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Recruiting America's Army; an Ethical Dilemma

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United States Army Recruiters face ethical dilemmas on a daily basis. Sustaining the strength for America's Army is a demanding and challenging mission and it takes a person of moral character to accomplish this mission.

The majority of ethical dilemmas usually arise when a recruiter is either attempting to qualify someone for enlistment or when they are offering a specific option to get someone to agree to enlist. Suppose for a moment that you are an Army Recruiter and you are talking to a potential recruit about life in the Army. The potential recruit lives in a two room, bug infested, floorless shack in Anywhere, USA. He has a wife and two children. He does not have a job and you can tell the family lives in poverty. The applicant is fully qualified to enlist in the Army except he has an open traffic ticket that requires him to pay a \$75.00 fine. He tells you he would like to enlist in the Army and provide a better life and future for his family but he does not have the money to pay the fine. You know that he would make a great Soldier and the Army would be the best thing for his family, but the regulation specifically prohibits you from paying the fine or interfering with the legal system. What do you do? Or, suppose for a moment that you are an Army Recruiter in Anywhere, USA. You are talking to a potential recruit about life in the Army and the applicant tells you that he will enlist if you can guarantee that he can be a Military Policeman (MP). You know that he is not qualified to be a MP because of his previous law violations. Do you tell him the truth or do you tell him that he can change his job when he's in the Army?

Recruiters face dilemmas like these everyday. However, recruiting during a sustained conflict provides new moral and ethical issues that recruiters must confront when recruiting someone for the Army. Prior to the war on terrorism, most of our recruiters lacked combat experience. Today, the majority of them served in either Iraq or Afghanistan. They are now

confronting ethical issues such as public anti-war opinions and their own personal beliefs about the war.

A former SGT that served in Iraq and is the co-founder of Iraq Veterans against the War, talks to high school students across the country as a counter recruiter. She tells high school students that the recruiter will tell you anything you want to hear, whether it's true or not, to get you to join. She also tells female students that she and other female Soldiers were sexually harassed and many of her friends were raped by fellow Soldiers. (Parents in Colorado Springs take on Military Recruiters, 2005)

A former recruiter related that she encouraged young people to enlist so they could get an education. Many did so for that reason. Her conscience was bothering her though, because she said that many of those who she recruited were sent to Iraq and she knew some had been killed there. She said it is hard to live with that. She questioned whether she should have presented the potential danger of serving more openly when she was a recruiter, rather than using education as a carrot to entice them to serve, assuming they would realize there could be danger to face. As a Christian, she confessed that she didn't think she had always presented military service with integrity because she was afraid that young people might not sign up if she did. (Christian Military Recruiters Ponder the Ethics of Bending the Truth, 2005)

With recruiting goals seemingly out of reach for the present, recruiters, who are selected from among the best junior leaders in the noncommissioned officer corps, are experiencing high levels of stress. More and more, they appear to be bending the rules to meet their goals. (Edwards, 2005)

Recruiters must deal with these dilemmas and make a conscience decision to do what's best for the United States Army. However, recruiters do not always choose the "hard right" over the "easy wrong". There are many instances when a recruiter chooses to do something illegal,

immoral, or unethical. Recruiting leaders must constantly remind them of the Army Values and their commitment to uphold the tradition of the recruiting motto “Recruit with Integrity”.

On May 20, 2005, the United States Army Recruiting Command (USAREC) conducted a stand-down day to focus on Army Values. During a press conference, MG Rochelle, the USAREC Commander, stated that the very reason for focusing this as a values stand-down day was to get away from the possibility of relativism with respect to what’s right and what’s wrong. Our values are immutable. I could easily have said we’re going to have a recruiting ethics stand-down day. I could easily have said we’re going to have a recruiting practice stand-down day. But what I said was; we’re going to have a values stand-down day, to take a look at who we are as an institution and what we represent by way of an institution. There is no relativism there. It’s either right or it’s wrong. (Army Recruiting Commander Briefing, 2005)

Ethical choices may be between right and wrong, shades of gray, or two rights. Some problems are centered on an ethical dilemma, requiring special consideration of what is most ethical. (FM 6-22 Army Leadership, 2006, pp. 4-17) Soldiers are taught ethical reasoning throughout their career and as a former senior instructor at the United States Army Recruiting and Retention School, I know first hand that a new recruiter is taught the difference between right and wrong. During their first week of recruiting school, they receive additional training on leadership, values, and the warrior ethos. During their third week, they are taught Enlistment Standards and Recruiting Improprieties. These classes specifically focus on what is right and what is wrong when recruiting someone for the Army.

In many instances, the Army Recruiter is the only representation of the United States Army in Hometown, USA. It is unfortunate that a few bad decisions made by a few bad people give the impression that all recruiters are liars and they will do anything to get someone to enlist in the Army. So, why does a recruiter choose to make the wrong decision when recruiting

someone for the Army? Is it because he or she has never failed at anything in their career? Is it because their career has been threatened by someone in their chain of command? Or is it because the “easy wrong” outweighed the “hard right”?

Ultimately, it is the individual’s responsibility to make the right decision when confronted with an ethical dilemma. All of the training, counseling, and mentoring that a Soldier receives will not guarantee the right decision will be made at the moment of truth. Only a person of moral character will do the right thing, all of the time, and when no one is looking. It takes a person of moral character to recruit for America’s Army.

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