

RUNNING HEADER: ETHICS: A FOCUS ON STANDARDS

Ethics: A Focus on Standards

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Abstract

Standards defined as the general nature of morals and specific moral choices an individual makes in relating to others govern the members of the United States Army. These standards define our ethics and are the foundation of the American Soldier. It is imperative that we as non-commissioned officers instill tough standards and make the “on the spot” corrections to ensure they are adhered to. If we fail to do so, a downward trend of undisciplined Soldiers will fill our ranks and sequentially become our future leaders.

Introduction

As the Army moves into the 21st century, we as Senior Non-Commission officers will be the role models for future generations of Soldiers to come. Our Ethics and moral values become that of future generations therefore, we must evaluate what it is that makes us professionals and what it is that we believe in. This is especially important since the Army was founded on standards and discipline with the introduction of Drill and Ceremonies from Van Steuben. It is this discipline that has enabled the U.S. Army to fight and win our nation's wars. Although we continue to be successful during current operations, discipline has declined in the Army, resulting in a variety of infractions conducted by Soldiers which in turn has tarnished the progress being made with the war on terror.

Defining Ethics

It is our duty to mentor our subordinates in the traditions and customs of the Army and to teach them to make the right choices even when it would be easier to bend the rules or take a short cut. This is what Ethics are all about; doing the right thing when no one is around or simply put, "taking the hard right over the easy wrong." As stated in Webster's Dictionary, "Ethics is the study of the general nature of morals and the specific moral choices an individual makes in relating to others or the rules or standards of conduct governing the members of a profession." Essentially, they are the rules and regulations that govern American Soldiers' conduct as they go about their duties. Some, if not all are written down, while others are those inherent standards, the norms that have been ingrained for generations in the personalities and characters of past Soldiers.

Disciplined American Soldiers

The American Soldier has been the foundation in which the United States Army has prided itself on for centuries. This Soldier is a highly disciplined, motivated individual who continuously volunteers to serve our nation in times of peace and war. This Soldier expects to be held to a standard and leaders must enforce these standards. When leaders begin to compromise standards or allow Soldiers to compromise standards, regardless of their personal feelings, the Soldier and respectfully the Army suffers. Standards such as head phones in the APFT Uniform, hands in pockets, rolling sleeves under, not wearing headgear, attending ranges with no plates in IBA, walking and talking on cell phones, and putting sunglasses on their head are all individually seen as petty, however, violating these standards undermines the good order and discipline and goes against the morals and ethics of the Army as a whole. This might seem extreme since the standards when looked at individually seem minor but, how can one individual decide what standard they want to maintain and which standard they don't. Standards are not up for discussion, they are standards, and when either leaders or Soldiers start violating standards, it causes confusion in the ranks and opens opportunities for other Soldiers to question or not meet the standard.

Infractions During Combat Operations

Specific examples of substandard behavior or undisciplined Soldiers include the incident at Abu Grab Prison and other incidents including the mistreatment of detainees in both Afghanistan and Iraq. During Abu Grab, Soldiers were found to mistreat prisoners by placing dog leashes and displaying them in the nude while taking pictures. It was also noted that Soldiers

would conduct sexual activities in front of the prisoners when they were suppose to be guarding them.

Other alleged detainee mistreatment was noted in Afghanistan when Soldiers burned the bodies of the dead enemy which is against Muslim Religion. Soldiers received numerous briefings on the aspects of Muslim Religion and were well aware of the infraction they were committing.

Importance of Discipline and Standards

Both of these examples are just among the few in which have occurred because of lack of discipline within the ranks. This lack of discipline stems from not correcting Soldiers and instilling standards and values. These standards are developed for a reason and must be enforced regardless of personal opinion. If not, a downward trend of undisciplined Soldiers will begin who sequentially will be our future leaders. If we want to continue to have an Army based on customs and traditions and that is disciplined, standards, regardless of personal opinion, must be enforced. If they are not enforced, another weaker standard will be developed and substandard performances accepted.

Leaders Set the Example

As senior leaders sometimes we lose site of the fact that being promoted into positions of leadership mandates we lead from the front. We must always remember that we are leaders first and managers second. We must set the example by picking up the torch and moving out in front to lead. Many have risen to these positions and blinded by the success of those that went before them. But let us not forget that we are always under a microscope by those that we lead and

mentor. Do not be self-deceived into believing that Soldiers do not observe our actions. This is even true off duty when both the Soldiers and the public are monitoring our every move. Examples include the incident in Aberdeen or the embedded media following Soldiers through Iraq. It is the public that pays the bills and they have the right to expect, that as professionals, we will handle ourselves in an ethical and moral way. It is for this reason that they have entrusted their sons and daughters in our charge. They expect us to teach them the discipline and standards needed to survive while simultaneously instilling an ethical and moral attitude to carry their children into the future.

For the future of America, it is our responsibility as leaders to instill values in Soldiers we lead. But first, we must look within ourselves and determine if we meet that standard and then judge ourselves to that standard. If we do not feel that we are up to it, then it is up to us to change ourselves so that we can meet that standard. If we cannot meet the standard, we go against the basic rules of “leading by example” and “leading from the front” and consequently we will fail our Soldiers. Soldiers are direct reflections of their leaders and if we want Soldiers to be “Army Strong”, we as leaders must meet the standards, enforce the standards, and display the ethics valued of the United States Army.

Conclusion

We have observed our fellow officers and non-commissioned officers put into ethical dilemmas; do we correct a Soldier who is in violation of military standards or choose to ignore it. Electing to make the on the spot correction could have a profound impact on the Soldier who may or may not have known the standard in which they were in violation of. Making these

corrections can only lead to a more disciplined well trained Army eliminating infractions that bring disgrace and embarrassment to the United States Army.