

Ethical Issues involved in Writing and Reviewing Noncommissioned Officers Evaluation Report

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### Abstract

Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) in the Army deal with ethical issues each time they write or review a Non-Commissioned Officer Evaluation Report (NCOER). The NCOER outlines an NCO's performance for a rating period. The Army regulation covers administrative data portion of the NCOER in detail, however performance data is based on personal opinion of the rater and the senior rater. When ethics are pushed aside when writing these reports, a multitude of implications arise. Considering the relevance of this report and how it is used as a promotion tool, only ethical and honest rating on the NCOER ensures the best NCO's are selected and promoted to senior ranks. It is the duty of the NCO to know how to conduct proper counseling using effective Army writing style, to use it in writing and reviewing the NCOER, and to install that knowledge into the next generation of NCO's through leading by example. Without proper back-up, substandard performance cannot be included in the NCOER. Failing to document incidents falsifies the performance records of the NCO. Is it ethical to just leave it out and allow for a better rating of the NCO's performance? It is unethical for the rater to leave the writing of the report to the ratee, but it happens on a daily basis. Any ethical lapse or unethical behavior associated with the NCOER voids its purpose and may possibly breed a population of unethical NCO's. Only when ethics are valued highly and used in writing and reviewing NCOER's can we be sure that the report is an effective tool for evaluation, assignment selection, and promotion.

## Ethical Issues Involved in Writing and Reviewing Noncommissioned Officers Evaluation Report

The NCOER has changed several times over the last 30 plus years for the better, but it still leaves room for improvement. The NCOER is used by the Department of the Army (DA) for assignment selection and promotion to the senior ranks. When ethics are pushed to the side in the process of writing these reports upon requirement, are the best NCOs getting selected for promotion or job assignments? The NCOER is one of the most important documents that NCOs receive in their career, yet personal opinion and bias often play a large role in writing the report. To properly evaluate someone, you must understand and conduct proper counseling. You need to know how to effectively write, using the Army writing style. Army values are what all Soldiers live by, but NCOs not only live by them, they must instill them into their Soldiers. These values are the largest area evaluated, but is given the least amount of space.

Counseling is the most important task for NCOs in the NCOER process. The regulation provides guidance on who gets counseled, how often counseling will take place, and what type of counseling you will give. Although this is a requirement, we still fail to accomplish the counseling procedure correctly. The counseling statement is the foundation of the NCOER. Without the proper counseling, we are limited to what we can write on the NCOER. If we fail to capture substandard performance in writing, the information has to be excluded from the NCOER, which may give the NCO a false rating. Should substandard performance be included in the report without proper back-up documentation, rated NCOs have the ability to appeal their NCOER. Improper counseling, lack of counseling, and incorrect counseling are key reasons for appeals and the majority of them are won by the rated NCO. Raters know that by regulation they are required to counsel NCOs and properly document incidents, but still some choose not to do so. Due to this ethical lapse, substandard NCOs may receive a standard or above standard

NCOER. The same substandard NCOs now are competitive with their above standard peers for promotions and priority job selections.

Senior promotion selection boards and priority jobs selections are determined in large part by the NCOER. The NCOER is the NCO's written representation of the performance throughout the career as a NCO. For this very reason, the regulation specifically states that no one may influence what the rater writes on the NCOER. However, we all have seen or been part of instances where senior personnel influence the rater to change the evaluation. Senior personnel justify their actions based on experience and knowledge of writing and reviewing evaluations. An unspecified number of senior personnel believe that one substandard evaluation will stall an NCO's career and may even push the rated NCO out of the Army. Based on this assumption, the NCOER may be altered to benefit the NCO instead of accurately reflect performance. Ethical raters believe that the zero tolerance vision of the 1990's is no longer relevant and NCOs with minor violations can overcome them. These raters do not shy away from putting factual information in the NCOER in an effort to instill the desire for performance improvement in the NCO.

Another ethical concern is the rating time period of the NCOER. While the regulation is specific about the rated time and how to properly identify shorter rating periods by use of justification codes, often the regulation is not properly adhered to. While not ethically correct, in many cases the rater simply adjusts the rated months to match the rating period covered. This may be done to show a continued rating period, without allowances for nonrated codes. If the rater changes during the rating period how can the NCOER prepared by the new rater reflect the entire rating period and still be ethically correct? If the NCO changes units before he gets rated, once again the rated months and the rating period covered need to show that. Raters may voluntarily indicate the wrong rating period or may be directed by senior personnel to do so. In

either case, it is ethically incorrect and has a large bearing on the NCOER. Adjusting the time on the evaluation may be motivated by the attempt to favor the ratee, or it may be done for sake of ease and simplicity. The motive for ethical lapses does not make the action more acceptable. For instance, when a NCO changes unit after ninety days, by regulation the rater must write an evaluation for that NCO prior to him/her leaving the unit. Often times, this does not happen. Many raters choose to pass the chore of the NCOER on to the next supervisor. Supervisors employing this unethical practice justify their action by arguing that one evaluation within a 12 months rating time is better than two or three evaluations with few number of months rated on each. They ignore the fact that in order to truly display the NCO's performance in the NCOER, evaluation must be done by the person actually witnessing the troop's performance.

The Army has seven values that all Soldiers are supposed to know and live by every day on and off duty. These seven core values are part of the NCOER. The evaluation addresses not only the personal conduct of the NCO based on these values, but also rates how well the NCO instills these values into his/her team. The values section of the NCOER covers a large spectrum, but is the one area that is brushed off the most. It is hard to believe that all NCOs meet or exceed these values constantly. Personally, I have senior rated or reviewed more than 200 hundred evaluations throughout my career in the Army and have yet to see a NO rating on any of these seven values. I have seen rated NCOs receive non judicial punishment or be relieved from their jobs, but still get all YES ratings for the Army Values.

One of the most unethical practices concerning the evaluation report is having the rated NCO write his/her own NCOER. While there may be several reasons for this practice, none of them make it any less wrong or more acceptable. One reason may be for the rater wanting to compare his views with those of the NCO being evaluated in an effort to be as factual and complete on the report as possible. This practice is not unethical, provided the rater has already

fully completed or almost completed the evaluation and uses the NCO's self-evaluation as a control measure. However, many times the rater has not done his/her job by correctly counseling the NCO and using a working copy of the NCOER as the counseling took place. Instead, the rater requests the NCO to complete his/her own NCOER and uses this evaluation as a yardstick for assessment. This practice is highly unethical, because not only does the NCO not receive a fair and factual rating, the rater displays dishonesty. Furthermore, the NCO will most likely take this practice as norm and imitate this procedure once in the role of the rater later in the career. On a smaller scale but not less unethical, the senior rater sometimes has the rater fill in the comments of the superior rater in Part V of the evaluation. The higher the rank of the senior rater, the more likely it is for the rater to be asked to complete this section. Senior raters in high ranks may have less contact with the rated NCO; therefore the senior rater does not know the quality of the rated NCO's performance. However, the ethical choice would be to have the form revised or elect a lower level rank to fill the spot of senior rater.

The last ethical issue with the evaluation is that the NCO is allowed to permanently change duty stations without his evaluation being completed before departure. In some cases the NCO may never receive a NCOER for this rated time. It is the responsibility of the rater to assure the NCO departs the unit with a completed NCOER, however oftentimes this responsibility is neglected. While there may be several reasons for this practice, neglecting the assigned task of properly evaluating the NCO is unethical. It not only hurts the NCO for advancement and job selection, but also hinders the next duty station from writing the next NCOER. Department of the Army (DA) will not process a NCOER until all previous evaluations are processed. The new unit cannot write an evaluation for the lost time because they cannot process it with their unit code on it. The gaining unit must assist the NCO with contacting his

prior unit or rating chain (if they have changed duty station) and reconstruct a NCOER. This evaluation then must be sent to and processed through the losing unit to DA.

Many aspects of the Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Report raise ethical issues. The Army has procedures in place regarding the proper way to complete the NCOER, however there are many ways these regulations are being bent or interpreted to fit the situation. We all know how to properly counsel NCO's and prepare the proper documentation for the session. Further, we know the importance of the counseling statement in the overall aspect of completing the NCOER. The counseling statement is the back-bone of the evaluation; without it the NCOER is merely a guess on how well the NCO "may" be performing. In addition, we are aware of the impact of the NCOER on the senior promotion board and assignment selection. Furthermore, the rating period must indicate the actual rating months in order to accurately reflect the soldier's performance period. The core values, as installed in today's Soldiers, are an important portion of the NCOER. Every rater needs to take this portion seriously, as it shows the true nature of the person rated. If we let the rated NCO write his/her own evaluation, nothing is accomplished besides a chore fulfilled. The NCO did not receive a rating, no evaluation was completed. It is almost as if the NCOER was not done at all, which happens plenty of times as well. NCO's leave their assignment before the NCOER is completed, which creates a number of problems that will have to be addressed at a later time, most likely by a different rater than the one neglecting to do the job. In conclusion, the NCOER is a very important military document. Its accuracy and timeliness are essential to its functionality. The rated NCOs deserve factual evaluation for performance ranging from needs improvement to excellence. How else will they know where to improve and have a reason for striving for excellence? In addition, anyone reading the NCOER has the right to receive the most accurate and complete information possible. The more complete

and accurate the NCOER, and the more ethical we are in completing it, the better our Army will be.