

Running head: LEADERS' ETHICAL TRAINING DILEMMA

Leaders' Ethical Training Dilemma in Initial Entry Training

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Abstract

Leaders of Initial Entry Training units have the duty to ensure their cadre train new Soldiers in army values, discipline, and all basic individual tasks to standard. However, a way of thinking exists with leaders that it is permissible to graduate Soldiers not completely trained to standard on all basic individual tasks. This is a prevailing ethical dilemma leaders face in Initial Entry Training. Train to standard or train them enough to graduate. Leaders can counter this ethical dilemma through serious leadership involvement. No Soldier should die thinking, “Only if I was properly trained”.

Leaders' Ethical Training Dilemma in Initial Entry Training

Leaders focus on an approach in Initial Entry Training (IET) units more on just graduating Soldiers. With the Global War on Terror already in its sixth year, training new Soldiers to fill the ranks of new Brigade Combat Teams and replace Soldiers that leave the U. S. Army is a high priority. Leaders seem to fear the word attrition more than poorly trained. Discharge approving authority commanders no longer approve discharges for trainees who continually fail to master basic individual tasks that support the majority of the warrior tasks and battle drills (WTBD). This approach causes an ethical dilemma on leaders to either properly train or just check-the-box. Leaders would focus only on milestone tasks that ensure graduation instead of ensuring they train Soldiers on all basic individual tasks and be familiar with the WTBD.

Personal Observation

I was an IET company first sergeant. When I assumed my role, I assessed how the company conducted and tracked its training. The company tracking method was in place but Soldiers were not receiving make-up training. The company conducted training in accordance with current program of instructions and training support packages. I noticed some drill sergeants seemed not to care whether the Soldiers retained how to perform tasks. I questioned Soldiers on these tasks and asked why they were not concern on knowing how to accomplish them. They responded it was not important because it was not testable. They just needed to participate to graduate. Drill sergeants stated basically the same thought. It was appalling to me. Soldiers were leaving IET without knowing how to read a map, send a simple radio message or even evaluate a casualty. Soldiers must execute these basic individual tasks to standard in order to support the collective tasks taught later in the IET cycle. How did this way of thinking come about and what

should I do? I had a choice. Allow the company to continue training the way it was or change the way of thinking in the company. I choose the latter. I first searched for the root cause of the participate-to-graduate mentality and focusing on milestone tasks and.

The Root Causes

Participate-to-graduate

Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) regulation (Reg) 350-6 establishes the U. S. Army's guidance, policies, procedures, and responsibilities for managing and conducting enlisted IET (*TRADOC Regulation 350-6, 2007*). This regulation under paragraph 1-5c(2) allows commanders to adjust standards of fitness and task proficiency because trainees may not be able to achieve the standards during IET. Lower the standards to obtain achievable goals. This allows the participate-to-graduate mentality to occur. Instead of knowing what each Soldier does in a four man stack, I only have to participate in a stack. Instead of knowing how to navigate with a compass, I only need to participate in the land navigation course. It goes on. Out of 39 warrior task and 9 battle drills, all 9 battle drills and 18 warrior tasks evolved into a participate-to-graduate standard.

Milestone Tasks

Milestone task are the minimum tasks Soldiers need to perform to standard to graduate. These tasks drill sergeants focus the most on. Tasks such as weapon's qualification, throw two live grenades, Convoy Live Fire, and the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) are the milestone tasks. Milestone task became the focus for drill sergeants for three reasons; streamer policy, evaluation reports, and tasks conducted or tested outside the unit.

Streamer policies and evaluation reports are based on statistics. Streamer policies focus on percentage of Soldiers passing the APFT, weapons and hand grenade qualification.

Evaluation reports focused also on those statistics. A rater could justify an excellent block rating to a drill sergeant for meeting the standard for a streamer. Naturally drill sergeants would focus on the tasks that would create an excellent evaluation report.

Tasks conducted or tested outside the unit forced the trainers to ensure Soldiers know those tasks to standard. Soldiers conduct weapon qualification, a major task in IET, on a range monitored by cadre outside the unit. This ensures trainers do not qualify for the Soldier or manipulate the qualification statistics. Throwing two live hand grenades requires the unit to give range cadre an alpha roster ensuring all Soldiers accomplish this task. Convoy Live Fire also requires an alpha roster. However, tracking who accomplishes the task is still a unit responsibility. Qualified trainers teach Combat Life Saver (CLS) now with drill sergeant support. Soldiers should now leave better trained on first aid, but it is not a graduation requirement to be CLS certified. Soldiers can still have a participate-to-graduate attitude towards CLS. Drill sergeants usually conduct the APFT internal to the training unit. However, the unit usually needs outside support and the unit's commander supervises the event while the next higher commander observes the event.

Regulations, policy letters, drill sergeant evaluation reports historic excellent bullet criteria, and the evolution of milestone tasks make it easy to allow Soldiers to graduate with out conducting all basic individual tasks to standard.

Defending the Root Causes

Some leaders will counter that End of Phase Testing will ensure that basic tasks are known to standard. Others will counter that the participate-to-graduate tasks are just for familiarization. I observed, though, drill sergeants were just going through the motion of the End of Phase Test and wanted to concentrate more on milestone tasks. Familiarization is different

than participate-to-graduate. In familiarization, the Soldiers know the standard and are not required to yet master the task. In participate-to-graduate, Soldiers just go through the motion.

Most senior leaders will say this all can be solved with leadership involvement. I strongly agree and leadership involvement is the solution of this ethical dilemma. Leaders can either be involved or just stay in the office and let the cycle run its self.

Leadership Involvement

Leadership involvement actions I took was first to reestablish drill sergeant accountability on all tasks. I ensured all tasks missed were made up. I fixed this with the commander's help by placing make-up training on the schedule, ensuring platoon sergeants were initialing on the training tracker when make-up training occurred. I conducted random inspection by asking the Soldier to perform or describe how to conduct the task they missed. I also ensured those who missed foot marches and obstacle or conditioning courses conduct the training. I established a task evaluation event. This event tested Soldiers to standard on individual tasks that I choose. It was a scaled down version of the old End of Cycle Testing. I also conducted a drill and ceremony (D&C) competition using the old D&C module eight standards. The results from these two events I used to counsel drill sergeants on how well they are doing training Soldiers. My initial counseling to senior drill sergeants did not just focus on the statistics. I also put the requirement of quality in training as a criterion for an excellent rating.

As a leadership team with the company commander, we raised the standard of WTBD from participate to familiarize. One of the end states of IET is to use all the individual tasks learned during the earlier phases and incorporated them into WTBD. We used the final field training exercise (FTX) to evaluate whether Soldiers demonstrate a level of proficiency that met our command team's standard of familiarization. Our standard was that all Soldiers will know

the task, purpose, and standard of all WTBD and execute them to a level of proficiency of an IET Soldier. We established a company standardized Situational Training Exercise (STX) for the final FTX. The company commander certified the STX lanes. The commander or first sergeant then supervised the execution of the lanes ensuring quality. If a squad executing the lane failed to meet the standard, they executed it again. These lanes also allowed the command team to evaluate the effectiveness of drill sergeants training and leadership abilities.

Implementing these leader involvement tasks focused our training back on all tasks and WTBD. Drill sergeants saw the results with Soldiers graduating better discipline, more pride, and better proficient than previous cycles.

Other actions could be done outside the company command team. Brigade streamer policies should have other tasks and goals associated with them. A streamer policy stating proficiency in WTBD, NBC, Map Reading, First Aid and U. S. weapons would be a start. With TRADOC Reg 350-6, paragraph 1-5c(2) allowing commanders to adjust standards, commanders above the company should establish what those adjusted standards are. This will keep tasks from falling to an unacceptable participation level.

Conclusion

Training in Initial Entry Training is not just a drill sergeant duty. Leaders must commit to ensure they train civilian volunteers on army values, discipline and all basic individual tasks to standard. Leaders also must ensure Soldiers are proficient on all warrior tasks and battle drills. By becoming seriously involved in their unit's training, leaders can influence cadre not to loose focus on training quality Soldiers in quantity. Leaders should not take the easy less stress road of letting the cycle run its self. No Soldier should die thinking, "Only if I was properly trained".

Reference

TRADOC Regulation 350-6: Enlisted initial entry training (IET) policies and administration.

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