

ATSS-DAS

MEMORANDUM FOR Commandant, United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas 79918-8002

SUBJECT: Access Agreement for release of Student writing assignment Ethics Paper
Paper.

1. I, MSG PARKER, Larry, submitted a Ethics Paper to the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy archives regarding events and experiences that may be of historical significance to the United States Army and the Noncommissioned Officer Corps.

2. I understand the manuscript and attached documents will be accessioned into the historical holdings of the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy archives and will belong to the United States Government to be used in any manner deemed in the best interests of the United States Army as determined by the Chief of Military History or his representative. I also understand that I may retain a copy for my own use subject to classification restrictions.

3. I hereby expressly and voluntarily relinquish all rights and interest in the paper to the United States Army with the following caveat/exception:

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4. I understand that the information in this paper may be subject to the Freedom of Information Act, and therefore, may be releasable to the public contrary to my wishes. I further understand that, within the limits of the law, the United States Army will attempt to honor the restrictions I have requested to be placed on this material.

Date: 13 Dec-10

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Accepted on behalf of the United States Army by:

SGA Printed Name/Date: Orlando Eche AR 03-03-11

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Improper Relationships

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13 December 10

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Improper Relationships that Destroy Command

Abstract

In order to maintain ethical standards in the military, it is necessary that we maintain our ethics at all levels, starting with the relationships we keep. Relationships between noncommissioned officers and junior Soldiers can foster the impression of favoritism or impartiality, which can negatively impact Soldier morale and performance. To prevent this, we need to carefully define what types of behaviors are unacceptable, and how to prevent them.

Thesis Statement

Improper relationships between our leaders and soldiers continue to ruin the good order and discipline within our organizations. Our noncommissioned officers are having relationships with junior enlisted Soldiers, and officers are having relationships with subordinates while using their ranks to gain favors.

Improper Relationships

The issue of improper relationships between noncommissioned officers and their subordinates has been an ongoing issue in the military for centuries. Although AR 600-20, para. 7-6 prohibits this, we have yet to completely eliminate it from our ranks. This problem is detrimental to the command structure, weakening the authority of those involved, and causing the organization as a whole to lose face. In order to effectively control the issue, it is necessary to understand exactly what the nature of the problem is and which methods work to prevent it.

In order to identify and eliminate seeds of this issue, we must have a clear definition of exactly what we are looking for. It is important to be consistent with our ethics, which is not only what is right and wrong in our own eyes, but also how we collectively agree to treat each other. The relationships that we have with Soldiers can themselves be unethical. Commonly, people think that only relationships of a sexual nature are at fault, but it is not limited to this. According to Army Regulation 600-20, any relationship between a senior and subordinate is judged as inappropriate if it will:

1. Compromise, or appear to compromise, the integrity of supervisory authority or the chain of command;
2. Cause actual or perceived partiality or unfairness;
3. Involve, or appear to involve, the improper use of rank or position for personal gain;
4. Are, or are perceived to be, exploitative or coercive in nature;
5. Create an actual or clearly predictable adverse impact on discipline, authority, morale or the ability of the command to accomplish its mission.

One of the biggest challenges for junior noncommissioned officers is the promotion to sergeant; they suddenly find that the soldiers who were their peers are now under their supervision. This creates a difficulty in drawing the line between leadership and friendship. Now, the sergeant must give them orders, rather than engaging in the task alongside them. If they fail to understand their duties and responsibilities, they may show favoritism towards their peers, and fail to discipline their Soldiers appropriately.

An example of this issue can be found with Sgt. Brown, who was promoted ahead of his unit. His living arrangements did not change in the process, so he still engaged in social gatherings with these privates and specialists the same as ever, having them over for weekend parties. Capt. Fox, the company commander, brought to Sgt Brown's attention that as a non-commissioned officer, this type of relationship with his soldiers could undermine his authority. Soldiers may not be mature enough to understand the difference between leadership and friendship, and Sgt. Brown, acting like he is still one of them, will cause them to perceive him as a friend.

Even a hint of partiality by leadership can destroy morale. Leaders must always enforce standards and morals, leading by example and maintaining absolute integrity in their units. Failure to do so can trickle down through the ranks and affect the mindset of all Soldiers. If they are under the impression that their leaders do not hold the welfare of the organization as a whole above their own well being, the Soldiers will be inclined to be of a similar mind. For this reason, if a leader is receiving favors from a subordinate, whether in truth or in perception, their Soldiers will view the leader as selfish and untrustworthy, and will be less willing to follow him or her.

When it seems that a leader is showing favoritism, this can also prevent the Soldiers from giving their full effort in their mission. When a Soldier is under the impression that no matter how hard he or she works, no matter how capable he or she may be, his or her efforts will go unnoticed and the promotion will still be awarded the one who gained favor with a superior, this can cause Soldiers to become frustrated or resentful, or to feel like they are not part of a team. This can also have a negative impact on Soldiers' willingness to reenlist.

For example, a drill Sergeant, SGT Frost had some of his trainees over to his house to watch TV and drink beer. He then asked them to help him paint his house, to which they agreed. Afterwards, the trainees joked to their friends that they had made a new friend and were sure to get easy treatment for the rest of the training program. The sergeant was in clear violation of AR 600-20, paragraph 4-15, which prohibits relationships between trainees and permanent party personnel (including cadre) except those relationships required by the training mission. In addition, virtually every U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command installation with training requirements has regulations prohibiting anything but duty interaction between trainees and permanent staff. In this situation, Frost violated the regulation when he invited the trainees to his house. He compounded the error by asking them to paint his house, an act which clearly took improper advantage of both his rank and position. Adverse action (including Uniform Code of Military Justice options) against Frost may be appropriate.

Rumors can destroy a unit. For this reason, it is necessary to make sure that there is no room for interpretation in a leader's actions. It is vital that they conduct themselves as leaders at all times, keeping constant vigilance, because if it is even perceived that we are

showing partiality to an individual, group, race, or gender, dissatisfaction can spread very quickly throughout the command, and once the respect of the Soldiers has been, lost it is almost impossible to reclaim. Once your credibility has been compromised, you become an ineffective leader.

Improper relationships between non-commissioned officers and junior Soldiers can also be harmful to the public image of the military in the civilian sector. This type of behavior brings negative publicity on the military, which permeates every aspect of the public perception. If the population does not see the nation's military as trustworthy in one regard, they will assume that they cannot be trusted at all. This is especially a factor in the Middle East, where the opinion of the people is a huge point of contention at present. We cannot win the hearts and minds of people who view us as hypocrites.

Conclusion

Leaders at all levels must continue to conduct training to ensure that ethics are upheld. When it comes to issues of improper relationships between non-commissioned officers and junior Soldiers, it is best to nip this problem in the bud before it can erupt into something huge. For this reason, Soldiers need to know the procedure to report such an issue of inappropriate relationships. They must be trained to know what behaviors are inappropriate and who to report it to. They must be able to trust that the train of command will take appropriate actions. We must encourage all members of the military to take responsibility for their own actions, to foster an environment in which their Soldiers can excel. A good rule of thumb is that you are in doubt whether something may be compromising, don't do it.

References

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