Smith who is on emergency leave.”

Every leader understands these dilemmas exist. Many leaders faced the same dilemmas at their current level or in positions previously held. It is easy to focus on what the information should be and lose sight of what the truth is when trying to excel. It is extremely difficult to report accurate information knowing the higher elements will be dissatisfied with the report. Revising the reports to allow for complete understanding will allow leaders to maintain ethics, report accurately, and uphold the Army values.