

Ethics Thought Paper

“Senior NCOs must lead by example”

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What are ethics? How am I to write a thought paper on ethics, if I do not know if you know the meaning? It is defined by Webster College Dictionary as “the system or code of moral of a particular person, religion, group, or profession.” Although definitions may vary, in my opinion, ethics are principles we follow that lead us to do the right thing. Throughout my military career, I have been faced with ethical violations from Basic Training to now, as a Senior Noncommissioned Officer. I will express my transformation to lead me to thoughts on ethics in the military.

When I first come in the Army in 1987, at a time when basic training was segregated between males and females. The Drill Sergeant would constantly tell us to stay away from the male Soldiers in the other company. They felt as if, having contact with them would distract us from what we needed to achieve in basic training. I knew of several females who would sneak outside our area of operation to meet the male Soldiers under the stairways, in the laundry room, or in the port-a-potties. One day our company was at the shoppette for PX privileges, accompanied by the Drill Sergeant of course, and a male Soldier came up to me, slipped a love letter in my hand and walked away. I looked around to see if anyone observed what had took place. Of course several of his and my peers were watching. I opened the letter, read it and immediately took it to my Drill Sergeant. This was the first time I was placed in an ethical dilemma in my military career.

The Army’s position concerning ethics has not changed despite violations by many Soldiers. We are taught, when faced with an ethical decision to use the seven Army Corps values as your guide, which are the foundation of our organization. Most of us had them instilled in us by our parents, who had tremendous influence over how they were prioritize. In

the course of prioritizing, it can be the best, or at times, the worst factor when trying to make the right decision.

Everyday in many different arenas leader's ethics are challenged. Many dilemmas demand our attention, and no two are alike. Leaders should do the right thing when no one is watching. Doing the right thing is not always easy, but to fulfill your duty, maintain your integrity and serve honorably, you must be able to apply fair reasoning. They must set the example in their actions and Soldiers will look to them for an example that they can follow. Leaders cannot afford to live by any type of double standards. This includes their own actions and as well as how they deal with actions of subordinates who make mistakes.

I was faced with another ethical dilemma about twelve years ago when I was an E5 stationed in the 2nd ID, Korea. My NCOIC was a SFC who was on an unaccompanied tour away from his family. Although his financial situation at home was demanding, he was forced to send a large portion of his money to his family. At times, he was left with barely enough money for his personal affairs, such as, personal hygiene items or money for eating. My NCOIC, who was the Fund Manager of the Consolidated Chaplain's Fund, would use the Chaplain's Fund to purchase food in order to eat. I knew this because I was the Fund Clerk. It was my duty to process receipts; prepare income, and disbursement documents while maintaining the records of the fund. I was the primary operator and management of the system.

This behavior by my NCOIC placed me in a compromising position, where as, I did not know what to do. I had mixed feelings about the situation, feelings such as, frustration, resentment, remorseful, and pity. My frustrations grew because he did not allow me to fulfill my obligation because he was doing something wrong. I resented him because he did not think I would find out. I was afraid to tell anyone, even though I had lost respect for him, assuming that

if the Chaplain finds out what he was doing, I felt, he would think that I had a part in this situation. In addition, I felt pity on him because he degraded the position he held as the Manager of the Chaplain's Fund.

Perhaps I felt these feelings because, this leader dishonored his character but in fact I could not respect him. Or maybe, because as a junior noncommissioned officer, I wanted to be a good leader and I felt I had more character than this Soldier. A Soldier, who was my senior leader that should be mentoring, training and teaching me, who failed to re-evaluate what it was that made him a professional. This leader's behavior made me reflect on my values, beliefs, and morals. Even though I never said anything to ruin his career, I promised myself I would never place my subordinate in a compromising situation.

Another ethical dilemma that occurred three or four years ago by a Soldier in the Chaplain's Corps. This time it was a Chaplain (Colonel) who had stolen monies from the Chaplain's Fund. He had stolen over \$25,000 by asking the Funds Clerk to write a check to him. Claiming he was the OIC of a religious organization, that was unable to open an account under their organization's name; he needed to open an account in his name on their behalf. Once discovered the dept had grown to over \$500,000. He did this because he had a gambling faddish. Later the Chaplain was sentenced to six months in jail and reduced to the grade of E1. The behavior of this leader not only mocked the positions he held, prestigious positions such as the Division and Installation Chaplain. Having achieved the special skills badges and tabs he wore, from Airborne, Ranger to Special Forces he earned the trust of many Paratroopers and Soldiers alike.

Leaders are the ethical standard bearer for the Army's values and they must live these values everyday. They must build the ethical command climate in their units that supports these

values. In addition, they must ensure they set the proper example themselves and determine how they will reflect those values. If you attack what is wrong and uphold what is right, an ethical climate in the unit has been set. A leader must exercise good judgment at all times. Soldiers must feel like that they can come to them for advice on the ethical decisions they face. They must feel that they can do this without fear of punishment, but with the feelings that the leaders will help with the decision making process and be there for them.

Now as a Senior Noncommissioned Officer, I see how ethics are constantly being challenged in this organization. Having been a Drill Sergeant as well as an Officer Basic Course Instructor placed me in a position to learn and understanding that my responsibility was to instill values and beliefs on to my Soldiers. Having had this training, I often questioned those leaders who had an average Soldier who all of a sudden performed exceptional on the Army Physical Fitness Test. Additionally, I've noticed an overweight Soldier who was never placed on the Weight Control Program. Regardless of the situation, I will always do the right thing. I will ensure that I will NEVER put my Soldiers in a compromising situation or lead the "Do as I say, not as I do" profession.

Knowing what your values are, you must tell your Soldiers what their values should be. If your personal values don't reflect the Army's values, then their values won't either.