

Running Head: THE “DOUBLE STANDARD”

The “Double Standard”

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Abstract

Is it ethical for senior NCOs and Officers to use their rank for “a double standard”? Since we are the Sergeant Major or the Commander, does that mean we get to pick what standards we follow, but hold subordinates to a different standard? Situations of “double standards” occur at all levels of leadership, but it becomes more apparent when it occurs at higher levels. Where does this “double standard” come from? Is it that we made it to the top and we just feel that we have played by the rules our entire career and now that we are Sergeants Major we just make the rules and expect our subordinates to follow them?

The “Double Standard”

As senior Noncommissioned Officers (NCOs) and Officers we set the standards within our units. We establish policies and procedures for our subordinates to follow. We expect leaders at all levels, from squad leaders to the battalion and brigade level Commander and Command Sergeant Major to follow and enforce the policies and procedures. What happens when the policies inconvenience senior NCOs and Officers?

Is it ethical for senior NCOs and Officers to use their rank for “a double standard”? Since we are the Sergeant Major or the Commander, does that mean we get to pick what standards we follow, but hold subordinates to a different standard? Situations of “double standards” occur at all levels of leadership, but it becomes more apparent when it occurs at higher levels.

How do we arrive at the mentality that “double standards” are okay? Is it an ethic that the Army teaches us? I personally don’t ever remember seeing that in an Army regulation or manual. In my nineteen years in the Army, I have seen NCOs and Officers use and sometimes even abuse their rank in this manner. I’m sure some of the people who have worked with me, or for me, would tell you that I have done this in some form or fashion also. Most senior NCOs rely on the experiences they gained moving up the rank structure and standard operating procedures (SOPs) from units they have served in. So, is it possible that we saw senior NCOs use their rank as a “double standard” when we were young soldiers? Did it just continued as we moved up through the ranks so in our minds it becomes okay because all the Sergeants Major did it?

From day one here at the Sergeants Major Academy we were told, “You are the top two percent in the Army, you are our future senior leaders to set the example for our units and the Army”. As a class we have our own problems and issues. Individuals still are unable to be in the right place at the right time. We still want to have our own conversations while someone else is talking in the auditorium.

What kind of an example has the Sergeants Major Academy shown us? In my personal opinion it’s been one of many “double standards”. From the beginning we were also told we are all considered to be Sergeants Major and we will be treated as such. However some members of the cadre address the class like we are a room full of privates. Though others in the cadre address you in a professional and respectful manner, even when they are making corrections.

The standard for the students in the auditorium is no food or drink. We are to be seated ten minutes prior to the start of all briefs. If we need to use the rest room or leave for any reason we must exit through the back doors as not to disrupt the class. In the four months, I have seen the commander and several NCOs bring water or other beverages into the auditorium. Cadre members walk into the auditorium in the middle of classes all the time. They walk thorough the front doors, right in front of the person who is giving the presentation. Most notable was when General Abizaid was giving his briefing. Prior to the class we were told to post personnel at all the doors because they didn’t want anyone in or out during the Generals briefing. About ten minutes into General Abizaid’s brief, CSM ZaGara walks through the front door, drops his blackberry, then preceded to his seat. Is there a different standard for the students and the Cadre?

As a further example I've had a finance issue that has not been resolved since I arrived at Fort Bliss. I went to the main post finance office during walk in hours to check on the status of my issue. The finance office informed me that as a student at the academy I had to go through the S-1. Finance was told by the academy not to help us and to send us to S-1. I was there during walk in hours, which means anyone can walk in and inquire on pay issues. However Sergeants Major Academy students cannot! The Staff Sergeant that walked in after me had no problems being helped with his issue. Do all personal assigned to USASMA go through the S-1 for pay inquires, or do they go to finance and handle the matter themselves. Is there one standard or two?

After speaking to my faculty advisor on this issue, I was sent to speak with the Company Commander. Instead, I spoke with the First Sergeant on the issue that a Master Sergeant was unable to walk in to finance, during walk in hours, and take care of his problems. The answer I received was that a student from the academy had gone to finance and was unprofessional and caused a big scene. This prompted some one to make the rule to mass punish every individual that is assigned to the Sergeants Major Academy as a student.

I explained my finance situation to the First Sergeant and his answer was submitting a pay inquiry through the S-1, I had already done this. I had to present my case to convince him that I needed to handle the situation myself. He told me to come back the next day with my paperwork. When I went back the next day I found out that he had gone to the S-1 to see if I had submitted a pay inquiry. I again had to explain to him why I needed to handle the situation. In the end I felt that my rank and experience meant nothing, everything I said and everything I wanted to do was questioned.

Not everyone acts professional all the time, but why should those who are, be punished for those who are not? In basic training we use mass punishment to try to promote teamwork. Does mass punishment of Sergeants Major and Master Sergeants promote teamwork or does it undermine their rank and the authority they have earned with it? Those individuals who are unprofessional should be dealt with on an individual basis. Those who are professional should not be punished for the unprofessional acts of others.

We have all earned the rank and positions we are in, we expect to be treated accordingly. As a Master Sergeant I was deemed competent enough by my chain of command to conduct combat operations in Afghanistan with no direct supervision. But at the Sergeants Major Academy I can't go to finance with out command approval. None of us would tolerate being treated this way in our units, so why do we have to tolerate it in an environment of nothing but Sergeants Major and Master Sergeants?

These are a few of the examples of the “double standards” that I have observed and experienced myself. I have over heard students in the class talking about several others. Is this the example that the Sergeants Major Academy wants to set for the future Battalion and Brigade Command Sergeants Major to follow?

Where does this “double standard” come from? Is it that we made it to the top and we just feel that we have played by the rules our entire career and now that we are Sergeants Major we just make the rules and expect our subordinates to follow them? Does it come from examples we have seen from Squad Leaders, Platoon Sergeants, First Sergeants and Sergeants Major? In some form or fashion the “double standard” always seems to exist no matter if you're in a unit or a school.