

Ethical Dilemma; The Ever Changing Standard

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In my opinion there is a very troubling ethical dilemma that is affecting the United States Army today. That dilemma is the ever changing standard. What I am talking about is the standard that seems to change depending on who it is applied to, or who is applying it. The ever changing standard can be seen almost any place that we look. It can be seen in the way we as leaders deal with our Soldiers. It can be seen in the way we are dealt with as senior noncommissioned officers. It is prevalent in the way we do almost everything in the Army.

A good example of the ever changing standard is the way Soldiers receive their assignments. It doesn't matter if it is the old method, where you fill out a dream sheet and then call your branch manager and either beg, or ask your buddy for a favor. Or, it can be seen in the new method where a Soldier updates his/her Assignment Satisfaction Key (ASK), and then the assignments that the Soldier is qualified for are presented for him/her so that they in turn can self-nominate themselves for an assignment. Either way, the ever changing standard dilemma applies to both. Even with the new system, Soldiers have been able to call up their branch manager, and get an assignment before others are even able to see it. Other Soldiers have been notified to go to a particular web address and they would then be able to choose the assignment that they were looking for. The ever changing standard there is that all Soldiers are not treated equally. Some Soldiers are given preferential treatment because they know the right person.

Another good example is in the way Soldiers are rewarded. If two Soldiers have done an outstanding job that is deserving of recognition, they should both be rewarded. Many times, either one will receive a lesser award than is deserved, based solely on his/her rank, or neither will be rewarded. The quota system has been in place for a long time in the Army. Many times a leader will be instructed that only a certain percentage of his/her Soldiers can be recommended

for a certain type of award. Although I do not advocate seeing every Soldier walking around with a Legion of Merit or a Bronze star, I do advocate properly recognizing each Soldier for their outstanding performance.

Retention is an area where this is visible as well. Many times, a commander will be under pressure to produce reenlistments. If the commander is struggling to make mission, the standards begin to change. Suddenly, Soldiers who do not meet the standard according to Army Regulation (AR) 600-9 will no longer be barred from reenlistment.

This ever changing standard is the result of poor discipline. This lack of discipline can be seen all across the Army. I am not sure that we can point to any person or persons as the cause of this. It is the culmination of events that have been ongoing for many years. What we can do as leaders is to enforce the one true standard and hold all soldiers to that same standard. There is a saying that goes something like this. Clean your own yard first. That is what we, as noncommissioned officers need to do. We need to clean our own backyard first. We have failed to hold ourselves to the standard that we expect our Soldiers to live by.

If you feel as if you need proof that the senior noncommissioned officer corps is not living up to the standard, just observe some of the students and faculty at the United States Sergeants Major Academy. On any given day, you can see both faculty members and students that have ironed their ACU uniform. It states on the tag of the uniform to not iron it, because it ruins the wrinkle release treatment of the uniform. On any given day, you can observe noncommissioned officers walking across the parking lot with no head gear on. These are only a few examples of the back yard that we must clean. If we do not take care of our business, we will lose our credibility. Along with the loss of credibility goes responsibility. And if we manage to lose credibility and responsibility, we lose relativity. We, as noncommissioned

officers, can not afford to loose what we have worked so hard as a corps to gain. If we do not tighten our shot group, the noncommissioned officer corps will revert back to the old ways, and it will again be an uphill battle to regain our relevance in the Army's mission.

I have spoken with several of my peers since arriving here at the United States Army Sergeant's Major Academy (USASMA), and I am not the first to have dealt with this problem. Leaders who allow themselves to fall into the category of not upholding one standard for everyone have set a poor standard for those that follow. They have let the Army down, they have let their Soldiers down, and they have failed to uphold the very values that we preach to our Soldiers. In the next few paragraphs, I would like to discuss these values and how I believe they have been broken.

A Soldier who has a bar to reenlistment lifted in order to help a commander make mission is probably not the best qualified reenlistment prospect. By allowing a bar to be lifted so that a substandard Soldier can reenlist, we have not shown **loyalty** to our Soldiers, our unit, or the Army in general. This Soldier will not be able to perform at the necessary level on the battlefield. By allowing him to reenlist, we have not been loyal to our Soldiers who do meet the standard.

When we talk about **duty**, we are talking about fulfilling our obligations. In the examples listed above, leaders had an obligation to uphold the one standard that is set forth in the regulations. As leaders, we must lead by example, and uphold the standard in accordance with regulations. A leader who fails to uphold the standard loses credibility. A leader who has no credibility can not be an effective leader.

Respect is a value that must be earned. A leader who fails to uphold the same standard for everyone will loose the respect of his Soldiers. Soldiers are always watching what we are

doing. The discipline of a unit can depend on the respect that its Soldiers have for their leaders. As leaders, it is our job and responsibility to uphold the standard and ensure that everyone is held to the same standard.

To have **honor** is to live up to all of the Army values. If a leader violates these values, then they have no honor. By living the Army values, we bring honor to ourselves and our unit. Along with honor comes **integrity**. A leader or Soldier who has no integrity is not a good Soldier, or a trustworthy person. We must know that our fellow Soldiers have integrity and can be trusted. If a leader fails to uphold the value of integrity, it must be corrected. We trust that our leaders will do the right thing.

A leader, who fails to do the right thing, lacks **personal courage**. There are two forms of personal courage. Those forms are physical and moral courage. It is important to have physical courage at the right time, but it is also important to have moral courage all of the time. We must do what's right. If we, as leaders, fail to do the right thing, then we have no reason to expect our soldiers to do the right thing.

If we break this down, it boils down to a matter of just doing what is right. A good leader treats all Soldiers equally. A good leader will not allow his moral standards to be eroded away by not using the same criteria to recommend both reward and punishment. In cases like the ones we have discussed, we don't even need to refer to a manual to tell what right looks like. The only thing that we as leaders need to do is treat all Soldiers the same. Hold them all to the same standard. And, most importantly, we must hold ourselves to the same standard.

To sum up the previous pages, we as leaders must be disciplined. We must apply the standards to ourselves, and then to our Soldiers. We must do the right thing, even when we don't think anyone is watching.

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