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Unethical Behavior among Noncommissioned Officers and Officers: Values and Ethics

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Class 57

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3 January 2007

Abstract

Values and ethics are central to any organization. The Army Values firmly binds all members of the Army into a fellowship dedicated to the service of their Nation and their Army. This paper will discuss some unethical behaviors of noncommissioned officers and officers. These noncommissioned officers and officers placed their personal needs above the Army Values.

Unethical Behavior among Noncommissioned Officers and Officers

An effective unit, battalion, brigade, or division should encourage ethical behavior and discourage unethical behavior. The definition of behave ethically is to behave in a manner that is consistent with what is generally considered to be right or moral (Value and Ethic, 2006, p.8). Ethical behavior is the bedrock of mutual trust. I have been in the military for 23 years and the Army's position on ethics has not changed. The Army's noncommissioned officers and officers continue to display unethical behavior. Ethics drive how our Soldiers should behave. Ethical conduct must reflect genuine values and beliefs. Soldiers adhere to Army values because they want to live ethically and display those values because they know what is right. To be an ethical leader requires more than knowing the Army's values (FM 6-22, p 4-16). Leaders must be able to apply them to find moral solutions to diverse problem. Yet, the Army's noncommissioned officers and officers continue to display unethical behavior. Is it ethical behavior to sign another Soldiers' name on an NCOER without the Soldiers' knowledge? *Integrity* is doing what is right legally and morally all the time.

In April of 1990, I was a young sergeant stationed in the 128th Signal Company, 39th Signal Battalion. My NCOIC asked SGT Gallop to review his NCOER. SGT Gallop noticed the signature on the NCOER was not his. Here we have a senior noncommissioned officer whose *integrity* is in question. The NCOIC never informed SGT Gallop of the illegal signature on the NCOER. SGT Gallop informed the NCOIC that he was going to file an Inspector General complaint about someone signing his name without his knowledge. The NCOER was subsequently thrown out and redone.

On another occasion my Soldiers were complaining about how the same NCOIC was

picking up one of my Soldiers once she completed her shift at the message center. The Soldiers complained that the NCOIC was displaying favoritism to this particular female Soldier on my shift. The Soldiers informed me that they witnessed the NCOIC, on several occasions, picking up the Soldier after she completed her shift. I explained to them the dangers of making allegations based on their perception of the Soldier and the NCOIC. I also informed them that I would have a talk with the NCOIC on the matter. My Soldiers motivation toward their jobs was not the same as the situation continued with Soldier and NCOIC. I approached the NCOIC about the problem of picking up the Soldier after work. He informed me that nothing was going on between him and the Soldier. I asked the NCOIC to discontinue his practice of picking up the Soldier following her shift. He stopped for awhile but soon started back. The NCOIC and I began having problems concerning the Soldier. The Soldier took the Army Physical Fitness Test and failed. The Soldier was up for promotion to specialist and the NCOIC asked me if I wanted her promoted. My response to that question was no. Based on her failure of the APFT, I suggested to the NCOIC that instead of a promotion I recommend a flag. One week later, my NCOIC informed me that the Soldier had taken another APFT and passed. I knew this could not be true. The Soldier's time was 22 minutes, her age was 19 and that portion of the APFT had always been her weakest event. How one could recover so fast, was beyond me. He forwarded the PT card to the battalion and the Soldier was promoted. Once again my NCOIC's integrity was questionable.

Loyalty is a two way street, we must be loyal to our Soldiers if we expect them to be loyal to us. In both situations, I gave you some examples of my previous NCOIC; he did not demonstrate loyalty or integrity to the Soldiers, nor to his NCOs. We speak of leaders doing the right thing and taking care of Soldiers. I stood firm and disagreed with my NCOIC about his

behavior, but he did what he wanted to do because he was in charge. True to the oath we took, Army leaders are expected to do the right thing, for the right reasons at all times. This is why our subordinates follow us and count on us as their leaders. I relied on my leader to make good ethical decisions and he disappointed me.

The unethical use of power result in some Soldiers submitting to unwelcomed sexual advances, verbal or physical abuse, or requests for sexual favors in exchanged for favoritism. Leaders must understand that they are the ethical standard bearers for the Army Values everyday, on and off duty. Leaders must build an ethical command climate in their units that supports these Army's Values. Officer and NCOs must understand it is easy to abuse the power that comes with their position, but power must be used fairly and for the benefit of the organization. Major General Hale abused his power and his position by engaging in numerous sexual acts with the spouses of several of his immediate subordinates. The power and the position you hold does not eliminate you from being an ethical leader.

There are three qualities Noncommissioned Officers, Commissioned Officers or Warrant Officers must posses to make ethical decisions. The first ability is to recognize ethical issues and to reason through the ethical consequences of decisions. This means seeing the second and third order effects. The second ability is to look at alternative points of view, deciding what is right in a particular set of circumstances. The third ability is to deal with the uncertainty; making a decision on the best information available. For those whose choose the unethical behavior will discredit themselves as leaders and will lead to their downfall and the disruption of their unit.

Conclusion

Leaders must establish a good ethical command climate that will guide their unit down the right path. Ultimately, the quest for organizational transformation must begin with a

personal commitment from each noncommissioned officer, commissioned officer, and warrant officer to pursue moral excellence. Power is an essential element of leadership, when wrongly displayed, it can be very dangerous. Leaders should not tolerate unethical behavior and Soldiers should not be placed in positions because he or she feels that the leader in charge has the power to control them. Leaders have an obligation to teach, coach, counsel, and mentor Soldiers. If confronted with unethical behavior, it is our duty to let our Soldiers know how to report this type of behavior. Remember leaders are on display at all times. Soldiers will model them and do as they do. Hopefully, all leaders will be honorable men and women who set the ethical examples for Soldiers. We cannot simply talk about ethics and ethical behavior. We must set the example in everything we do.

America trust us to defend and support the Constitution of the United States. We must do so proudly, with honor and with a high sense of morality.

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