

Ethics in Military Leadership

M04

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### Abstract

I believe Army ethics can be defined within the Army values that guide a Soldier. It is important that we train our Soldiers and lead by example. Making ethical decisions can be one of the toughest types of decisions a Soldier will have to make. When faced with ethical decisions Soldiers must have a solid foundation built upon the Army values. Soldiers have to understand standing up for their beliefs may put them in an ethical dilemma. By talking with and mentoring our subordinates in the Army values, we are giving them a fighting chance in making the right decision.

## Ethics in Military Leadership

Ethics are the foundation of our professional army, some say the corner stone.

Traditionally the military has set the standard of ethical behavior. Society often promotes military leaders because of their morally correct ethical behavior. As a military institution I believe the Army exemplifies ethical behavior. It is the foundation our many houses are built upon.

Within the Army we strive for excellence in ethics, immortalizing the Army values, loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage. In truly assimilating into the United States Army all soldiers make an unwritten but binding agreement to live ethical lives. Soldiers are faced daily on the battle field with choices that will affect the perception of the entire Army and what it stands for. By understanding how the army values and ethics are intertwined we can better prepare ourselves as future role models. Unethical conduct can destroy the progress the military has made from Soldiers sacrificing their lives in a hope of a better nation.

In making ethical decisions some say it is taking the easy wrong over the hard right. I challenge that with making good ethical decisions, means taking the hard wrong over the easy right. What I mean by this is most discussions I had with other leaders, they have always said it is always easy to know what the right thing to do is, and it is just hard to do it. I object because if the right answer comes easy, than no deliberate thought process was involved. I believe sometimes when considering a dilemma the correct answers may not seem as the right way to do things. An example could be, a young soldier comes to your unit and has received a cash enlistment bonus, as his leader you know that he wants to purchase some high value items. It is easy to let him spend his money as he wishes, the wrong thing to do is to tell the soldier what he will or will not purchase. This is what I mean by a hard wrong over an easy right. As good

leaders I think we owe it to our Soldiers to make them fiscally responsible. Sometimes it may take a hard wrong to reinforce the values that set the United States Army apart from civilian organizations.

Army ethics can be defined within the army values. Upon enlisting into the Army, one's ideas and beliefs are suddenly challenged. One's social norms and ignorance with prejudices have shaped and defined one's character. As a sub group within the American culture one is not truly a Soldier until he or she has made the conscious decision to live and uphold the values and ethics.

Loyalty is commitment to our nation, the Army, and our unit. A soldier takes an oath to protect the constitution from all enemies foreign or domestic. We can find ourselves in ethical dilemmas upholding this commitment. Leaders may find themselves issuing orders to subordinates that will in turn have the Soldiers questioning their loyalties. One example could be ordering Soldiers to protect the rights of bigots, sexist, and racists that are legally voicing their opinions through protests. New Soldiers because of their inexperience may find it difficult or impossible to define the limits of their loyalty in such situations. Leaders must be aware of the decisions they make and how they affect the beliefs of those implementing them, Soldiers will always be loyal to the nation, the Army and the unit as long as they are given the chance to do so.

Duty is fulfilling your obligations. Soldiers sometimes emulate leaders by not taking responsibility for their actions. As leaders we must always be ethical in our duty. When leaders make a decision, they must accept responsibility and live by it whether it was the best choice or not. We have to show our Soldiers that as long as we do our duty and are ethical in our implementation it does not matter if the outcome can later be determined as not the best course of action. This will install a sense of duty by awarding initiative and giving credit to subordinates

for success.

The third Army value is respect. Respect is treating others as they should be treated. This is one of the most difficult values to indoctrinate into young Soldiers. A young Soldier sees respect as being treated equally with all other Soldiers regardless of rank. All leaders should spend time educating new Soldiers on the difference between respect and protocol. Sometimes I believe Soldiers are confused between treating higher ranking leaders differently as showing them more respect. If leaders would continue to be straight forward with Soldiers on protocol within ranks some of this should be eliminated. By the nature of our institution we develop better citizens respectful with truly ethical beliefs. When a mother comes to see her Soldier graduate basic training, she routinely reminds the drill sergeants of how amazed she is with her son or daughter. It is not the Soldier showing respect to his or her family by being afraid of the consequences the drill sergeant will bare for the lack of respect, but a genuine belief in our values.

Selfless-Service is putting another need before your own. It is human nature to want to progress and be rewarded. Soldiers have an ethical responsibility to put the needs of others first always. Selfless-Service will cause ethical conflicts in the simple process of just getting promoted. Leaders must continue to better educate themselves through every educational opportunity possible. Leaders must also continue to enforce their subordinates to increase their educational level. Ethical dilemmas always seem to arise due to this conflict. All Soldiers regardless of rank should maintain their education and seek promotion as personnel goals and for the betterment of the United States Army. Soldiers should never accomplish tasks for the sole purpose of personnel gain or self gratification. Leaders will often use selfless-service vignettes to illustrate Soldiers sacrificing their lives in war. Soldiers understand selfless-service in war and we as leaders should strive to prepare them to be future leaders as deployed and non-deployed

Soldiers.

Honor is living the Army values. The ability to live the Army values is probably one of the most difficult ethical behaviors we as Soldiers strive for. Honor can not come and go as we wish. It solidifies our total belief in a concept. As a society this concept is not institutionally ingrained as a way of life. When I look back at my time spent as a child, I remember the pledge of the allegiance, the national anthem, appreciation of our elders, respect for law enforcement officers and grace. All though these were minor instances of beliefs and values, it did enforce a concept in becoming a responsible citizen and having honor within our families and our communities.

Integrity is doing what is right legally and morally. If there is one value I believe most leaders lack, it is integrity. Leaders must have the moral character to always tell the truth. It was once said the Army is a zero defect institution. It is in my opinion some leaders have decided there are no defects. Leaders will routinely give Soldiers and subordinate leaders praise for poor work. It seems to me leaders do not find defects because they lack the moral fortitude to identify and correct substandard Soldiers performance. Ethically it is repulsive that leaders are relieved of duty and moved out of position of authority and saved from a career ending evaluation.

Personal Courage is facing fear, danger and adversity. Historically Soldiers will face their fears and overcome them. We as leaders must ensure we set the example. It can be as simple as demonstrating the slide for life or as complex as taking the fight to the enemy. Leaders should never become so rigid in their beliefs they never show their feelings to their subordinates. Subordinates should see that all Soldiers regardless of rank have fear sometimes but overcome them.