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Ethics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

SGM Doni Jones

M - 05

CMDMC Cain

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My Task is to write a thought paper on Ethics. So, I decided to write an over view of ethics with a thought provoking twist at the end about the 21<sup>st</sup> century and what role the army will play as the this country moves forward. Although the assignment required no additional research, I found it necessary to do a little homework on the subject in order to clarify some of the terminology. Like most Americans, if asked, I could not define the difference between morals and ethics, the two were always one of the same.

Taken from the FM 6-22, I took the definitions of the following to give a better idea of what we are talking about when we say that something is unethical;

*Morals: the rules that govern our behavior*

*Values: affairs that are important to people*

*Virtues: Conditions for the good functioning of the society*

*Ethics: Are the morals, duties, values, and Virtues of society.*

Although definitions may vary, for the thoughts that follow, my use of these words will be as defined above. Now my thoughts, in no particular order. Here are some examples and comments on the thought of ethics and what we as a society to be ethical now and what was in the past.

As I look back throughout our nation's history, our ethical principles have changed tremendously. Not long ago, what our society considered acceptable treatment for blacks, would not only be illegal but also considered ethically unacceptable today. Now as you look at that principle of living in that society then, today it is unethical but in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is was ethical and ok by the standards of that time. Likewise, the violence and nudity on our televisions or a woman bearing a child out of wedlock are common occurrences today, but unspeakable only a short while back. My

point being, society's ethical standards are in constant change. Who knows what will be said one hundred years from now about our standards of behavior today or how acceptable behavior will be defined then. As we move forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we must adjust the values and beliefs to go along with the nation but never drop the core values of being good.

Another point of controversy is these liberal thinkers that hide behind their constitutional rights. I realize how that might sound, but freedom of speech and expression must have limits. We must not confuse "our right" with "what is right". Yes, you *have the right* to burn the American flag, but is that the *right thing to do*? The reporter who releases the story or pictures before confirmation of information or worse, notice of family? Then of course, there is the right to life activist that deliberately car bombs clinics? Yes, your right to expression, information and life is guaranteed, but these people are ethically mistaken in each case.

As the beliefs of the nation change, so will the beliefs of the people that serve in the Army. The beliefs that people had in the 1960s are not the same as we have today. Some of the beliefs that we have today are more conservative than the beliefs that were around forty years ago. Then as the baby boomers die off the ethics and beliefs of the nation will change also and thus will the Army.

The Army, which I am proud to be a part of has established a professional set of ethics that are based on Jewish-Christian beliefs that the country was founded on. So as we continue to grow as a nation into the 21<sup>st</sup> century the Soldiers of this great Army will not only be role models, but will set the ethical standards for the children of this great nation. As I pointed out earlier, these standards must continually evolve in order to

remain relevant. People have a tendency to equate a change in standards with an erosion of standards. Not so long ago, beer machines stood where our coke machines are now. Not so long ago, lunch at the NCO club meant something entirely different; knock down a couple cold ones while you watch the dancers. Could you imagine doing that today? No way!

Values will always change but the moral and virtues of this nation will always remain the same. I do not advocate a lower standard, only one that is relevant. One example that comes to mind is the Department of Defense Fraternalization Policy. This policy, which forbids any relationship between an officer and an enlisted person, is a perfect example of the caste system, where a person could not associate with another outside their own caste or social group. Not only is this a stupid policy, but one that will be too difficult to enforce. Ethical standards written in the “reliable 1950s” have changed and so must we. Some of these standards will be written regulations or policies, however many will not, and should not be written. Many are so basic, that writing them would be an insult, “*Treat others as you would like to be treated*”, “*be loyal*”, or “*be honest*”. Soldiers should not carry around a little card to remind them. These are rules to live by and should be imbedded in a person from the start of life and for those that do not have these qualities then they are not needed in the Army.

As I stated earlier, I am proud to be a part of the Army’s Ethical team. I will continue to teach my soldiers *the right thing*. As long as we are relevant in establishing our standards and once established, never compromise on them. As we strive for a higher standard, we must accept the fact that amongst us are some bad apples. We should be careful not to over react, as in the fraternization case. Instead, we must find these misfits,

weed them out and then drive on. Our professional standards must derive from those traditional set of values that have made us the most watched and admired organization in the world.

Therefore, as we, drive deeper into the 21<sup>st</sup> century we must wonder which of the values and beliefs will change and which will remain the same. We must wonder if the will be Army the setter of values and beliefs or will we just be a snap shot of the U.S. We must also wonder are the core values and beliefs that we hold so dear today be the same in the next ten years. Can we or should we be the standard setters for this country or should we be the reflection of the country.

#### Conclusion

So, as we keep moving along deeper and deeper into the 21<sup>st</sup> century you need to remember that an organization is only as strong as its people and its people are only as strong as their beliefs. So, make sure that you as a Soldier in the US Army uphold the values and beliefs of this great nation and keep setting the standard for the rest of the world.