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## The Ethical Awards Process

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## Abstract

When a Soldier receives an award, the Soldier should feel a sense of pride and accomplishment. It is a leader's responsibility to ensure that all awards are recommended and awarded for the correct reason. When the ethical awards process is not followed, unit morale can be effected negatively. Using AR 600-8-22 and unit S.O.Ps can keep leaders on the right track and ensure that all awards have the correct effect on a unit's morale.

### The Ethical Awards Process

One of the most common and difficult problems facing leaders is the ethical awards process. Because of the Global War on Terrorism and the many deployments facing leaders and Soldiers, these problems have multiplied in the last few years. Leaders face problems in recommending awards and also confronting leaders who are acting unethically when recommending and approving awards. All leaders have the opportunity to recommend Soldiers for awards for outstanding performance and actions. Soldiers and units will only take pride in those awards if the leaders award them fairly.

Why are ethics important when considering awards for Soldiers? Leaders must act fairly and ethically in all aspects of our jobs and the awards process is no different. Even the NCO creed states "I will be fair and impartial when recommending both rewards and punishment". The seven Army values also help guide leaders when considering awards. The appearance that awards are being dealt with unethically will affect a unit negatively. Morale can suffer and so can esprit de corp.

Army regulation 600-8-22 is the regulation that covers the military awards process. The goal of the total Army awards program is to foster mission accomplishment by recognizing excellence of both military and civilian members of the force and motivating them to high levels of performance and service. (US ARMY, 11 December 2006, p. 1) Army leaders should use this regulation when considering awards for individuals. This regulation covers important topics such as principles and standards, policy, precedence and information, order of precedence, and reporting requirements and filing instructions. If a leader who is considering recommendation of an award to an individual, first researches in AR 600-8-22, the leader will be able to effectively submit the recommendation with less problems. Unit SOPs concerning awards are

a good source of information regarding recommending awards and processing requirements and time needed for submitting the recommendation.

What type of ethical problems can occur with an award? Many leaders do not think that awards, which are suppose to recognize superior actions and behavior and increase morale, can also cause friction and decrease morale. Leaders must understand that an award must be unbiased. All Soldiers in the command can sense when awards are recommended for the wrong reason. In the following paragraphs, there are two examples of awards that were considered to be handled unethically.

The first situation happened on a deployment to Iraq. The first Soldier was a Master Sergeant who was in a promotable status and was the brigade S-4 NCOIC. He had been with the company 10 months before the unit deployed to theater. He was a good NCO who got his jobs completed and had no complaints from any of his leaders. The unit deployed and was sent to a northern part of Iraq, which was stable. Even though leaving the base was not too dangerous, he always sent his subordinates to accomplish missions that were required to be completed off base.

After three months in this location, his number came up for promotion to sergeant major. The division headquarters called and told him that he would be returning to the rear to work as a sergeant major in another battalion. The leadership submitted his award and he was an awarded the bronze star the day he was promoted to sergeant major and soon thereafter, he left theater.

His replacement arrived and was also a master sergeant, however, he was not promotable. Soon after his arrival, the unit moved to Ramadi which was a very volatile area of Iraq. The master sergeant performed combat missions off the base through hostile contact to accomplish his missions. He led convoys to recover destroyed vehicles and placed them in the class seven yard. The unit ended up in this harsh environment for nine months. He accomplished all of his

missions and his leaders had no complaints about his duty performance. When the unit was ready to redeploy out of theater, the unit awards were submitted. He was recommended for a bronze star but the higher leadership, the same ones that awarded the bronze star to the first NCO, rewrote it as a meritorious service medal.

When his award came back, there was an immediate outcry. Some NCOs suggested that the only reason the first master sergeant received the bronze star because he was promoted to sergeant major on the day he received the award. Some leaders were angry because the second master sergeant had been a war-fighter and been on combat missions while the first had not been outside of the wire at all. They could not understand how the first NCO would get a bronze star and the second, given a meritorious service medal. After a few days, there was talk about “favoritism”, “no standards”, and “it’s who you know.” The leadership stood by its decision for a few days and then decided to revoke the current award and award the Soldier the bronze star medal.

From this situation, would you say that the leadership acted unethically? Do you think the Soldiers in the unit thought that they did? Does it matter? Should the leadership have stuck with the original award? The Soldiers had the perception that there was a problem or unequal treatment because of the large amount of comments in reference about the award given. There may or may not have been an unethical issue in this case but a large amount of Soldiers in the unit thought or perceived that there was a problem. This issue did undermine some moral in the unit.

The second situation occurred after the unit returned from deployment. The unit commander and CSM had established a permanent change of station awards policy that had three points. A Soldier was not to receive a PCS award if he was to PCS to another unit in Europe.

The Soldier would only PCS to another unit in Europe if the Soldier's Europe tour had not been completed. The Soldier would not receive a PCS award if the Soldier arrived right before the unit deployed and the Soldier was to depart the unit immediately following redeployment. The thought was that the award that was given during the deployment would cover as the Soldier's PCS award. The third point was that recommenders needed to look at the level of responsibility when recommending PCS awards and which award to recommend.

The award in question was an award that was to be given to a Specialist in the unit. The Soldier had arrived to Europe and was in the unit only two months before the unit deployed to Iraq. Once the unit redeployed, he was scheduled to PCS to another unit in Europe because he had not finished his OCONUS tour. His duty position was the brigade CSM's driver. The award recommendation for an Army Commendation Medal came across the unit first sergeant's desk and he recommended a complete disapproval due to the leadership team's awards policy. He had not meant the requirement to have completed his tour in Europe, or to have been in the unit long enough before or after the deployment and his duty position did not warrant an ARCOM. The commander recommended a downgrade to an Army Achievement Medal on the DA Form 638.

The day following, the first sergeant was called to see the brigade CSM. The CSM asked the first sergeant to support him on this award and speak to his company commander on this because "he really wanted to give this award to the Soldier." The first sergeant told the CSM that he could not support this award and would not ask the company commander to change his mind because this award violated all three points in his own policy.

After two weeks, the CSM awarded the Army Commendation Medal to the specialist. The other specialist's that were PCSing with the Soldier went to their supervisors and asked about the award. As in the last situation, echoes of "he is the CSM's driver" and other

statements echoed through the unit. The specialist was looked down upon by his peers and at one point, entered the first sergeant's office and asked to have the award revoked.

From this situation, would you say that the leadership acted unethically? Did the leadership overstep their boundaries when they superseded the company commander's recommendation for downgrading to an AAM? What impact did this one award have on morale and cohesiveness in this unit? Did the other Soldiers have a reason to complain? All of these are good questions and by examining them, we can be better leaders when recommending awards.

It can be difficult to know when to award a Soldier an award. When recommending and approving awards for Soldiers and civilians, leaders have to understand that they are not giving the award, it has already been earned and the leader is just doing the paperwork. At no time, should a leader ever think he is doing the Soldier a favor or giving the Soldier a reward. At all times, awards must be recommended and awarded fairly.

### Reference

US ARMY, (11 December 2006). *Military Awards*. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army.