

THOUGHTS ON EHTICS

SGM ROBERT R. LIPPERT

INSTRUCTOR: SGM NICHOLAS, L09

15 NOVEMBER 2005

SGM Robert R. Lippert
Student Number 65, Group Room L09

THOUGHTS ON ETHICS

Ethics, as defined by Webster is "the system or code of morals of a particular person, religion, group, or profession".

As I started to do research for this ethics papers I discovered some very interesting articles. I didn't know that there are institutes that study and do surveys on ethics ranging from business ethics to politics to other ethical dilemmas in every day society. Narrowing the scope for this paper was somewhat more of a challenge. Nevertheless, I found a couple of article that touched me in one-way or another and decided to add my comments and thoughts.

First I found a short paragraph the deals with leadership; individuals in supervisory positions in relation to the employees. Some of the points that were made struck home and can be applied to the military. This is the first sentence of the paragraph, "Although top management and supervisors have authority to enforce standards of behavior and the ability to lead by their own example, their impact on employees' ethical behavior has its limits." This statement holds very true with the position that I hold, along with many other senior Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO)s in the Army today. We enforce standards of behavior and assist in establishing policy among many other duties and responsibilities. However we, the senior NCOs have limited contact, direct interaction, with the junior soldiers in our units.

Soldiers spend a great deal of time interacting with one another. This interaction takes place in the work place and also during off duty time. Therefore the senior leaders

can only impress upon the soldiers within the organization the importance of doing what is morally and ethically the "right thing to do." If the soldiers do not believe that the senior leaders will do what is right, or they foster a climate of unethical behavior, then it can be expected that the junior soldiers will follow suit. In addition, the junior soldiers will tend to act, conduct themselves, as they witness others in the organization acting. Whether this behavior is from the top down or among peers; it is likely to be perpetuated once it starts.

Nevertheless, we as senior leaders are always being watched. For the most part, the junior soldiers pay little attention when we, the senior leaders, go about our daily business. However, when and if there are transgressions, unethical or immoral behavior of some sort, however miniscule or epic, the soldiers are the first to know. Word spreads fast and is often embellished in some way or another. As examples and role models we can ill afford to conduct ourselves in a manner that is less than exemplary. If within an organization there is a climate of unethical behavior, that organization is destined to fail. Ethical behavior is a cornerstone to creating a productive work environment. The junior soldiers must have confidence that their supervisors and senior leadership will do what is in the best interest of the organization, and in the best interest of the soldiers within the organization.

I once had a Battalion Commander that expressed his power down concept simply by saying, "if it is morally, legally, and ethically correct, execute." However, if an individual is unfamiliar with what is legal or ethically correct it would be very difficult to act without inadvertently stepping outside the limits. Ignorance should not and cannot be used as an excuse. As teachers, mentors and coaches, senior leaders have the

responsibility and obligation to inform subordinates what the legal, moral, and ethical standards are. Not only in terms of providing the information but also in how we conduct ourselves on and off duty.

Unfortunately, within the same unit, just prior to the arrival of this Battalion Commander, the Command Sergeant Major had been relieved for unethical behavior. The potential for individuals and organizations to behave unethically is limitless. Additionally, this potential is too frequently realized. Besides ignorance, again this should never be an excuse, what are some of the rationalizations used to justify unethical behavior? Some people may pretend the behavior is not really unethical or illegal. Others may excuse the behavior by saying it's really in the organization's or their own best interest. Another rationalization may be to assume the behavior is okay because no one else would ever be expected to find out about it. Finally, some may expect their superiors to support and protect them if anything should go wrong.

In the military we face many ethical dilemmas on a daily basis. Some are unique to the military itself. Nevertheless, the challenge of ethical behavior must be met by the military if our soldiers are to one day become leaders themselves. What is needed in today's complicated times is for more individuals to step forward and operate with strong, positive, and ethical behavior. In the military we must ensure that our soldiers know how to deal with ethical issues in their everyday lives. As a result, when the ethical climate is clear and positive, everyone will know what is expected of him or her when inevitable ethical dilemmas occur. This will give our soldiers the confidence to be on the lookout for unethical behavior and act with the understanding that what they are doing is considered correct and will be supported by their supervisors and the unit.