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The Army Values, Ethics, and Leadership Application

SGM Luis A. Rivera

United States Army Sergeant Major Academy

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CSM (R) Diane Williams

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Abstract

Army leaders place a great deal of emphasis on insuring that it's Soldiers understand and know how to apply the Army values, ethics, and leadership to every situation that may involve an ethical dilemma. This practice applies to Soldiers, their families, and providers of special services. Leaders and Soldiers at all levels must understand how an informed ethical conscience consistent with Army values prepares Soldiers to make the right choices when faced with tough issues.

The Army Values, Ethics, and Leadership Application

During my 23 year military career, the best leaders in the Army placed great emphasis on the proper application of Army values, ethics, and leadership. The Chief of Staff of the Army has provided guidance on the subject of professional ethics and leadership to organizations responsible for the publication of field manuals, training circulars, and lesson plans. The Army's service schools are engaged in the task of adequately describing Army values, ethics, and leadership doctrine. The list and number of Army values changed after several revisions to the present amount of seven. The Army's definition of leadership changed from an art to a process, from a process to an essential element of combat power, and then back to a process. Classroom instructions on ethics increased from a very limited number of courses, to complete well thought out advanced courses. They are now being taught at the U.S. Army War College, the Command and General Staff College, the ROTC Cadet Command, and other Army service schools. During that same time the number of books and articles on military ethics and leadership has increased.

The U.S. Army Academy libraries include titles on the subjects of war, morality, and ethics. The Army's top educational institution, the Army War College, listed titles in the related fields of ethics and leadership. No other organization or Army in the world gives as much attention to these subjects as the United States Army. From the end of the Vietnam War to present the U.S. Army studied many cases of ethical dilemmas with the intent to develop more effective leaders. The education resulted in the public acceptance of the U.S. Army as an organization worthy of trust and support.

The Army and its leadership requirements are based on our country's democratic foundations, defined values, and standards of excellence. Yet this emphasis on high standards of

professionalism has not met all the needs of the service. Soldiers and leaders at all levels continuously fail to take the morally correct action when faced with ethical dilemmas. While the Army Values are widespread and taught to Soldiers at all levels with the intent to guide them into, doing the right thing, it is ultimately the consciences of the Soldiers that determines their actions. It is stated in FM 6-22, “an informed ethical conscience consistent with Army values strengthens leaders to make the right choices when faced with tough issues” (FM 6-22, p. 4-1).

While serving in Iraq as the First Sergeant for HHC, 1-14th Infantry during Operation Iraqi Freedom II, I witnessed numerous incidents of unethical conduct. Soldiers from all ranks and background took part in these incidents of ethical misconducts. One such unethical conduct involved a noncommissioned officer assigned to my company as a rehabilitation transfer.

The incident started when SSG Peg, a member of C CO, 1-14th Infantry, failed to conduct a pre-combat inspection on his squad before going out on a combat patrol as his platoon leader instructed him. SSG Peg not only failed to follow the order of his platoon leader, but also lied to a senior noncommissioned officer when he told the First Sergeant that his squad inspection was completed. For his actions SSG Peg was charged under article 92 of the uniform code of military justice (UCMJ) and reduced to the rank of Sergeant. He was later rehabilitative transferred to HHC 1-14th Infantry.

While assigned to HHC 1-14th Infantry, Sergeant Peg did not qualify to participate in the company’s rest and recuperation (R & R) program. The company had a policy that Soldiers on the overweight program, Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) failure, or received UCMJ action were not allowed to participate in the R&R program. The only way that Soldiers in these categories could go home was under emergency conditions with a certified Red Cross message.

Sergeant Peg duty performance after the transfer was good. He took initiative and made sure that all Soldiers under his supervision were always prepared to execute the assigned missions. In October 2004, the Battalion Command Post (CP) received a Red Cross message requesting Sergeant Peg return home because of his daughter's illness. Once the message was received the Soldier was notified and Battalion Surgeon advice was sought. The Battalion Surgeon recommended against the Soldiers return home since the illness was not serious enough to grant the request.

A week later the Battalion (CP) received another Red Cross message requesting Sergeant Peg return home due to a daughter illness. Once again the Soldier was notified and his reply was, "when am I leaving?" We told him that we needed the message verified and the Battalion Surgeon recommendation before the decision to let him return home could be reached. Once again the Battalion Surgeon reviewed the message and determined the illness was not severe enough to grant the Soldier return home. Once the second Red Cross message was received the Battalion Surgeon questioned the accuracy and the integrity of the report. He decided to call the doctor and speak to him about the report and the seriousness of the illness. When the doctor was contacted, he admitted that the illness was not serious enough to grant the Soldier return home. He also stated that he was trying to help the Soldier's wife in her efforts to bring her husband home on leave, since it was the only way that he could go home.

This incident clearly demonstrates unethical conduct due to lack of integrity by the Soldier, his wife, and the doctor. The lack of integrity is not the only Army Value that was in conflict during this incident. The Soldier involved failed to be loyal to his Soldiers by not living the Army Values. Leaders must lead by example and loyalty is an extremely crucial for the successful day-to-day operations of all organizations.

The next Army Value displayed during the incident was Duty. Duty is fulfilling your obligation; it goes beyond everything required by regulations. I fulfilled my obligations by ensuring that the report was accurate and the company policies were enforced. However, senior NCO's must take care of the Soldiers and their families. There is the possibility that the integrity conflict could have been avoided if the R& R policy was changed or eliminated. I had the opportunity to affect that change. I faced a difficult ethical dilemma on whether to support the command or to support the Soldier and his family.

I decided to support the command after analyzing and evaluating the situation under the whole Soldier concept. The question is, did I make the right decision? I am not sure that I made the right decision, but my ethical conscience and the understanding of the Army Values guided me to reach my decision in this difficult issue.

The other Army Value in conflict during the incident was Selfless Service. Selfless Service is putting the welfare of the Nation, the Army, and the subordinates before your own. The Soldier involved in this incident was clearly interested in going home on leave in anyway possible even if it was through illegal means.

The next Army Value in conflict during the incident is Honor. Honor is honesty, fairness, and integrity in one's belief and actions. Honor is the glue that holds all the Army values together. Sergeant Peg was dishonest in his actions when he lied about the pre-combat inspections and when he influenced his wife to send the Red Cross message.

The last Army Value displayed during the incident was personal courage. Personal courage has two components: physical and moral. The Battalion Surgeon displayed moral courage when he questioned the integrity of the report and the doctor equally displayed moral courage when he admitted to his intentions during the report.

The Random House Unabridged Dictionary (1997) defines ethics as “a system or set of moral principles (values); the rules of conduct recognized in respect to a particular class of human actions or a particular group, culture, etc”. The United States Army has its own set of values that they want the Soldiers to live by. Those values spell the acronym LDRSHIP. The Values as stated in FM 6-22 are Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage (FM 6-22, p. 4-3).

While the Army Values are designed with the intent to guide the Soldiers into “doing the right thing”, it is ultimately the conscience of the Soldiers that determines their actions. A good understanding of the Army Values and Ethics will prevent confusion and will increase the leaders and Soldiers ability to make the right choice when faced with tough issues.

Conclusion

Leaders are responsible for establishing the ethical climate in the unit. We must examine ourselves and determine how well we reflect the Army values. If you attack what is wrong and uphold what is right and just, you have set an ethical climate in your unit. A leader must exercise good judgment at all times, knowing that Soldiers are watching him. Leaders must set the example. Soldiers look to the leaders as someone who has made it, so whatever we do in that role is what many of them feel they must do in order to be successful. We must lead by example. Our values are an essential ingredient in our success in the performance of our duties.

References

FM 6-22, Army Leadership, 10 January 2006, p. 4-1, p.4-3

Ethics. (1997). Retrieved December 7, 2006, from Fact Monster, the free dictionary

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