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Army Recruiting Referral Bonus Program

MSG Jeffrey S. Hegarty

United States Sergeants Major Academy

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Abstract

Effective 18 January 2006 the United States Army launched a program to assist the United States Army Recruiting Command (USAREC) with making the FY 06 recruiting numbers. The Army Recruiting Referral Bonus Program pays Soldiers \$1000.00 for referrals entered through the Sergeant Major of the Army Recruiting Team (SMART) Program database located at <https://www.usarec.army.mil/smart/>. The program did assist USAREC with making the FY 06 recruiting goals, but to what price to the budget and what price to Soldiers morals. I am not saying that this program is a total ethical problem but there are ethical problems that could come up in the future that must be addressed and the possible solutions to correct these ethical problems considered. USAREC does not need more ethical problems in the press.

Conflicts of Interest

The Ethical Problems

An online article in *About U.S. Military* details facts on the Army Recruiting Referral Program at <http://usmilitary.about.com/od/armyjoin/a/referralbonus.htm>. The article addressed the main concern that I have about the new program but the title “No conflicts of Interest” shows it as a non-issue. This portion of the article spells out who cannot participate in the referral program to include Army Recruiters, Retention NCOs, Cadet Command, and National Guard and Army Reserve Retention and Recruiting personnel. The article also says that “anyone ...if their duties could be perceived as creating a conflict of interest” will not receive the bonus. All Soldiers are excluded from referring family members and receiving the bonus. In these areas, I see ethical problems in the future with this program for the Army and the Army Recruiting Command. I have to believe that my fellow Soldiers follow the ethical beliefs instilled upon us since Basic Combat Training. However, Soldiers come to the Army with different norms and for all the Army’s Values of Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage does not always win, compared to the Soldiers norms that have been taught and acted upon since birth.

The Buddy System – Ethical Scenario 1

The first possible problem I see is with not allowing all MOSs the opportunity to refer a Soldier with this program and receive the \$1000 dollar bonus. In my opinion, this could create what I will refer to as the buddy system of circumventing the system. A hypothetical ethical dilemma scenario could look like this. A recruiter (who is screened for financial problems prior to acceptance into the Army Recruiter Course) develops a gambling addiction that creates money problems. This recruiter also knows Joe, a friend who is serving as a Supply Sergeant in the National Guard. Joe and the recruiter come up with the buddy scheme for the referral program,

where the recruiter will find applicants that are interested and give the information to Joe to put into the Operation SMART website under Joe's account. They agree to split the money 50-50 once the Soldier completes AIT. Joe is willing because he can create an account with Operation SMART and the Referral Bonus Program does not spell out how you receive the recruit's information. The recruiter could do this because all he is thinking about at the time is paying off his debts caused from gambling. This same scenario could work with any of the aforementioned sources that cannot participate in the program.

The other piece to this puzzle that the recruiter is looking at, is why does Army Recruiting Contractors receive bonuses for Soldiers they put in after reaching their quota and service members receive nothing? This seems like a double standard and in the recruiters mind what he is doing is not unethical.

Family Members – Ethical Scenario 2

I, and many other Army service men and women have relatives that ask questions about what we do in the Army. Relatives ask these questions because they themselves would like to follow in our footsteps. I have personally influenced my sister-in-law, three nephews, and one niece into joining the ranks of the United States Army and Army Reserve. Could that have resulted in \$5000.00 for my efforts? I believe Soldiers do influence relatives to the point of joining the ranks of the Army. I also see another scenario involving a friend of a Soldier who agrees to refer the Soldier's relative in the Operation SMART Program database. The Soldier's friend will receive the money and split the money with the Soldier and possible the Soldiers relative. This situation, not unlike the situation above, could cause not just the two friends to have an ethical dilemma, but also the new recruit if they make them a part of the scheme.

The following ethical problems could cost the Army and the United States Army Recruiting Command millions of dollars. The cost would be broken up into money paid to Soldiers who

refer applicants that are not eligible, other cost could involve investigations into allegations of abuse into the program. Other cost could be in media relations if this happens in the future, and the media makes it out to be a big scandal. Money can be the root of all evil, causing ethical dilemmas for some of the weak minded Soldiers we have in our ranks. I have developed two different courses of action to solve the different ethical dilemmas mentioned in this paper.

Course of Action 1

The first course of action is to take out the equation of, "It is not fair that I am not able to receive the bonus because I do not qualify." The Army could open the referral program up to all MOSs, to include Army Recruiters. The Army Recruiting Command is already paying Civilian Contract Recruiters bonuses for extra recruits over their current mission. So why should USAREC exclude an Army Recruiter in receiving similar bonuses for the work that they do above and beyond. By offering the bonuses to recruiters, this could also spark a more vigilant effort in recruiting in our high schools and colleges. Other MOSs that are excluded, are Retention NCOs. Retention NCOs do not recruit, they reenlist current members of the Army to stay in the service. Retention NCOs are great influencers on what the Army has to offer. I am a retention NCO and I do not go into malls or grocery stores looking to recruit, however I would think hard about it if I was paid the bonus. I would be very affective at referring people into the Army. In my opinion my position as a retention NCO off duty is the same as a supply sergeant off duty. The biggest difference is the supply sergeant gets a bonus if he refers someone, and the retention NCO receives nothing.

Another part of this course of action is to allow family members, to receive the bonus. Was it any more work for a Soldier or myself to speak about the Army to my relatives and ensure they receive the information they are looking for prior to joining. Is the Army trying not to promote family members from joining? Are Soldiers with family members who they influenced

being punished by not being eligible to receive the bonus?

Course of Action 2

The final course of action that I am going to recommend is probably the easiest in my mind. This course of action could cause the media to ask questions as to why, what, and how the Army Recruiting Command came to this decision. This course of action involves disbanding the bonus referral program all together, by not paying any bonuses for referrals. Questions that should have been answered are. Do we need to motivate and influence Soldiers to refer civilians to join? Should our Soldiers do this out of Selfless Service? Should we not teach and preach the Army values and sell them to our Soldiers more than getting paid to refer your friend or any civilian to a program that helped you out with your future plans? The next question is, how many Soldiers has these referrals brought to the ranks of the United States Army? It seems there are many questions that still need to be analyzed first, prior to another rash decision. The final reason this is a viable course of action, is it takes the temptation for causing an ethical dilemma out of the picture. It not only takes it out of the picture, it saves the Army money on paying bonuses to Soldiers who would do and share part of their values with others, selfless service. It will also save the Army, in money invested with investigating possible fraud allegations brought about in the future, due to the new referral program.

Conclusion

I believe the new \$1000.00 Army Referral Program has a great value in recruiting tomorrows Army. It influences Soldiers to speak about their service in a positive light to the public and to actively seek there replacement to serve in the Army. Whether you are shopping in a mall, out picking up groceries, and possible paying for gasoline in a convenience store, the public is curious and interested in a normal Soldiers perspective of the Army. The referral program will assist our young Soldiers in seeing that talking to the public is not a waste of their

time. The ethical course of action solution I would personally pick is the first. The reason I would, is that it multiplies the recruiting force even more, to include Soldiers who are skilled at talking to a stranger and putting things in a way that sounds like gold. By taking the problem out of the equation you eliminate the ethical problem. If the Army does not look at this there will be investigations later, with the possibility of repercussions from the civilian population asking the same questions that were asked throughout this paper.

References

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