

Army Values are the Answer

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Every ethical question that we are faced with can only be answered by living the Army Values. Leaders and soldiers must always do the right thing, and sometimes doing the right thing is difficult. We must be prepared to face situations in which there is no clear right or wrong answers. The burden falls on us leaders to make the right decision, however, as Soldiers we always have the Army Values as guides to help us distinguish between right and wrong. Our credibility is based on the Army Values because they tell who we are and what we stand for. Our Soldiers expect us to do what is right every time. We cannot pick wrong over right because our soldiers lose trust in us and we discredit the Army and ourselves. Too many times, we tend to forget what right looks like, and we do the wrong thing. Without Army Values, a leader cannot stand for what is right, much less do what is right.

General Kevin Byrnes faced with an ethical situation chose wrong over right. He was given an order by the Army Chief of Staff to stop seeing a woman with whom he was allegedly having an affair, because he was still married to another woman. He chose to ignore the order and continued his relationship. He had a duty to follow the order, not only because it was the honorable thing to do, but also because it was the right thing to do. He forgot his loyalty to the Army and the nation. He lost his integrity and honor as a Soldier and as a commander. As a leader, he failed to apply the Army Values, he set the wrong example, and it caused him to lose his command.

In late April 2004, a number of photographs surfaced depicting abuse and torture of Iraqi prisoners held at the Abu Ghurayb Prison by US Soldiers. Those showed both men and women in U.S. military uniforms, laughing and giving thumbs-up signs while posing with naked Iraqi prisoners. This situation should have caused someone in a position of authority at the prison to

questions the ethical behavior of the Soldiers shown, but no one cared; not until the matter became public through the media. The leadership involved, those who were responsible for the ethical behavior of those Soldiers said that they had no idea of these abuses.

The noncommissioned officer leaders and the Soldiers involved in the acts did not act ethically. Each of them had an opportunity to do the ethical thing, instead they chose to do wrong; they abused the prisoners. Those Soldiers failed to do their duty by not putting a stop to the abuses, and failed to report it to the chain of command. They exhibited no respect for human rights and they showed no personal courage to do what was morally right. Some of these soldiers were military police officers, they were supposed to represent the law and enforce it, but forgot both their legal and ethical duty.

The Abu Ghurayb Prison incident created an ethical environment inconsistent with the Army Values that almost cost the Army its credibility. As an Army, we cannot afford to lose our credibility especially in a time of armed conflict. Every day there are fathers and mothers who ask if the war in Iraq is right or wrong, they wonder if their son or daughter who joined the Army made the right decision. Every day a soldier asks if the war is right or wrong. If the American public doubts or if our Soldiers doubt our credibility because of unethical behavior, we will cease to be an Army. As leaders, we must make sure that our actions are consistent with the Army Values; we must teach our subordinates, and we must always do the right thing to create an environment of trust.

A few years ago, the Army decided to remind all of us of the importance of doing the right thing. They came up with the Army values card and tag and we had to sign for them. To ensure we did not forget them, we had to wear our identification tags with the Army values tag

attached to the chain. We also had to carry the Army values card in our wallets. When was the last time anyone checked the cards or read them?

The answer is not to check or read them, but to live the Army values every day. These values are LOYALTY, DUTY, RESPECT, SELFLESS SERVICE, HONOR, INTEGRITY AND PERSONAL COURAGE, and they apply to every soldier. We must embrace these values and apply them in every ethical situation.

One way to apply the Army Values is to promote them everywhere and every day. We need to post them at the entrance of every military installation for everyone to see them. We need to have television commercials with the top leadership talking about the importance of the Army Values. This reinforces our commitment as leaders for building an ethical climate. The Army Chief of Staff and the Sergeant Major of the Army need to have a welcome letter that addresses the Army Values for every Soldier that joins the Army. When in processing a Soldier into a unit, the commander and first sergeant need to address the Army Values with them. When counseling a Soldier, the Army Values need to be part of the counseling session; this ensures that our soldiers understand the importance of living by the Army values.

We have to believe in the Army Values if we want to exemplify our ethical conduct and be effective and credible in our profession. Our Army cannot be an organization of unethical behavior where wrong is the answer because right is too hard to do. We owe it to ourselves, our Soldiers, and the American people to always live the Army Values.