

Running head: LEADER'S INTEGRITY WHILE RECOMMENDING SOLDIERS

Leader's Integrity While Recommending Soldiers for Promotion

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Abstract

Even though promotion boards are selecting junior NCOs for promotion during deployment, some commanders' integrities are questionable because they are recommending Soldiers who do not meet the promotion standards. One of the tools commanders and first sergeants are using to maintain junior Soldiers in their unit are promoting them. Soldiers can conditionally promote to junior NCOs ranks without the proper schooling. In other cases, commanders are blind folded or completely ignoring other requirements when they are signing the recommendation paperwork. This situation is affecting the readiness of our units, while deployed, and the motivation of other Soldiers. Some commanders believe this action inspires Soldiers, but they do not forecast the consequences it will create later on the battlefield.

Leader's Integrity While Recommending Soldiers for Promotion

In today's Army at war, one of the biggest challenges leaders face is how to continue fighting in combat with a total volunteer force. Promotion of junior Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) is one of the incentives commanders are using to retain and compensate junior enlisted Soldiers. However, when commanders and first sergeants recommend Soldiers for promotion knowing they do not meet the requirements for advancement they have left their integrity in question. NCOs are responsible for the readiness and effectiveness of the Army and their units. How ethical is bending the rules or lowering the standards when we understand it could create a problem in the future? The purpose of this paper is to address how the promotion of unqualified Soldiers could benefit or affect the readiness of our units and Soldiers. We consider integrity as one of the most important values within the seven Army values. Doing what is right, legally and morally is part of the principles of being a good leader. As senior NCOs, the key elements for our performance are integrity and honesty. Nevertheless, where do we draw the line and stress the difference between right or wrong.

Due to current operations, and other factors, the Army has changed the requirements to promote conditionally Soldiers without the proper qualification of their noncommissioned officer education system (NCOES). Soldiers deployed in support of current operations can request a waiver for promotion. Once they return to their home-station, they have a specific time window to complete the required schooling to retain their rank. The current regulation allows Soldiers to be promoted to sergeant without the Warrior Leader Course and to staff sergeant without the Basic Non-Commissioned Officer Course. Another factor contributing to this situation is when Soldiers attend any NCOES, they are not sent back to their units because they do not pass their Army physical fitness test (APFT) or do not meet the weight standards.

At the end of the course Soldiers only receive a marginal rating on their service school academic evaluation report which will give them the schooling qualification for their current or next higher grade. Now these three key factors: NCOES, APFT, and weight, open the window for promotions without completing or meeting the appropriate requirements. When a Soldier submits a packet for consideration for promotion, their commander signs and certifies Soldier meets the APFT requirement for promotion. If the Soldier is in a weight control program, the regulation clearly states that the commander cannot recommend them for promotion. Now, how is it possible that we are still selecting Soldiers for promotion without meeting the standards? As we, stated earlier commanders and first sergeants are using the promotion system as retention tools to sustain Soldiers in the Army.

This is an example of how a promotion occurred. During my deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), I witnessed this situation. We deployed with the idea we were going to be back home in six months. After all the changes in theater, and when they implemented the one-year boots on the ground rule, Soldiers motivation decreased. Our battalion command sergeant major (CSM) announced a promotion board for junior NCOs, to boost their morale. The criterion for that board was very slim because most of the Soldiers did not have an updated record and all of the required paperwork was not available for their packets. Some Soldiers had the opportunity to contact their families, and they received their records before the board convened, while others didn't. My commander's and first sergeant's goal was to have as many packets as we could. They believed that promotion was the only way they could bring motivation back to the Soldiers in our unit. After holding a few junior enlisted boards, all junior enlisted Soldiers in my unit were promoted by the end of our deployment. All Soldiers in the rank of specialists were promoted to sergeant and all sergeants were promoted to staff sergeants.

The number of NCOs in our unit increased drastically and those promoted were happy because of the extra money. Some of them were enjoying it more because they did not have the responsibilities attached to the rank. The difficulty this mass promotion created in our unit was that some Soldiers promoted to staff sergeants did not possess the knowledge or expertise to command and control a convoy. Some of the Soldiers promoted demonstrated the leadership traits, skill, and ability to command and control troops in combat. But, what about those other Soldiers that never had the opportunity to lead or supervise not even a small section. Those were the same ones having problems to meet unit standards. These Soldiers were the same ones creating conflicts with other because they were not accepting or following orders from another person with the same rank. Did the commander or first sergeant ever think or consider their actions were going to escalate or create other dilemmas?

As we know, NCOs are the leaders, doers, and mentors that guide Soldiers toward the achievement of unit mission and commander's intent. The expertise and dedication of their subordinates are a reflection of the training, effort, and commitment of their NCOs. In our unit, the commander was the only officer. All sergeants first class were working as platoon leaders, some staff sergeants were conducting platoon sergeant obligations, and the rest of them were performing convoy commanders' duties. This circumstance completely affected the readiness of our unit because we were tasking unskilled NCOs, to perform as convoy commanders. Some of them demonstrated a lack of competence or interpersonal skills to guide other subordinates in the combat zone. We do understand we are working with different generations but for what reason do we need to give up the safety and well-being of our subordinate Soldiers? In today's operation, the battlefield environment is constantly changing. NCOs are required to adjust and improvise while they continue fighting the battle. The only way we can achieve this is by

selecting and promoting the most competent and best qualified Soldiers. After our mobilization unit's strength decreased, some of the Soldiers retired and other ask for transfers because of the leadership problems we were facing in our unit. One of the problems the unit currently faces are that some of those NCOs promoted completely froze the opportunities for other junior enlisted to get promoted. They are occupying a position that some other Soldier who is better qualified for could engage and increase the readiness of the unit.

In conclusion, the promotion of unqualified Soldiers could affect the readiness of our units and the well-being of our troops. Leader cannot recommend Soldiers blindfolded. Their recommendations today would affect the welfare of our future generations. How ethical is recommending and promoting Soldiers knowing they do not meet the standards? Yes, it is true that some Soldiers deserved that promotion and were completely ready to assume their position, but what about those that received the rank and never demonstrated the superiority to perform at the level expected by their peers. We also understand that due to medical conditions or other factors some Soldiers struggle to pass their APFT or meet the weight standard. Sometimes they are the perfect candidates to assume those leadership positions. Subordinates respect, follow them, and trust their decisions. These are the times were integrity and equal opportunity comes into play, does this really benefit the unit and Soldier's readiness? For some leaders, promotions equal retention. For others it meant more work because they had to micromanage instead of delegate. Leading by example is one of the higher principles every leader should learn and understand. As senior NCOs, we need to sustain the pride of the NCO Corps and teach our subordinates the value of the chevrons. We need to assist those officers appointed above us in making the right decisions and advise them on the impact their choices will make in the readiness of their units and Soldiers. We need to understand every decision we make will

influence the future of our subordinates in a positive or negative way. Those decisions may put the well-being of our Soldiers at risk in combat operations and that is something we cannot afford. Soldiers are the most important resource of today's Army at war.