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Abstract

Everyday we as leaders have to make ethical and moral decisions on procedures we use to procure equipment. From the start of Operation Enduring Freedom there have been many instances when leaders had to use the moral decision against the regulation when spending the Army's money. The fiscal laws in the military does not allow for "doing the right thing" in situations where lives could be lost. In this paper I will give examples of the decisions I was involved with and the situation around these events.

You could say Ethics is nothing more than looking at a problem, determine if its wrong, and then making the right decision based on our values. So what is the right thing to do in an ethical situation? We all posses our own set of ethics so does that mean we are right every time we make a decision. Maybe not to everyone, but in our mind there is usually no doubt that we have made the right ethical choice.

Placing an equal importance on our values allows us to define ethical violations. The ability to define an ethical problem does not make reaching an ethical decision easier. The way we proceed once we define a problem is perhaps the hardest part in making the right ethical choice and it is here that our personal values play the largest role.

When does the ethical decision making process get in the way of “Doing the right thing”. In our society there are laws we break for the ethical or moral right thing to do. We as leaders in the military have to choose between morally right and ethically right thing to do. I have had to make some hard ethical and moral decisions during my military career. I will site a few instances in my career where I had to make the right decision when it was against regulations and or laws. These occurrences happened while I was assigned as a group S-4 NCOIC getting my unit ready to deploy for Operation Enduring Freedom.

In the first scenario, we were faced with a dilemma about the regulations that governed our units Government Purchase Cards. The laws and regulation states we cannot break the \$1500.00 per purchase threshold. This also means we cannot split a \$3000.00 purchase into two smaller purchases. When we received our deployment order we only had days to prepare. We were tasked to deploy to an area of the world we never worked in and were tasked to conduct a mission we did not have the equipment for. As we started to purchase we realized we could not stay within the \$1,500.00 threshold per purchase. I knew we only had days to prepare and there

would not be enough time to send these requests to contracting, so we made the choice to split the purchases and do what ever it took to get the equipment into the teams hands. By making this decision did I make an unethical decision? According to many I made an unethical decision because I broke the regulations. In this case I believe I did the right thing for the health and welfare of the units personnel.

The second scenario was when we were employed in the area of operation and were sending teams down range for combat operations. There was a requirement to supply each element \$30,000 operational fund before infill. This was an emerging requirement we were not prepared for. As the Task Force J-4 NCOIC, I deployed with a \$250,000 operational fund. We were the first elements in theater and there was no finance office to draw cash and issue to our teams. The only way we could make mission was for me to issue each element \$30,000 from my OPFUND. The situation on the ground was not known and sending our teams into an unknown area could be deadly if they cannot supply themselves with appropriate clothing, shelter and transportation. The only way was to purchase these items on the local economy. My funds were entrusted with me, I had full responsibility, and it was against every rule in the book to hand my money over to the teams.

We dispersed the money to the teams, however some of the items they purchased were not within the regulations either. They needed to procure vehicles, since we could not infill them with the appropriate transportation. They also needed to spend money on the local people they worked with, meaning they would have to buy their support. Other items included renting a house, food, clothing and other items required to live on the local economy. All these items were a valid item however they broke the fiscal laws. The decision by the command was to support what ever the teams needed and it was my job to make sure I could clear my OPFUND at the end

of the mission. Again, were these decisions unethical? According to the contracting office, I was wrong and I could go to jail and/or get UCMJ action against me. As a command we knew the situation and we chose to make sure our personnel were equipped with everything they required.

The last scenario was when we started to re-supply the teams while they were down range. Federal law tells us what we can procure with the type of funds we have in our units. There are funds for every class of supply, however we in the field cannot procure certain items. Our teams were in the middle a country with no infrastructure and could not get all the comfort items needed especially personal demand items. We received requests from t-shirts and underwear to cigarettes and chewing tobacco. All these items were illegal to procure with the types of money we had. We as a command had to make the choice to take care of our soldiers who were not afforded the opportunity to purchase these items.

In the choices above were they the right ones? We as a command knew we were making choices that went against the regulations and fiscal laws. These were just a few of the situations we faced during the initial deployment into Operation Enduring Freedom. The lives of all team members rested in the hands of my office, since all logistical support came from us. At the end of the deployment we went through many audits and inspections from our higher units. In almost every situation we were told we broke the regulations and could be punished, however they also told us we made the right decision. We made these decisions to save the lives of every soldier we sent down range.

These are a few of the examples in one situation. Since we started to deploy units for both Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom there are decisions made everyday about the same situations. We as leaders know we need to take the best interest in the

safety of our soldiers to make sure they are equipped with all their required equipment. We cannot let the rules and regulations get in the way when it gets in the way of protecting our force. There will be many times where we will make an unethical (against the law) decision but it will be morally right because it helped save a life of a soldier.

Unfortunately many ethical problems are not clear-cut and not defined using the army values as our guide to assist us to reach the right decision. During these times, we most relay on the moral values more then ever. It is imperative that we look past our own personal feelings and do what's right for good of the army. Sometimes the ethical decisions are the ones that go against rules and regulations, but as leaders when we are faced with making the hard choice we have to make sure we keep the lives of our soldiers and well being of the Army's values close together.

The Army values are our foundation and our key to defining Ethical problems. Most of us will make different recommendations and decisions based on our personal values and experience when solving these problems. The important point to remember is that we are able to recognize there is a problem and act to correct it. The decisions we implement and how impartial these decision's are, will directly reflect on our leadership and how our soldiers react to similar situations. Our decision to act on an ethical problem directly reflects our desire to maintain and enforce the moral standards. Most importantly, we instill in our soldiers the need to maintain these standards even when it means doing the hard right over the easy wrong. As leaders, we may allow our personal values to implement or recommend solutions to an ethical problem, but we must never allow them to interfere with our ability to define an ethical problem. To do so will surely harm the ethical and moral fiber of our great Army.

First, all leaders are role models. Setting the example in everything we do on and off duty and leading from the front. Second, avoid putting subordinates in compromising positions. Placing soldiers in situations of ethical dilemma, where the possibility exist he/she might make the wrong decision because of misinterpreted instructions. Finally, we must develop good ethical traits in subordinates, constantly re-enforcing the fundamentals of duty, loyalty, selfless service, and integrity.

In summary everyone faces some type of ethical and moral dilemma in life. Using the decision-making process in ethical situations can help identify the course of action that will result in the greatest moral good. Making a decision that may be ethically wrong can still be a right choice because it is the moral right thing to do. Interpret the situation and all factors and forces that relate to the dilemma. Choose the course of action that bests serve the nation, and implement the best course of action that will lead you to the right path.