

ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER

The Leader and Ethics

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Abstract

We, as leaders and Noncommissioned Officers are the backbone of the United States Army. The Army's success is based largely on the success of the Noncommissioned Officer Corp. Our success in garrison and triumph in battle can be attributed to the foundations on which it is built. Our organization is built on principles, beliefs, and ethics. The absence of ethics can lead to the demise of morale, good order, and discipline in even the strongest organizations. As leaders, we will make decisions daily. Our decisions whether large or small will not always please all. In the end, we must make decisions based on what will best serve the Soldier, the unit, and the United States Army.

The Leader and Ethics

In essence, ethical responsibility starts from day one when the individual Soldier Voluntarily raises their hand and swears to defend a nation. From the beginning, all Soldiers are trained, educated, and encouraged to make the right decision and to conduct themselves in an ethical manner regardless of the situation.

When we become Noncommissioned Officers, our responsibility increases ten-fold. To be an effective leader, Soldiers must be able to trust their leaders and their decisions whether it is on the battlefield or in garrison. We receive doctrine early on in our careers to help mold and shape our minds into thinking the way the Army wants us to think. Given our diverse backgrounds and upbringing, leaders will struggle with their own demons when it comes to making ethical decisions and doing the right thing. We are all guilty of doing something unethical whether we are aware of it or not. Because of our diverse backgrounds and for the sake of good order and discipline, Soldiers receive many items to learn new behaviors and reinforce ones we already have. Doctrine used to educate and influence our behavior comes in the form of Army Values, Warrior Ethos and Creeds. The United States Army uses these forms of doctrine mainly to increase our awareness of what right looks like and to motivate Soldiers to the point that the Army's philosophy penetrates the hearts and minds of all Soldiers. These doctrines provide the thought process and behavior needed to perform ethically as a Noncommissioned Officer.

The Army Values are the building blocks for the ethical decision making process. Our behavior must be influenced by these values: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless-service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. All these values are equally important in forming

an ethical Army. Enlistment in an all-volunteer Army requires that each Soldier sign a contract. By signing this contract, we are saying that we will perform all duties required of us and behave in a manner that is acceptable to United States Army. Regardless, of our own personal beliefs, experiences, and learned behaviors we must follow these values. We can unquestionably achieve ethical behavior as a Noncommissioned Officer by living up to these values and embodying each one to the best of our ability. The Noncommissioned Officer Creed requires us to perform specifically to ensure our Soldiers, peers, and subordinates have the utmost respect for us, but most of all we gain their trust as a Noncommissioned Officer.

Noncommissioned Officers are faced with ethical decisions everyday whether it be associated with day to day operations such as mentoring Soldiers or much more in-depth decisions on the battlefield. Everyday things such as mentoring Soldiers can be viewed as an ethical situation. Leaders that do not find the time to mentor Soldiers are performing in an unethical manner. Again, when we joined the Army we swore to perform all our duties to the fullest capacity. When we fail to do this, we can affect a Soldiers' morale and ultimately their career. Further, unethical decisions can rob the Army of what could be an otherwise productive member of the team. We as Noncommissioned Officers are entrusted with many lives. We have a great responsibility to enhance and protect these lives not crush a spirit.

In my career, and based on personal experience, I have encountered many leaders that choose to make an unethical decision because it could enhance their career or for their own personal gain. Many of these bad decisions have made a direct impact on many Soldiers' attitudes towards the leadership, the unit, and the United States Army. We tend

to see the big problems and not some of the everyday ones that seem to go unnoticed. A good example of this is NCOERS. We as leaders are required to make a fair and impartial assessment of our subordinates and often ourselves. Although, to be competitive in our promotions system there may require some “fluffing up” of a Noncommissioned Officers performance. This may or may not be unethical depending on the situation. On the other hand, I have seen blatant lies being put on NCOERS with leaders at all levels turning their heads to get someone they “like” promoted. This seems to be common practice in many organizations. When we fail to make the right decisions, we ultimately affect many Soldiers. The promotion process has been in place for several years. It is the responsibility of all Noncommissioned Officers to conduct fair and impartial evaluations of their subordinates to ensure that the process is as accurate and ethical as possible. A fair promotion process is essential to the good morale of all Soldiers regardless of rank. Noncommissioned Officers at all levels hold the responsibility of ensuring that the best, most qualified Soldiers are promoted in a manner that upholds the correct promotion process.

Another everyday issue I see facing the Army is the Noncommissioned Officers failure to uphold the creed. Although, these may be just words to some, we can perform our duties ethically by taking what we recite and applying it to our individual leadership styles. Complacency has played a role in this. Many of us seem to lose steam as the years go on. Many times this may be expected due to negative experiences and plain fatigue. We must be loyal to each other and get past the technicalities. Loyalty means being loyal to all. In many situations, this may not be possible, but we must make the hard decisions without wavering. An unethical decision affects not only the individuals

involved, but it feeds the decline in the quality of our Army. This will become increasingly harder as our missions increase.

These are just a few examples of many of the ethical situations we will face as leaders. We must encourage all Soldiers to behave in an ethical manner, for we never know who or what we may effect negatively by not doing the right thing. Our number one priority is our Soldiers, we owe it to them to be the best leader and person we can be. We are a greater influence on them than we know. Trust is crucial to being an effective leader.

Conclusion

Over the course of a career, Noncommissioned Officers will receive many items to aid them in making the right decisions. Everything will not always be black and white. As we gain more responsibility, we gain more opportunity to exercise our ethical decisiveness. We must continue to do our best to live up to our responsibilities as they pertain to ethics because in reality, we are all human. Even the best leaders do not always make the right choice when faced with an ethical dilemma. On the battlefield, an unethical decision may save one or more Soldiers' life. Would this be wrong? Ultimately, we as leaders must rely on our common sense, instinct, and experience to make the best decisions for our Soldiers, our units, and the United States Army.