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Class 58

Abstract

The seven Army Values are enduring qualities all Soldiers must strive to make part of their professional and personal lives. As Soldiers we cannot pick and choose where and when these values best serve our interests. Soldiers and leaders must make a conscience effort to confront the ethical issue of adultery and realize that the social acceptance of, and turning a blind eye to the practice of adultery is contrary to the seven Army Values.

“What goes TDY stays TDY.” All but the newest recruits know the connotation of this phrase. Reflect upon your own experience the first time you went TDY with a group of your peers and you heard the phrase for the first time. Or maybe you have experienced an unaccompanied non-combat tour, where “TDY” took on a new meaning, Temporarily Divorced for a Year. Without question you knew someone that subscribed to this mentality. Some however do not need a special exemption to commit adultery. You may laugh, you may cry or like many in today’s society feel indifferent depending upon, relative to the fence, where you sit.

It is estimated that more than 50 percent of all married or previously married personnel in the Army have either committed adultery or were the victim of adultery at some point during their marriage. I derive the previous statement based upon the fact that the Army is a cross section of American society and from the following quote. “Recent studies reveal that 45-55% of married women and 50-60% of married men engage in extramarital sex at some time or another during their relationship.” (Atwood & Schwartz, 2002 - Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy) The purpose of this paper is to show that as leaders when one of our peers or subordinates engages in the act of adultery and it comes to our attention we have an obligation in keeping with the seven Army Values to take action to address this ethical problem.

Some may argue that what ever two consenting adults do “in the bedroom” is none of anyone’s business but their own; I disagree. Unlike the Army’s Homosexual policy of “don’t ask don’t tell” I believe adultery poses a greater risk to disrupting good order and discipline of a unit. I do not have an issue with individuals wishing to express their sexual freedom, however when two individuals enter into the union of marriage both individuals agree to adhere different set of rules, if not what is the purpose of marriage. Here lies the basis of my argument. Like the bonds of Soldiers in a unit two individuals in a marriage base their relationship upon trust and

friendship and nothing destroys a team faster than a breakdown of trust. To understand my point of view I must first define adultery. According to dictionary.com adultery is “voluntary sexual activity (as sexual intercourse) between a married man and someone other than his wife or between a married woman and someone other than her husband.”

(<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/adultery>)

As Soldiers we proclaim to live by the seven Army Values: Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage. These values apply to all conduct on and off duty. I submit that an individual that engages in the act of adultery tramples upon all seven of the Army Values. First, when two individuals marry they pledge their loyalty to each other. In the Army Soldiers pledge their loyalty to the constitution, their organization and to those with whom they serve. Secondly depending on an individual’s beliefs, religious or otherwise, each partner in a marriage has specific duties, whether as the primary provider of resources or as the primary care giver when children are concerned a sense of duty is part of the marriage contract. As Soldiers we have many well defined duties and others that are inherent. Our actions on and off duty may affect our ability to carry out our duties. The same applies to marriage. If one were to apply the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) to the marriage life adultery could fall within the realm of dereliction of duty.

Respect is something both given and received. We earn respect through our actions and we can be disrespectful through our actions. How can an individual that commits adultery possibly argue they have respect for his or her spouse, and how can that individual expect their spouse to have respect for them. Like trust, once respect is lost it is very hard to regain. Once it is know by members of an organization that a fellow Soldier has engaged in an adulterous relationship they have without question lost a measure of respect within that organization for that

individual and possibly the unit, as is the case of CPT Mike Myers a former Fort Huachuca Chaplain. The unit commander of his former unit had this to say “There’s a stigma and embarrassment that goes along with the unit.” (Little, 2007) This leads to the forth Army Value, Selfless Service. The act of adultery is nothing more than a selfish act of sexual gratification which ultimately leads to the complete abandonment of the last three Army Values; Honor, Integrity and Personal Courage.

Many individuals recite the traditional marriage vows to “love, honor and cherish,” on their wedding day. I do not ever remember attending a marriage ceremony where vows were exchanged and the couple also mentioned temporary exemptions. Looking at one of the many definitions of honor we can find the following: “honor refers to the highest moral principles and the absence of deceit or fraud, honor denotes a fine sense of, and a strict conformity to, what is considered morally right or due.” (dictionary.com) Adultery regardless what popular culture is willing to accept as a “norm” is morally wrong. As a nation based upon the belief in God, as noted in our oath of enlistment or office and the words “So help me God” one cannot arbitrarily disregard the biblical command of “Thou shall not commit adultery.” Without our honor what do we have?

If a Soldier were to succumb to a lapse of judgment during a moment weakness, would the individual have the Integrity and Personal Courage to admit to their spouse they committed adultery? I would venture to say that the vast majority of individuals that commit adultery would never voluntarily admit it to their spouse. Of those who have committed adultery and were confronted by their spouse or someone else the majority would lie and say nothing ever happened or they would attempt to misrepresent the facts. An example of this is evident when our former commander in chief President Bill Clinton perjured himself during his impeachment

when he denied having a sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky. If a Soldier does not have the integrity or personal courage to face the consequences of their actions at home with their spouse, an individual they vowed to “love, honor, and cherish . . . till death” why would it be so hard to believe that the same Soldier would act any different “on duty” if confronted with a circumstance where their integrity or personal courage came under question.

Personal courage is the ability to stand in the face of danger or adversity and confront your fears; this applies to both physical and moral courage. Admitting we made a mistake can be the ultimate test of our character; it takes courage to admit we were wrong. Teams can become stronger during times of adversity; the same is true for both Army organizations and marriages. However the habitual disregard for team members trust and making the same “mistakes” over and over again will destroy the team. Adultery is one of the top reasons stated for many divorces, not only in our country but in a majority of other countries as well.

As elite members of society we have a moral obligation to uphold the highest moral standards. It is often a general consensus amongst various groups in our society that as a nation we currently lack the moral foundation to survive as a nation. With laws on the books in most states and within our own UCMJ outlawing adultery, the crime often goes unpunished unless “the conduct is harmful to military order and discipline, or if it is deemed so disgraceful as to discredit the service.” as with the case of an Army Chaplain who was court- martialed and sentenced on 22 September, 2007 for adultery, conduct unbecoming and cyber stalking. If we wish to contribute to society we must address the problem of adultery using the tools available to Army leaders: counseling statements, evaluation reports, non-judicial punishment and when necessary court-martial proceedings.

By no means do I advocate a zero tolerance policy towards adultery but the ethical problem of not recognizing adultery as a contributing factor to our moral decay must be addressed. What kind of statement are we making to our young Soldiers when we allow “What goes TDY stays TDY” and the Temporarily Divorced for a Year mentality to go unchecked? I challenge leaders at all levels to live up to the seven Army Values, but especially Personal Courage, we must use the tools we have available to us to correct inappropriate conduct. The best tool leaders can use our own personal conduct.

For the sake of those that advocate “what happens between two consenting adults” is not a crime I invoke the “don’t ask don’t tell” mentality. However like the homosexual conduct policy if a Soldier’s adulterous conduct is made known through general knowledge, observation or disclosure then appropriate action must be taken.

References

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