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Personal Ethics and the Army Referral Bonus Program

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Abstract

I have not served in combat. Is it ethical for me to participate in the Army Referral System-Sergeant Major of the Army Recruiting Team referral bonus program? I know that each of us who serve is subject to conditions of grave danger. It is a matter of good training and a lot of luck to serve and live to tell about it, especially in these times of terrorism. I feel it is my duty to make referrals. I also feel that it is correct to participate in the referral bonus program even though I have never served in theater and those I refer will serve in theater. I must support this decision of ethical participation and will do so.

Personal Ethics and the Referral Bonus Program

Recruiting is necessary to sustain our military forces and national sovereignty. Under the Army's new recruiting initiative, Army Referral System-Sergeant Major of the Army Recruiting Team (ARS-SMART), each service member has been asked to assist the recruiting command by referring people to recruiters. This program has been established as an essential element to help fulfill the Army's recruiting goals. As a senior leader in our Army, I take the request seriously and know that we are in dire need of bolstering our recruiting efforts. This causes what I perceive to be a personal ethical dilemma. In 33 years of service, I have never served in harm's way. I have no combat duty, nor have I been deployed anywhere near a combat zone. My question is whether it is ethical for me to pursue referrals under the bonus program and be paid for them if they succeed in becoming a Soldier.

Service to Our Country

I have always felt that everyone who is suited for military service should serve in the military. It is an obligation for those who live in freedom to help carry the burden and help pay the price for freedom. This ethical opinion is shared by many but we all know that not everyone can serve in the military. Those who are not suited for the military can make their societal contribution in other ways. The main point is that we all have something to contribute and we all have an obligation to contribute something.

I have been in the ready for 33 years and have been very close to being called to war duty four times. I volunteered for service in the Gulf War but was not chosen to be activated. I am now toward the last portion of my career and I am still awaiting the call to serve in theater. Being a reserve Soldier, the fight is not my first choice of duty, but I am standing by to go to help fill the needs of the Army and the needs of our Soldiers. I feel I have missed the real Army

experience along the way but realize that I have served my country and fellow Soldiers well in the missions I have performed.

Children, Parents, and Families

One aspect of my ethical dilemma surrounds the relationships between children, parents, and Families. Most young people, those potential recruits, are the children of parents who have kept them safe from harm during their childhood and adolescence. Parents who have painstakingly protected their children always want to protect their children regardless of how old the children become. Also, Families and extended Families have an emotional need to remain whole and intact. A death of a loved one who died in the military is often devastating to parents and Families. Young people, children, often do not understand the dangers of the world. They are young, smart, and often have the feeling that they are invulnerable to the dangers around them. Young people often feel they can do anything and get through any situation that comes their way. A person should be made to understand the gravity of a decision to serve in the military before the oath of enlistment.

Measured Danger

Those who choose to serve in the military are, for the most part, those who are most capable of serving. One seldom attempts what he or she can definitely not do. We are all basically the same in that most people are capable of doing well in the military service if they want to do well. It is a great comfort, and selling point to potential recruits, that we have the best trained, best equipped, and most effective Army in the world. The American Soldier has a creed, a Warrior Ethos, and the most ethical leadership in the world. Whatever the danger in the war zone, it is a shared danger. Whatever the mission, the exposure to danger will be no greater than what is needed. Each recruit is given the best training, the best equipment, and the best network

of other resources to keep him or her alive under any and all circumstances. These facts are the reasons all of us can go forward each day with confidence. These facts provide the foundation for any discussion regarding the ethics of asking one to consider putting their life on the line to help share the burden of freedom.

Reasons to Enlist – Pay and Benefits

The GoArmy.com web page concerning total compensation compares compensation for a civilian job, Police Patrol Officer, to that of a Military Police Sergeant, pay grade E-5, with four years service. The Police Patrol Officer is shown to have total compensation of \$41,355 versus the total compensation for the Military Police Sergeant, shown as \$42,376 (United States Army Recruiting Command, 2007). The civilian police officer's gross income is more but after subtracting for health care, and after adding allowances to the military police sergeant's base pay, the military total compensation comes out on top.

Military pay and benefits always seem to be a better deal when examined in detail. This is especially true for Soldiers who know how to take advantage of the benefits available to them. For the ranks of private through specialist, the money alone is not very good, but the benefits are great. Potential recruits must be made aware of how the combination of pay, allowances, and benefits round out a total compensation package that is very attractive. Those with quick upward potential will soon have decent pay and allowances as they acquire more rank, but not everyone is able to acquire rank quickly. Sometimes, the ability to acquire rank is totally out of the control of the individual Soldier. Although, the Soldier can always count on benefits being there to ease the financial pain of the lower rank years.

It would be unethical to ask potential recruits to lay their lives on line if their compensation was base pay alone. But our enlisted Soldiers are given allowances to cover the

cost of living for any basic need items that are not provided in kind. Also, the generous education benefits have always been a strong magnet to those considering military service. The Army takes care of its Soldiers and Families with a multitude of legal, social, and recreational benefits. The Army helps Soldiers when transitioning from Soldier to civilian after their tours or careers are completed. Also, while in the Army, a Soldier can defer taxes on military pay saved for retirement through participation in the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP).

Most who have served in the Army feel they have benefited most just by having the opportunity to serve. A Soldier's life and experiences lead to great personal growth and an understanding and wisdom for life and living with others. Soldiers, by serving, benefit from improved physical fitness, enhanced patriotism, better knowledge of foreign affairs and self-discipline. Soldiers are usually earning decent pay when they depart military service and can retire at 20 years. A detailed review of the total compensation package proves that most new recruits, lower enlisted Soldiers, receive excellent compensation when compared to what they could earn elsewhere, given their youth and inexperience.

The Ethical Decision

I will recommend to those with the potential to serve that they allow me to fill out a referral card for them. I will inform them that a recruiter will contact them to tell them about Army opportunities and benefits. I will ask them to fully weigh out the benefits against the possible danger involved in military service. I will tell them about the bonus referral program and tell them that the reason I am talking to them about the Army is because it is an opportunity that everyone should explore. Army service is a benefit to all who give of themselves and serve honorably. The rewards and sacrifices of military service are great. Without those willing to lay

themselves on the line, our freedom would be lost. It is not unreasonable to ask those capable of serving to consider serving in the Army.

I feel any other conclusion or response to the ARS-SMART program would be unethical. The bonus program was implemented to give something back for those who take the call to action to heart. It is ethical for any Soldier, including me, to be paid under program rules.

References

United States Army Recruiting Command. (2007). Benefits – Total Compensation. Retrieved December 11, 2007, from <http://www.goArmy.com/>.