

Running head: DIFFERENT STANDARDS FOR DIFFERENT RANKS

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A serious ethical issue that I have encountered over the years is that some commissioned officers and senior noncommissioned officers (NCOs) believe that because of their rank or position certain standards do not apply to them. As the previous First Sergeant (1SG) of a senior level organization, me and the company commander dealt with this attitude quite frequently. This type of attitude, if left unchecked, can lower morale, destroy teamwork, and create a work environment that is unsuitable for the accomplishment of the unit's mission. In the Army we have standards that everyone must meet or exceed. While a standard may vary based on age or gender, it is not meant to vary based on rank or position. Failing to meet these standards is supposed to result in such things as: poor performance counseling, bars to reenlistment, additional training, entrance in to the overweight program, or substandard evaluation reports, as well as a multitude of other possible courses of action to raise a substandard Soldier's performance to acceptable levels. However, some commissioned officers and senior NCOs seem to believe that these "tools for improvement" are for the lower enlisted Soldiers and not applicable to them. Some of the same people who preach about enforcing the standards, holding Soldiers accountable for their actions, or "leading from the front" are the same people who are often delinquent in these same areas. In the pages that follow, I describe several situations in my previous units that overwhelmingly show this ethical dilemma and how it could have affected the unit.

Overweight Officers

As stated above, my previous assignment was as the 1SG of a high level company. This company consisted of a great deal of field grade officers as well as senior captains. A crazy thing happens to some officers when they achieve this level in the army. Some of them feel that

physical training is not needed for them. As a result, weight gain and lower physical fitness comes quickly to these individuals. When I first took over as the 1SG, the company had an Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) scheduled in one month. The commander placed it on the training schedule well in advance so every Soldier knew of this upcoming event. As I moved around the Regimental Headquarters observing the Staff Soldiers, I noticed a few officers who I thought had weight issues. As I talked to them about their sections' physical training (PT) programs they informed me that the Soldiers of their sections conducted physical training with their NCOs; but because of their jobs, they didn't worry too much about PT or any APFT. They also informed me that I did not need to worry about administering them an APFT because some of their fellow officers would grade them and submit the scorecards to me. I simply laughed and wished them luck on their weigh-in and APFT that they would take with the entire company, on the scheduled day, administered by me. I immediately prepared myself and the commander for the onslaught of angry staff officer e-mails that undoubtedly were headed our way. Instead of e-mails I was personally visited by a major and a captain expressing concern about my "new standard". I respectfully informed them my intent was to ensure that the weigh-in and APFT was administered to the entire company and that every Soldier, not just enlisted Soldiers, was held to the army standard. After the weigh-in and APFT, both of which were failed by the questionable officers, the Major informed me that he didn't believe it was right for his officer to be placed on the overweight program and additional PT program. This could hurt the officer's career and cause him embarrassment. Apparently, it was fine that he had two enlisted Soldiers in both programs because he didn't mention them during our discussion.

This type of attitude can wreck the morale of a section and cause Soldiers to doubt the sincerity of their leaders. Soldiers watch what their leaders do and how they perform. They know

if their leaders are maintaining the standards and if there are consequences for their leaders when they fail to achieve those standards. If there are no consequences, the Soldiers feel unfairly treated because they are being held to a different standard than their leaders. Shortly after our APFT, those officers who could not meet the standard began conducting additional physical training with their staff primary officers and under close supervision of the Executive Officer. Morale was good.

Senior NCO Attitudes

While I would love to believe that the attitude displayed in the earlier example is present only in the officer corps, this is sadly not the case. Several senior NCOs seem to also believe that they deserve special treatment and considerations, based on their rank, when it comes to adhering to established standards. One day our brigade Command Sergeant Major (CSM) called all of his battalion CSMs and me to his office for a meeting. During this meeting, he expressed his dissatisfaction with the Soldiers of the brigade violating uniform policies on post. He made it perfectly clear that the black beret was the standard for headgear on post unless the Soldiers were in the motor pool, on a special detail, or conducting training that the wear of the patrol cap was authorized. Every CSM and myself nodded agreement and left the room clearly understanding the emphasis the Brigade Command Sergeant Major wanted us to place on this area. Not more than 48 hours later, I went to pick up some mail at the post office and one of the CSMs who attended the BDE CSM's meeting walked into the post office wearing his patrol cap. I could not believe what I was seeing, so I went up to him and reminded him of the BDE CSM's guidance pertaining to standard on headgear. He became extremely upset with me and proceeded to inform me that he was a Command Sergeant Major and that he didn't have his beret with him at the time. He also explained to me that I should "watch my lane" and not worry about "his lane." A

week later, I saw him reprimanding a group of Soldiers from another battalion for the exact same reasons after they gave him the exact same excuse he provide me. Once again, this type of, “Do as I say, not as I do”, leadership attitude is detrimental to an organization. Whether it is a Command Sergeant Major who threatens to kick out all his Soldiers who are overweight and than refuses to step on the scales because of his own weight problems, or a Lieutenant Colonel who refuses to pay for a computer after spilling coffee on it, yet signs a Report of Survey making an enlisted Soldier pay for a computer he broke, Soldiers see these conflicting actions and lose trust in their command and unit.

Conclusion

Why do some leaders feel that certain rules and regulations don't apply to them? Why do some Field Grade Officers feel that accountability formations, physical training, or uniform standards are for only Soldiers with an “E” in front of their pay grade? I believe it is the same reasons that compel some senior NCOs to think the same way. For years they were made to conform to the standards of the army and they were constantly being watched by their leaders. Once these individuals reach positions of power and they are supervised less, they place less importance in achieving the standard themselves but believe that their Soldiers should still beheld accountable. Sure, they want enforce the standard and pretend to “lead from the front”, but few of these types of leaders seldom fool Soldiers and quickly lose the respect of their peers, and subordinates who actually strive to excel in their daily performance.

Do I believe this ethical issue runs rampant throughout the army? No, I believe that a very small percentage of senior leaders act in this manner. The majority of officers and senior NCOs have the highest of standards and this is why we achieved this level of responsibility. However, it only takes a few leaders in a unit, with the attitudes described earlier, to create an

atmosphere among Soldiers that can lead to low morale, low trust, and a less trained fighting force. We, as the senior leaders of the army, have the responsibility to set the example of “what right looks like.” We didn’t sign up to do our jobs only when it suits us or when someone higher ranking than us is watching. We signed up to be the best and train the best. Some leaders have lost sight of this fact. What they should not lose sight of is that their Soldiers watch them, critique them, and base their level of respect for them on their actions. Few of these young Soldiers will whole-heartedly follow a leader who has an attitude of “Do as I say, not as I do.”