

The ethical problem with the current Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Report (NCOER)

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One of the biggest ethical problems facing the Army today is the current Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Report (NCOER) system. The NCOER is currently not use for what it was originally intended. The purpose of the NCOER is to provide a written report on the individual Soldier, to formally recognize performance and personal traits and a basis for counseling by rating officials for career development. Today, the NCOER is solely viewed as means to get promoted or to end a Soldier's career. This evaluation tool often put leaders in ethical dilemmas because as all good leaders, we want to take care of our subordinates. However, it is to what extent that we go to take care of the people that work for us. Many leaders today think that the current NCOER system is the most accurate and fair way to document and show ones performance and potential for promotion. On the other hand, many say that the NCOER can, and is often used to influence decisions on subordinates, used to settle grudges or simply put, "if your rater like you he or she will take care of you, if they don't, it will reflect on the NCOER"

The evaluation of NCOs has been around for a long time. Starting on 1 October 1958 to 31 March 1968, the Commander's Evaluation Report (DA Form 2166-1 / 2166-2) was used to evaluate NCOs performance and potential. From 1 April 1968 to 29 February 1988 the Enlisted Efficiency/ Evaluation Report (EER, DA Form 2166-3 to 2166-6), was the tool used again to evaluate NCOs. The DA Form 2166-7 was used from 1988 until October 2001. The current form (DA Form 2166-8) has been in existence from November 2001 to present.

The main ethical problem associated with the current system is that it is directly tied to promotion for the top three enlisted ranks. This creates a potential ethical problem for most raters because we want to put our subordinates in a position to better compete for promotion. In 15 years as a rater, senior rater or just proofing reading NCOERs as a leader, I have only seen one "needs improvement" rating came across my desk. I have surveyed many of my peers over the

past two months and they have experienced similar situations in their careers. The first thing that raises a red flag is that not all NCOs are created equally.

We have excellent performers who exceed the standards, successful performer who meets the standards, and a lot who needs some or much improvement, to get to the standards. However, if you look at NCOERs from any Company, Battalion, or Brigade for any year in the past ten years, you will find that about 2.5% gets excellence in all five areas, while 96% gets a mix of excellence and success while the remaining 1.5% gets needs improvement.

The ethical problem lies in the fact that there are a lot more NCOs who needs improvement than just the 1.5% each year. I know that the current NCO Corps is stronger than any other time in our history; however, we have a lot whose performance and actions are well below Army standards and values that are getting by. The ethical problem is tri-fold. First, most leaders know the importance of the NCOER as the number one factor in getting promoted. We sometimes fail to rate a Soldier based on their somewhat sub-par performance because we still want them to remain competitive. Secondly, when a rater completes and turns the NCOER in to battalion, the Battalion Command Sergeant Major challenges the rater in most cases. The rater usually have to go above and beyond to justify excellence ratings and even more so for needs improvement ratings. I have seen many leaders who do not stand their grounds, and change an excellence rating to a success rating or needs improvement to success. They do this to avoid the report being sent back or having to provide the necessary documentation to justify why they gave an excellence or needs improvement. Finally, some leaders will not give needs improvement rating unless the rated NCO actions is so overt, that he or she has to get a needs improvement, such as a DUI or a filed grade Article 15.

The single most important document that a promotion board sees is the NCOER. Most leaders, officers and NCO know this, and realize that the evaluation report is design to fairly and accurately evaluate a Soldiers performance and potential. However, most leaders also know that a needs improvement in any area is almost a career ender.

There are also many leaders in our Army that will inflate the NCOER for different reasons. Some will do it to keep their subordinates competitive in their career field, knowing the inflated rating doesn't match the performance. Others will do it because they have a friendship with the rated NCO, or think the rated NCO deserves it, even when the performance does not warrant such inflation.

You also have leaders that will use their position as the rater or senior rater to influence their subordinate's actions. Many will hold grudges, or allow personal feelings to get in the way of giving a fair and impartial evaluation. Many NCOs will not take a stance or oppose their rater on serious issues that affect their Soldiers, because of fear from reprisal on their evaluation.

There are a lot more NCOs who deserve excellence in all five areas than just the 2.5%, likewise there is a lot more that need improvement than the 1.5%. The Army teaches us that honesty and integrity is probably the most important Army value. On the other hand I have had many of my leaders told me to change a rating because "You don't want to ruin SGT Doe's career" or "he or she has X numbers of years in the Army, you don't want to end their career now".

With so much importance placed on the NCOER for promotion and assignments, many leaders at all level acts unethically to give a subordinate the best chance for promotion by inflating the NCOER or not giving justifiable needs improvement. This make it difficult for those leaders who want to do the morally right thing, and unfair for those deserving NCOs whose

performance and action deserve excellence. The current evaluation system is not perfect; however, we as leaders should do our best to rate our Soldiers as accurately as possible and continue to look out for their needs, while maintaining an ethical position.