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The Hard Left or the Easy Right

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### Abstract

The decision to confront and report ethical dilemmas of your superiors, peers or subordinates for actions unbecoming a Soldier and in clear violation of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, often cause us to hesitate and question which direction we should move in. The absolute true fiber and being an exceptional role model is one who sets the example and never backs down even when faced with difficult situations and circumstances. If an individual choosing to do wrong, such as fraternizing with subordinates, is confronted and does not correct their actions, it is our duty to report ethical violations to correct ill behavior in the ranks. The ethics (morals) one is taught early in life are the precursor for decisions made later in life that defines what one truly stands for: the truth or something ethically wrong.

## The Hard Left or The Easy Right

One could say that ethics are not learned until one becomes a member of an organization that strives to set standards and instill a sense of purpose and direction in an individual. I believe that role models in our lives have no room for ethical violations. In fact every individual that is or aspires to be a role model will in deed face an ethical dilemma along their way. The ultimate test of how great or good of a role model he or she becomes is based on the decision they choose to resolve a dilemma.

As a member of the United States Army, each Soldier is revered as a role model for the nation, regardless of where we are stationed. We represent the best of America wherever we travel, reside and are stationed. The Department of Defense counts on each of us serving with distinction and pride. We are expected to live the Army values and emulate the Noncommissioned Officers (NCO) creed, if we are true NCOs. The creed sets the tone of why an NCO is the true role model I wish to discuss. It embodies the essence of what all enlisted Soldiers strive to become upon entering the NCO Corps: professionals, Noncommissioned Officers, LEADERS.

As NCOs grow and mature in the ranks, they are mentored, coached, taught and instructed with the highest degree of respect and proficiency by others of equal or greater rank. When the role model skillfully directs their pupil, the greatest care to attention to detail is taken when the pupil remembers and implements what was learned.

As a new drill sergeant on the trail, trainees looked to me to train them, as well as for guidance and direction on a daily basis. Like the trainees, I looked to the senior drill sergeant, also my battle buddy, for input, training, guidance and direction on my role as a drill sergeant.

However, within six months of assuming my duties as a drill sergeant I am faced with a dilemma regarding my battle buddy; the individual that is my role model.

When I arrived in the company the primary female drill sergeant informed me that the platoon I was being assigned had some issues. She never specifically told me what they entailed, but advised me to watch my battle buddy and the relationship he had formed with some of the trainees, specifically the female Soldiers. Our office was positioned on the second floor where only male trainees lived. I found it odd that one evening when I returned from school formation two female Soldiers were in our office alone with my battle buddy. I thought nothing of it and recovered my things and departed the office as he talked to the Soldiers. As the week passed I noticed the same two females were once in the office alone without my battle buddy on an all male floor. I knew I was the only female authorized on the floor without a male escort. I escorted the Soldiers downstairs and informed my battle buddy it would not happen again. It caused a heated battle, but he stated he would ensure it did not happen anymore.

A few weeks went by and the First Sergeant asked if I had noticed any suspicious behavior from my battle buddy. I informed the first sergeant nothing that would cause any trouble. The first sergeant proceeded to inform me of possible misconduct between my battle buddy and a trainee(s). I assured the first sergeant it was untrue and he just asked that I watch my battle buddy and not allow him to get in trouble. I later confronted my battle buddy and informed him to be careful and not be alone with female Soldiers to avoid trouble or perception of what looked inappropriate. He said, "I am good and nothing is going on." We departed and conducted normal evening pickup of the trainees from the schoolhouse.

A week later, I entered our office to find my battle buddy holding one of the Soldiers I had previously warned him to not be alone with in our office. He informed me the Soldier had

received a Red Cross message and was upset and came to talk to him about it. I excused myself from the office. I went and sat in the other female drill sergeant office talked with her about what I had witnessed. I asked her for her advice, because I wanted to inform the first sergeant right away of what I saw. She convinced me that without evidence both my battle buddy and the Soldier could stand against what I thought I saw. I did not inform the first sergeant and returned to my office.

Upon returning to my office, my battle buddy said he was going to an appointment and asked if I could cover his last formation of the day. I assured him it was taken care of and he departed without saying anything about what I witnessed. He rushed out of the office after I said I would cover the formation. I looked out the window and notice him driving out of the parking lot. I turned to see another drill sergeant enter my office asking where my battle buddy was going. I looked back out the window to see the same Soldier getting in his car at the far side of the parking lot. I waited for my battle buddy to return to talk with him about the entire situation.

While I waited for my battle buddy to return, I thought about just turning my head and letting things stay as they were. My thoughts were full of indecisiveness and fear. I had witnessed my role model and battle buddy violate the Army regulation governing drill sergeant trainee relationship and behavior. I was a new drill sergeant and did not think anyone would believe what I saw if I reported it. I quickly typed and printed a memorandum for record describing everything I witnessed in detail. A few days later he entered the office and stated he was being sent home. I said alright and asked him about the events I witnessed. I told him to tell the first sergeant or else I would. He said no and I told him I would allow him to tell by the morning or I would tell the first sergeant.

The dilemma I was in felt awful. I was afraid of prosecution for failing to do what I had been trained to do in drill sergeant school when a drill sergeant does something wrong and no one reports the behavior. I feared losing my rank and being called an accomplice or even worse a snitch. When I went downstairs, my battle buddy was in the office with the first sergeant. I felt relieved only to find out he was just asking first sergeant to take leave for the next few days to take care of a family situation. I ran to my office and retrieved the memorandum I had typed and brought it to the first sergeant. As we were talking, the commander told him they had to go see the battalion commander and Command Sergeant Major. The First Sergeant told me to hang around and we would talk when he returned. When they returned, I was informed I would have to take care of the platoon alone until I got a new battle buddy. I was sad at the outcome, but yet relieved when the truth came out in full detail regarding the behavior. Others applauded the stand I took, but I felt bad for his family, the scare it left on my unit and our Soldiers.

This ethical dilemma in the middle of my career taught me a valuable lesson. It taught me that as a role model I must always strive to set the ethical standard regardless of the outcome. The lives of my superiors, peers, fellow NCOs, and other Soldiers depend on my choosing to make the correct decision when placed in such a dilemma. The role we play in another individual's life could make or break their ethical decision making process now or later in life, if they know we can or could make a difference by doing what is right.

In conclusion, ethical behavior as a role model in our lives is forged when our parents began teaching us the difference between right and wrong. As we mature in life, we determine how we implement the ethical character instilled in us by our parents when we encounter situations like the one I described above. When a true role model is confronted with such ethical decisions, will he or she demonstrate the correct actions to apply? As senior NCOs we are role

models whether we choose to be or not. We are the standard bearers of ethics and the Army values. We must always do what is right and strive to never fail a Soldier or a battle buddy, regardless of the internal fears we may face.