

UNITED STATES ARMY SERGEANT'S MAJOR ACADEMY

Ethics in Leadership

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To speak of an ethical dilemma within the military is too broad a topic and is subject to opinion and conjecture. Ethical dilemmas are situational at best and as leaders we must recognize this when formulating our decisions while in the leadership positions we are assigned to. That is why I have chosen to write about the ethics in leadership and hope to give you a better understanding of it. To better understand this concept you must first understand my philosophy on leadership.

The concept of leadership can best be characterized in two ways. The first being as Colonel Sherman L. Kiser, US Army Retired stated, "An exact science capable of being understood and practiced by anyone." The second, which I feel strongly about, is a view taken from General, Sir Archibald P. Wavell, "No amount of learning will make a man a leader unless he has the natural qualities of one."

As it is, leadership cannot be relegated to terms or definitions, rather attributes that are not easily defined. It is a composite of character, courage, hard-work, commitment, initiative and an understanding of ones strengths and weaknesses. How and when these are used is greatly dependent upon the individual and the situation. Someone once said, "Even wise leaders must await appropriate circumstances. Appropriate circumstances can only be found at the right time and cannot be fulfilled through or sought by knowledge."

As effective leaders, we must inspire those we lead. For us to think and understand how we are to act ethically is an essential part of the whole. Many leaders are blinded by rank and reputation few see or fully understand the magnitude of their position.

The role of a leader is often misinterpreted as a position of authority rather than that of virtue and ethics. Conversely, as leaders we are followers; so we must look to those who have achieved success as leaders. And in doing so we will find that at times even their interpretations do not mirror their actions. So we must carefully balance their actions against their guidance and determine what it is we can learn from them.

Ethics, as defined by Webster is "the system or code of morals of a particular person, religion, group, or profession". We as senior leaders sometimes lose sight of the fact that being promoted into positions of leadership as we are today, those positions mandate we lead from the front. We must set the example by picking up the guidon and moving out in front and maintain the standard, morally and ethically.

As Senior Non-Commissioned officers we have a duty to teach leaders and soldiers alike to make the right choices. This is where our ethics influence us as leaders. Ethics are what govern our conduct as we go about our duties. Some are written, while

others are inherent standards and norms that we have had ingrained in us as individuals.

As individuals the army teaches us when faced with an ethical decision to use the army values as our guide. The line between what is ethical and what is not, is razor thin and leaders must tread cautiously, never straying far from the truth. Placing an equal importance on the Army values allows us to define an ethical problem but does not make reaching a decision any easier.

By integrating the Army values to an already solid base of moral and ethical values instilled by family and friends during adolescence we can groom and mentor our young leaders to assess the ethical climate and avoid costly errors in judgment, before it is too late and they find themselves in an ethical dilemma.

Fortunately many ethical problems are clear cut and we can easily reach the right decision, however, there will be times when personal feelings or intuition may interfere with our decision making abilities. It is important that we look past our personal feelings and not deviate from the standards that enforce our ethical beliefs. Historically, leaders who choose to behave unethically have learned that these decisions prove costly.

Our decision to act on an ethical problem directly reflects upon us as leaders. More importantly, it reflects our desire to

maintain and enforce the army standards. We must instill in our soldiers the need to maintain these ethical standards and enforce Army values.

Ethical leadership will and should follow many paths. We should lead without self interest, face difficulty without self-doubt, resolve doubts without diverting blame, be flexible without being pliant, be humane without being vulnerable, be firm, cultivate your skills, maintain your integrity and unwavering character.

As NCOs we are the vanguard of today's army. Our actions weigh heavily upon the reactions of those we lead. Every decision made by you as a leader should be made using ethical-critical thinking. This concept of leadership in addition to individual effectiveness, competence and abilities will credence a leader and his leadership capability.

Thusly, leadership is an intangible and as leaders we must see with the eyes of many, hear with our minds, know with our knowledge and experience and accomplish our missions with those strengths, all the while recognizing our weaknesses.