

Running Head: ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN THE IET ENVIRONMENT

Ethical Dilemmas in the IET Environment

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Abstract

Leaders should always be cognizant of the fact that we often leave lasting impressions, good or bad, on subordinate Soldiers. In their eyes, we are a Soldiers' impression of leadership. We should always value those impressions, as well as our Soldiers. Young Warriors enlist into our Army, often lacking basic core family values. The recruiter and drill sergeant are a trainee's first look at Army leadership. These leaders have a potential for overwhelming influence and power on recruits. If this influence is abuse by unethical behavior, the end-state could be potentially devastating.

Ethical Dilemmas in the IET Environment

Military ethics are standards by which Soldiers should act based on the Army's core values. Army values are core beliefs such as loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage that motivate Soldiers' attitudes and actions. Not all values are ethical values. Ethical values relate to what's right and what's wrong. They take precedence over non-ethical values when making ethical decisions. Leaders negotiate ethical decisions based on their own beliefs and attitudes. You can lead a horse to the water hole, but you can't force them to drink. My point is that we can teach, coach and mentor Soldiers under the proper Army core values and ethical beliefs. As these Soldiers mature as leaders, they have to commit to doing what's right and making sound ethical decisions. Leaders are required to accept responsibility for their decisions and the consequences thereof. This includes avoiding even the appearance of impropriety.

We as leaders must exemplify ethical conduct in order to be effective and credible to our profession. In the Initial Entry Training (IET) environment, some leaders at various levels have proven that living the Army code of ethics can be somewhat challenging. This is evident by previous impropriety of leaders at various Training Centers around the Army. Some Soldiers are tempted to behave unethically because it often proves the path of least resistance. Others, especially in leadership roles, are tempted by the seemingly endless influence over subordinates. Senior leaders find themselves resolving gray area solutions over black and white issues daily.

During my tenure in the Initial Entry Training (IET) environment, I have served as a Senior Small Group Leader, Drill Sergeant, Senior Drill Sergeant, and First Sergeant. I have experienced leadership challenges involving subordinate and superior leader impropriety. I have learned that Soldiers at all levels of leadership sometimes fall short of living the Army's values.

Upon enlistment of young Warriors into the Army, they do not initially possess the values that the Army expects them to adopt and live by. This leaves them in a vulnerable state. These Soldiers are products of our environment and simply comply with directives of leadership. At this stage, a young WHOA has not yet acquired the ability to judge a “grey area” directive. They simply follow instructions even without knowing the end state of a given task. This often presents opportunity for abuse of authority from an unethical leader. These types of leaders within the IET environment serve in positions as drill sergeant^s, operations sergeants, unit support personnel, lieutenants, company commanders, and first sergeants.

During my monthly sensing sessions with IET Soldiers while serving as First Sergeant, I would inform them that often a Soldier's family or social values are not consistent with the seven Army core values and that we did not expect them to transition over night. I further informed them that over time throughout their training they would willingly adapt, embrace, and live the Army values. I informed them that the training cadre would correct violation of ethics, values, and simple infractions through corrective action with physical exercise or punishment under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), whichever the situation permitted. This baseline established the initial standard for the IET Soldiers' ethical training. This is what Soldiers were taught and what they expected from their leaders to display by example.

Cases of improper relationships and other improprieties by drill sergeants and other IET cadre often surprised and have disappointed me. During my initial assignment in the IET environment, I assumed that all leadership was sufficiently hypersensitive to the issues of improper relationships and other improprieties. For reasons I have yet to figure, some individuals (not to be confused with legitimate leaders) could not or refused to reframe from this type of unacceptable behavior. These behaviors ranged from simple trainee abuse such as

administering improper punishment and issuing unethical directives to improper relations and sexual misconduct. This type of behavior occurs in various environments of the traditional Army, as well. Two very notable and publicized incidents involved members at the most senior command level.

On 8 August 2005, the Army relieved four-star General Kevin Byrnes (former TRACDOC Commander) of his command following allegations that he had an extramarital affair with a civilian. The allegation against him did not involve a relationship with anyone within the military or even the federal government. The allegation did not involve more than one relationship. It did not involve anyone on active duty or a civilian in the Department of Defense. He was allegedly involved with a private citizen. During the course of the affair, Gen. Byrnes was separated from his spouse. However, he was legally married at the time which the Army considered in violation of UCMJ and punishable by Court-martial. He was relieved of his duty coincidentally on the same day as his divorce was finalized.

Former Sergeant Major of the Army Gene McKinney faced charges of sexual harassment from several former female subordinates. The Army Chief of Staff relieved him of his SMA duties while a court martial was pending. Sergeant Major McKinney was acquitted of all sexual harassment charges, but was convicted of obstruction of justice. He received a reduction in grade to E-8 and a reprimand. His situation began with sexual harassment and took a twist during the course of the investigation because this individual chose, yet again, to make unethical decisions. This Sergeant Major obviously, after more than 28 years of military service and various assigned senior level positions, was ethically clueless or just consciously chose to do the wrong things. These are just some examples of unethical conduct by leaders at the senior level

of command. If there is potential for this to occur at this level, then one can only imagine the past, present, and future occurrences at levels below.

No matter how far up the ladder one succeeds, he or she should never assume that they are above Army standards of law and policy. Soldiers expect their leaders to be honest and true. Deception is usually easily uncovered. Lies erode credibility and undermine a Soldier's confidence. Some untruths are told for seemingly altruistic reasons. In certain situations, leaders feel that a small lie to prevent hurt feelings or to promote good-will conform to the rules of good Army ethics. This is far from true and, in the end, will often be resented by the Soldier.

Leaders should always be cognizant of the fact that we often leave lasting impressions, good or bad, on subordinate Soldiers. In their eyes, we are a Soldier's impression of leadership. We should always value those impressions, as well as our Soldiers. We should honor their trust and never involve nor expose them to unethical dilemmas. I will be the first to admit that there are some bad leaders within our ranks. However, I firmly believe that the good will always outweigh the bad. We must continue to educate our Soldiers through awareness and values based training.

In summary, leaders should remind and re-enforce ethical standards through counseling. We must counsel our subordinates according to schedule and be physically and morally courageous through honesty with subordinates. Proper ethical behavior is a wide lane to manage. Senior NCOs and Officers alone can do their part by mentoring and setting the example for all Soldiers to emulate. The NCOs and Officers who choose to behave unethically will eventually discover the ultimate cost for their actions. We all must do our part by breeding and growing young leaders to assess the ethical climate and avoid unethical choices. Good leaders truly lead by example.