

Leaders Create Ethical Dilemmas

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Some NCOs often create ethical dilemmas when there is no need. Regulations are our standards and they are not to be used only when they fit our needs. Other NCOs will argue that even though there is a regulation the situation dictates and NCOs take care of Soldiers.

Noncommissioned officers must behave ethically to be effective and credible. Leaders are tempted to behave unethically because sometimes it is the path of least resistance or it will fit their needs. True, leaders can find themselves dealing with gray solutions. However, I believe that when there is a standard that is black & white then there is no dilemma. Trying to justify unethical behavior by stating that the situation dictates is a way to make one feel good about their decision. The line between what is ethical and what is unethical might be thin to some but I feel that it is clear. Leaders must guard against moving away from this line. Leaders can create some common ethical dilemmas in any unit that they are assigned.

Promotion boards and Soldier of the Month boards have the potential of being an ethical problem for some. The board President will set the standard for a board by giving a brief on the scoring process. However, some of the board members will have their own agendas. I have seen First Sergeants that held a grudge against a Soldier for their past performance. The result would be a score that resulted in minimal promotion points even though the Soldier performed very well at the board. I have also seen board members that kept a mental note of how they scored each Soldier at Soldier of the Month boards. The purpose was to ensure that their Soldier received the best score. I am all for competition but when the system is degraded because of it then there is a problem. Performance of duties, demonstrated leadership, potential, and how the Soldier performs at the board should be the key factors. The standard is set and leaders must avoid unethical behavior as a means of getting one of their Soldiers ahead.

Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Reports (NCOER) are another common dilemma for most evaluators. For some reason leaders often inflate the report for the Soldiers that they want to see succeed instead of giving a true reflection of the NCOs abilities. Thus, we have Soldiers that get promoted to the senior NCO level and ultimately fail. On the other hand, NCOs that may not be the favorite get a less than stellar NCOER even though their counseling does not substantiate a sub-par performance. I think that senior leaders should be more involved and ensure that all NCOs receive a fair and just rating based on performance, leadership skills, and potential. I think that a NCOER should truly reflect when a soldier accomplishes the mission successfully or does not accomplish the mission.

Counseling is an area that has no gray standards. Counseling should take place in accordance with the regulations because the standard for counseling is clear. Far too often counselors will back date a counseling session so the correct timeline is reflected. Especially if there is a need to justify a NCOER or an inspection is on the horizon. When this happens I have to believe that the counselor is more concerned with covering up the fact that they have not done their job as opposed of taking care of the Soldier. I also believe that when this happens the standard is changed and the subordinate will remember the new standard for the rest of their career.

Counseling is an area where leaders can remind Soldiers to behave ethically and exemplify the Army Values. How can a counselor that back dates counseling sessions inform their Soldiers not to violate policies or behave unethically in anyway.

The Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) has born its fair share of poor ethical decisions. The APFT or lack of by senior leaders is a sore topic for me. Fellow Soldiers know whether or not someone at the bottom or all the way to the top fails the APFT or even takes an APFT. The APFT will be taken biannually in accordance with FM 21-20. The standard is black and white

but we still have leaders that do not take a physical fitness test. This is not only a leadership issue but also an ethical dilemma that is created by the leadership. I believe that when the issue is addressed then pressure is applied to leave it alone. I also believe that some of our leaders take an APFT under the most favorable conditions. If the leader changes the conditions in which an APFT is given then a new standard is set. This is not the case for all leaders but there are quite a few that fall into the category. I cannot imagine how a leader that does not meet the standard can punish a Soldier that does not meet the same standard. In addition, it is unimaginable to me that a leader has their Soldiers do something that they are not willing to do themselves.

I cannot understand how the overweight program can create ethical dilemmas but it most definitely does. Army regulation sets the standard for the overweight program. Any Soldier that exceeds the body fat standards will be enrolled in the overweight program. Most leaders will monitor and ensure that their Soldiers meet the standard. Some leaders will throw away the paperwork and tell the Soldier that they need to get the weight under control. I can understand how the leader thinks that this is taking care of the Soldier but I have to wonder if all Soldiers get the same chance. I also have to wonder whether or not the leader is more concerned with positive numbers as opposed to really taking care of the Soldiers.

As far as I am concerned the worst case of unethical behavior is when leaders do not meet the weight standards and do not get enrolled in the overweight program. Much like the APFT, a leader that can put a subordinate on the overweight program but not meet the weight standards themselves is appalling to me. I think that the message the unit receives is one of unethical behavior and a double standard for the leadership. I guess the situation dictates whether or not we use the Army's standard or the leader's standard. To support my argument just look at

December 2003 when the Sergeant Major of the Army directed that all Command Sergeants Major and Sergeants Major conduct a height and weight to shake the leadership.

Leader's actions must send the proper message. Unethical behavior is unacceptable. Ethical behavior is a wide lane to manage. Senior NCOs can do their part by mentoring, and setting the example for all soldiers to see. The NCOs and Officers who choose to behave unethically will eventually learn that their decision was costly. There are cases where standards are not clear. However, we need to be careful when making ethical decisions based on whether or not the situation dictates. Standards, equal treatment, and the regulations should dictate most decisions that need to be made.