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The Army Weight Control Program

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Abstract

The Army Weight Control Program sets forth standards and provides incentives designed to motivate Soldiers to comply with Army standards. However, the human factor is involved while reading and setting the standards outlined in “The Army Weight Control Program” manual (AR 600-9), especially when it comes to different rank structure and individual performances throughout the United States Army.

The Army Weight Control Program

Ethics is the principles of conduct governing an individual or group; concerns for what is right or wrong, good or bad. AR 600-9 regulates the Army Weight Control Program. The interpretation of this regulation leaves many doors open as to whether we should have a Soldier's military obligation terminated for not meeting the standard. Using words, such as can, may, or should does not state that a Soldier must be removed from military service. In addition, we have many situations when a Soldier is not meeting the standard and they are not placed on a weight control program, because of their superior job performance or because we do not want to hurt their career. This is when we may run into an ethical situation according to some people according to the Army values. Let us look at some situations and see the relationship between the Army values and the Army Weight Control Program.

The unit has just conducted a weigh-in and SPC Smith is overweight and must have his body fat checked. He failed the TAPE for his age and body fat standard, but because of his superior job performance; he is not placed on the program. He has constantly earned the Army Physical Fitness Test Badge and has received several awards for his job performance throughout the year by his commander. He was counseled about the situation and he informs the commander he will lose the weight. At the same time, SPC Jones does not meet the standard and is placed on the program. He is an average Soldier and does not try to exceed the standard when it comes to his job performance. What is the ethical problem with the two situations above? Is the command being loyal to the unit by keeping the outstanding Soldier off the program and enrolling the average Soldier?

SGM Wallace and I had a personal communication about a weigh-in conducted in his unit and a one of his platoon leaders is grossly overweight according to the regulation. First Lieutenant Soft is overweight and does not meet his required body fat standard. The company commander is notified and wants to have a closed-door session concerning placing Lieutenant Soft on the overweight program. The company commander knows that Lieutenant Soft's father is the Commanding General in another division and the company commander does not want to jeopardize the Lieutenants career by placing him in the weight control program with others Soldiers in the unit.. He does a good job, but is not exceptional performer. As outlined in AR 600-9, CH3, Para 3-1 (d), Personnel who are overweight, including Soldiers who become pregnant while on the weight control program. Para 3-1 (d)(2) Will not be assigned to command, command sergeant major or first sergeant positions. The company commander decided not to place the Lieutenant into the program, what ethics dilemma did company commander violate by not enrolled the Lieutenant into the program?

It is time for deployment and there are a few Soldiers not meeting the body fat standard. The unit needs the Soldiers to fill their manning roster and will not receive any replacements prior to deploying. They are some of the hardest working Soldiers in the unit. There are not many that can carry the loads, fire a weapon or know the battle drills required in combat as these Soldiers. Why do we go against the standard and have our integrity questioned by removing them from the program, when in reality, they should not be removed.

A Soldier is on the overweight program, but one of the most combat focused Soldier in the unit. He always set the standard for roadmarches, earns the Army Physical Fitness Badge, and is the first to lead by example. Another Soldier is a marathon stud, but he cannot pass the

pushup event on the Army Physical Fitness Test. The unit does nothing because of his running ability and the good name the unit receives during the monthly 10k runs.

The Army is going through a great transformation. This means there are many aspects of the Army that must change. The Army Weight Control Program is one that is in desperate need of change. Where do we draw the line? Is an overweight Soldier actually a liability or asset to the unit?

It is time for the Army to start being more battlefield focused when it comes to weight control. The jobs that certain personnel in the Army have do not require them to be in the best physical condition. This not to say that we do not need a standard. The standard needs to be adjusted so that we as leaders do not put ourselves into ethical situations such as the earlier examples.

One way to adjust the program is that a Soldier that is placed on the program and has not met their obligation to the service will not be terminated from the service. This will stop a Soldier from trying to eat their way out of the Army. I think that when a Soldier is put out for this reason, we are not supporting the Army value of Honor. We have let our country down by not requiring that Soldier to fulfill their contract and oath of enlistment.

Now, let's look at the Army Physical Fitness Test as it compares to the Army Weight Control Program. I have yet to see the time when I was required to run two miles on the battlefield. So, why is this being judge of a Soldier's endurance? In combat arms field, it makes a lot more sense to have a roadmarch or sprints in place of the two-mile run. In addition, I have never been required to do push-ups or sit-ups on the battlefield while fighting in Operations Iraqi Freedom. Let us add an event such as a buddy carry, ammo can carry, or even a station where a

Soldier must pull himself or herself over a wall. This really sounds more like battlefield situations the Soldiers of today are facing.

Once a program such as one of the above is put into place, the Soldier must be required to pass the test. If after this point in time a Soldier is over their allowed body weight and body fat they will not be allowed to receive any favorable action. If the Soldier is dedicated to their job and wants to better themselves, they will do all in their power to have the restrictions lifted. The Soldier already knows they will not be leaving the military service and if the unit deploys they will be there with the rest of their service members. Most of the overweight programs are suspended when a unit is deployed.

A new program that focuses more on the Soldiers day to day activities and the mission the Soldier is required to do when on the battlefield will allow leaders not to be as concerned with the weight of the Soldier. The Soldier knows they will not be going home for not meeting the standard and the leader does not have to be concerned with placing themselves in an ethical situation because they are showing favoritism and not supporting the Army values in the eyes of some.

Conclusion

The Army Weight Control Program is a clear and well defined program used in today's Army. The roles of leaders are to use AR 600-9 and maintain the standards prescribed in this regulation. Therefore, once we lower the standards or refuse to apply them, it becomes an ethical dilemma that goes totally against the seven Army Values. It is time to use this manual; regardless of the situation or environment you are placed, to keep the most qualified, motivated and fit Soldiers ready for peace and combat operations.

References:

Army Regulation 600-9, The Army Weight Control Program, November 27, 2006

Wallace, Ricky SGM, personal communication, November 21, 2006