

Running Head: THE GRAY AREA OF ETHICAL BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

Unethical decision making occurs on a daily basis and is usually done at a time when it feels justified. Today, more is being demanded of Soldiers than ever before, both in theater and in Garrison. Soldiers endure long deployments with consecutive rotations and are separated from loved ones for extreme periods of time. A thinly stretched Army combined with long separation from family can cause Ethical standards to turn gray and leadership denial to surface. Leadership must take action and demand Standards!

The Gray Area of Ethical Behavior

Introduction

We are living in a time of war when Soldiers and Army leaders are faced with long deployments away from family and friends. This creates the need for a larger military force in order to help alleviate the stress being placed on the men and women currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. With the Army being stretched thin and many Soldiers on their second and third tours, the need for more Soldiers is at a premium. How long can these Soldiers continue to be in theater and away from family before unprofessional relationships are created and ethical standards start to slip?

Personnel Strength

Today's war in Iraq and Afghanistan is making recruitment for the army difficult and therefore is placing great strain on our forces when it comes to filling shortages. These are times when ethical decisions can become difficult to make. Leaders find it easier to look the other way as oppose to cracking down on problems or even worse, to possibly separate a Soldier from their ranks. This is an area where ethical standards seem to turn gray. Under these conditions, many leaders begin to have a more flexible attitude when it comes to disciplining Soldiers and maintaining Standards. After all, things like PT standards obviously take a back seat, why can't other standards be flexible as well? Often, leadership does not have the time or energy to deal with many issues, and do not want to place any additional strain on the Soldiers who are already doing time in theater. Therefore, Soldiers get away with poor performance and low standards as a result of the army's need to maintain personnel strength.

Sexual Temptation

Another problem is that Soldiers and Leaders find that long deployments away from home can cause great temptation for establishing unprofessional relationships. Temptation is a natural instinct and relationships happen between Soldiers of inappropriate ranks or simply between married Soldiers of similar grades committing adultery. The mutual understanding of the conditions these Soldiers share seem to allow flexibility in ethical behaviors because of the conditions in which these Soldiers are living. Again, leaders at all levels are finding gray area in their ability to uphold and enforce ethical standard due to circumstances they too understand and are faced with. How can our senior leaders uphold and maintain ethical standards when they are facing the same temptations and practicing the same unethical acts as their Soldiers?

Moreover, Soldiers are not only committing inappropriate sexual acts but there are even cases of sexual assault while deployed. The ethical strains created from the long deployments cause Soldiers to compromise army values and their own personal values performing acts beyond the moral practices of non deployed Soldiers. Many of these Soldiers have their families back home worrying about their safety while they are in the combat zone committing adultery or worse. Numerous Soldiers, to include many senior leaders routinely access pornography through the internet during deployment as well. This only fuels the desire, urge, and temptation to engage in some type of sex. No one seems to want to talk about it. Leaders often refer to the behavior as a personal matter rather than one that affects unit morale and the well-being of troops. This creates just another gray area of unethical behavior and leadership denial.

Problems with ethical decisions are not limited to Soldiers in theatre; they also apply to Soldiers performing their duties at home stations as well.

My Ethical Experience

As a Senior Enlisted Bandleader, I will provide a completely non war related situation in which “Ethical Gray Area” received a lot of consideration on my part. The Army preaches the “Total Soldier Concept”. This is a great concept, however the nature of my career field is one that demands high maintenance for MOS proficiency. Though this is the case for the entire army, being a superb army musician requires hours of daily practice and dedication because playing a musical instrument is a highly perishable skill. Within the army band program, the greatest performers (Musicians) are typically not PT monsters. In most MOS’s Soldiers are cross trained and when one Soldier leaves another one simply fills the slot. This is not the case for Army Bands. The loss of a Soldier/musician creates a huge impact on mission readiness because Soldiers do not all play the same instrument. One example is a case I had with a Soldier named SSG Thomas.

This example presents a time when I was left questioning the very policies I am obligated and entrusted to enforce. As the Senior Enlisted Bandleader, one of my challenges is to maintain not only physically fit Soldiers who are technically and tactically proficient, but to search and find those few Soldiers who possess the unique skills or talent as true entertainers. Soldiers/Musicians with character and charisma provide the true essence of an Army band and musical product. Soldiers with this character combined with the instrumental dedication are detrimental to lose simply from poor PT performance. SSG Thomas was a phenomenal drummer, vocalist, and NCO truly dedicated to the mission and making the absolute best product possible. He had all these skills and they were combined with Charisma, humor and personality that was contagious throughout the unit. Additionally, SSG Thomas had four children and a wife. The Problem was however, that SSG Thomas struggled to pass his APFT run. Every opportunity

was given for him to succeed. I had a dynamite Soldier who was an absolute asset to the unit yet could not pass his run. I remember thinking, “Would the Army not benefit more by keeping this great Soldier”? Moreover, this Soldier had a family with four kids. What an ethical dilemma I was faced with. Was there not a way to protect this Soldier from the system? My solution right or wrong was to keep this Soldier. I knew the correct answer was that he simply did not meet the standard and therefore had to go yet, I decided to seek advice from the post Sergeant Major who also knew of SSG Thomas’s unique talents and value to his unit and the Army. His advice was to give SSG Thomas two more weeks to take an additional test. This was the gray area of ethics at its finest. Did we do the best thing? Did we set a double standard, was it worth it, and did it pay off? I knew it was wrong, but seemed like the only intelligent decision at the time. Miraculously, SSG Thomas passed that test and it was later discovered that he had a rare blood disease that had not been detected through earlier tests. This was preventing SSG Thomas from getting the Oxygen he needed to perform on his APFT run. Later, With Medical treatment he was consistently passing his APFT.

In Closing, SSG Thomas created a unique situation when choosing the unethical approach actually turned out for the best. The policies of the Army are not perfect and do not always present the most justified answers to a given situation, however these policies must be in place to promote standards.

The ethical problems in theatre present a major challenge to leaders. As a result, Soldiers and otherwise innocent individuals are being hurt, marriages are suffering, units are being rendered less effective, and ultimately, our ability to focus and fight the enemy is weakened. Leaders at all levels must have the courage and commitment to stand up and take action even in

times that truly test a person's moral strength. A leader must be the academy of self discipline and control to truly be an example, a role model, and a real leader.