

Army Leaders misconduct through  
bad choices or decisions.

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## Ethics Thought Paper

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Army leaders must be great decision makers, especially when facing an ethical problem. To understand what ethical problems are, you must first define ethics. Webster's Dictionary defines ethics as "the discipline dealing with what is good and bad with a moral obligation". Simply put ethics are a set of moral principles or values we follow that guides us to do the right thing. 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 ethical reasoning. The Army's Decision Making Process and Critical Reasoning models provide guidance to help leaders apply ethical reasoning when faced with dilemmas or ethical problems. One of the many challenges the Army must deal with is leaders making poor decisions to use their rank, position, and authority to serve themselves at the expense of subordinates. Many times leaders place their needs above what is best for the Army, their unit, and Soldiers. This practice is a violation of the basic principles of the seven Army's values.

In the Army, complex situations occur routinely, however, values and ethics mandate that we must live by the highest professional values—the seven Army values, even when put in difficult situations. As a Sergeant Major, we have seen or even experienced bad situations at one time or another. In many cases, we have observed Officers and fellow Non-Commissioned Officers in situations where they have had to make choices. Choosing to do what is right depends on an individual values and beliefs. The Army teaches all Soldiers regardless of their rank or position to conduct themselves as true professionals. Recently, I observed a case of misconduct involving an Infantry

Task Force Operations Sergeant Major who took advantage of his rank and position by convincing a Private First Class—his driver to run over his leg with a HUMMW-V. The Sergeant Major a veteran with 23-years of service was angered by the fact that he was denied retirement under a Stop Loss—Stop Move policy affecting all Soldiers of the division deploying to support operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan. His actions, driven by a terrible decision put the private in a position to make a choice. The private with little experience in dealing with ethical dilemmas allowed the rank and position of the sergeant major influence his decision—the wrong decision. To add insult to the poor decisions made by both the Sergeant Major and private, the incident occurred 42 days in theater. Subsequently, the Sergeant Major was court martial ending what would have been an honorable career in shame and embarrassment.

Another example of poor decisions made when leaders are in positions to have positive influence on subordinates was the scandals of the 90's involving sexual misconduct within the military, this resulted in an awareness of ethical misconduct throughout the ranks and at every level of command. Although it is not publicized as much in the worldwide media today, bad decisions to engage in sexual misconduct is happening more than the Army may admit. During a deployment to Afghanistan, a young single Battalion Commander of an Aviation unit used his rank and position of authority to violate the Combined Joint Task Force Commander's policy letter on sexual relations while deployed in theater. The policy letter prohibited any single Soldier from having sexual contact of any kind with other Soldiers. Married couples were the only Soldiers allowed to have such contact in the privacy of their sleep area. The BN commander decided that he would have sex with a sergeant, a member of his staff. The

commander and sergeant's actions came to attention of the Battalion Command Sergeant's Major who informed his commander that if the allegations were true he needed to stop. The commander again made a bad decision to continue the relationship, placing the CSM, a PSG, and several individuals—female Soldiers who shared the tent with the sergeant involved with the commander in a difficult ethical dilemma. This incident of sexual misconduct clearly shows how leaders in positions of authority abuse it when making the wrong decision even though the possibility of losing their job, damaging the future, and self-respect is present.

As leaders, we have three general ethical responsibilities:

First, all leaders are role models, setting the example in everything we do on and off duty by leading from the front. Second, avoid putting subordinates in compromising positions. Leaders must never place Soldiers in situations of an ethical dilemma, where the possibilities exist that they may make the wrong decision. Finally, we must develop good ethical traits in subordinates, constantly re-enforcing the fundamentals of duty, loyalty, selfless service, and integrity. In my opinion, intestinal fortitude and the moral courage to do what is right is always the best answer.

Everyone faces some type of ethical dilemma or problem in life. The question is how do leaders make the best moral decision when challenged with a dilemma? Using the decision-making process when faced with ethical situations can help identify a course of action that will result in the greatest moral good. This is very obtainable, ideally when leaders can interpret the situation and all factors that relate to the dilemma they are able to choose the course of action that best serve the Army, their organization, and their Soldiers. As senior leaders, we sometimes lose sight of this when in positions of

authority.

America expects nothing short of excellence in the matters of professional ethics from today's Soldiers. The proud and honorable heritage our brother and sisters in arms have established over the last 230 years is only the foundation. Leaders must continue to build upon it by constantly making sound decisions that are moral and consistent with the seven Army values.