

Do the right thing: NCOs' role in unit ethics training

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"When our president has to publicly apologize for the actions of a private, then an NCO has failed to do his or her job." Sgt. Maj. Hugh Roberts, the former U.S. Army Ranger Regiment sergeant major, said this during his official remarks at a First Sergeant Course graduation. He managed to bring the whole ethics issue down to one sentence with this one statement.

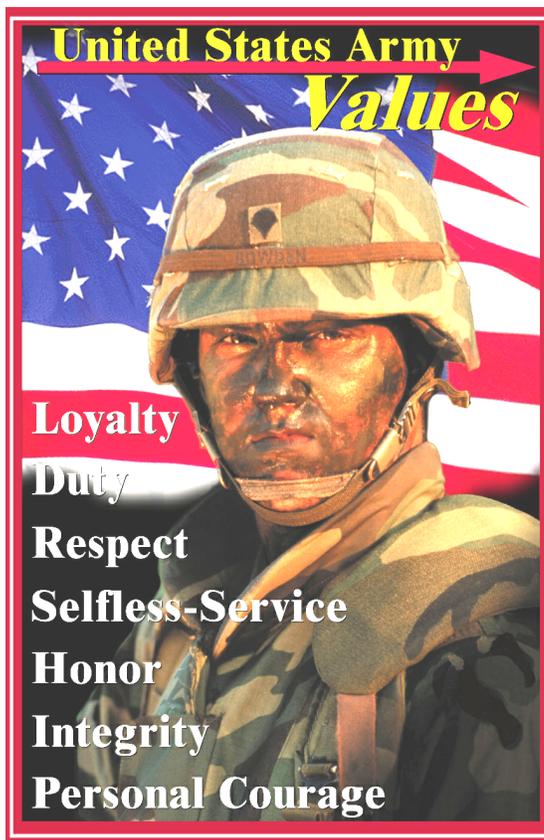
During the Civil War the citizens of Atlanta asked Union General William T. Sherman to spare their town during his march to the sea. Sherman refused, reasoning that his mission outweighed traditional rules of conflict and individual considerations. He responded that "War is cruel." Some Soldiers have mistranslated his quote as, "War is Hell." They have used his quote to justify a number of wartime decisions. In combat Soldiers must weigh many rules, consequences, situations and values in making decisions. But, no matter what the conditions, American Soldiers have no reasons not to make ethical decisions.

All leaders – junior and senior alike – must act ethically. Professional ethics is nothing more than Soldiers putting Army values into action. H. John Poole, author of *The Last Hundred Yards*, states that the last 100 yards is the contribution of NCOs to combat. The last 100 yards makes all the difference in ethical action.

All NCOs can define ethics. It's a subject that's discussed in every NCO Education System course. But, the training should not be confined to just NCOES classrooms. NCOs must teach ethics to their teams or squads, the same way they teach marksmanship and squad drills. It's a part of how we soldier on a daily basis.

We must integrate ethics into our missions in the same way that we do our values, technical skills and rules of engagement. Ethics training is a perishable skill just like marksmanship. We have to practice it and reinforce it as a regular part of training for the skill to be useful when your team is under fire. It's the senior leaders' duty to ensure that ethics training is conducted, but it's the junior leader's responsibility to ensure that he or she is teaching the team ethics training on a regular basis.

Professional ethics training begins with the boundaries and foundations we set for our actions at the individual and organizational level. FM 7.0, *Training the Force*, describes the outer boundary of



U.S. Army graphic

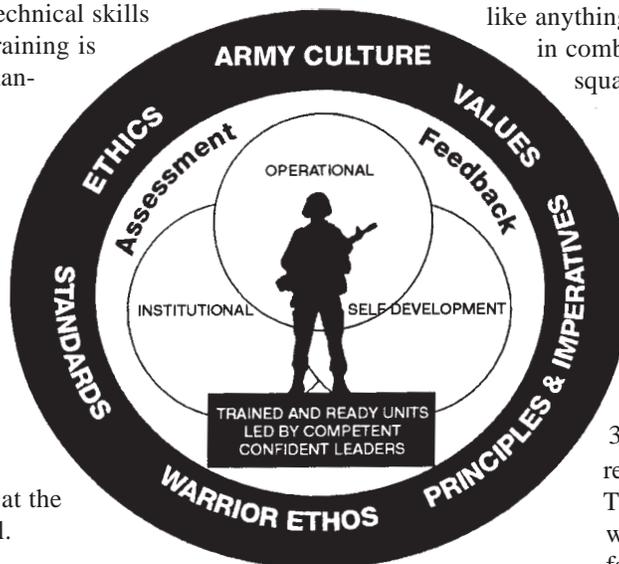
The seven Army Values make up a good part of the framework for ethics training.

Army training as a combination of values, principles, standards, ethics, Warrior Ethos, army culture, etc. Soldiers can only learn and practice this if it is trained and reinforced like anything other skill: on the job, in the field, in combat, always taught at the team- and squad-level by NCOs.

Incorporating ethics education into your training is a simple task. NCOs can use the following list of ideas that require minimum to train their Soldiers:

1. Learn about military ethics. The bibliography at the end of this story offers some good resources
2. Incorporate ethics training into your training schedule.
3. Learn to do ethical after-action reviews for unit actions and events.

These are private lessons learned that will help your team avoid reinforcing failure and escape the "what happens in the field stays in the field" mental-



Army training and leader development model.

ity. NCOs determine the subject matter, but rework the decision process using the format shown inset:

4. Don't wait for a combined-arms training center rotation or mission rehearsal exercise. Think about what ethical challenges your Soldiers need to prepare for. Incorporate ethical lessons learned and operational events into your unit's lane training and field exercises. Apply these scenarios to your Soldiers' training, and make them a part of the AAR so your Soldiers can discuss them and form their own lessons learned. NCOs can make up scenarios from their experiences or they can draw from books, newspapers and some of the Web sites listed in the references.

5. Use short scenes from movies (do not use the whole movie) to host a discussion with your Soldiers on professional ethics. The scenes may not always be realistic, but they provide a launch pad to get your Soldiers thinking about ethical behavior. Match these episodes with your unit missions. Use the ethical decision process outlined in FM 22-100 or the ethical AAR process

Decision process

1. Define the problem/event.
2. Ask the following questions:
 - a. What are the rules/principles?
 - b. What is the destination mission or desired end state?
 - c. What is the situation – what's going on/who is involved – what are my resources, what are the risks, METT-TC?
 - d. What does my conscience/character tell me and the Army Values require of me?
3. Develop alternative courses of action.
4. Choose the course of action that best aligns the rules, mission, situation and character.
5. Act.
6. Constant azimuth check.

(shown here) to teach professional ethical discipline versus personal views.

6. Ask senior NCOs with operational experience to talk with your Soldiers about their experiences in an informal, small-group setting where the Soldiers will feel comfortable asking questions.

The goal of a unit ethics program is to reinforce the standard that Soldiers must act ethically in all operational environments. War may be cruel — but it doesn't excuse unprofessional behavior. Instilling ethics in your Soldiers is a trained skill that doesn't happen by accident while Soldiers are under fire. Soldiers learn from training and our examples that our values and the belief that we must do what's right are our standard operating procedures. Soldiering is all about ethics. As Davy Crockett once advised his troops, "Be sure you're right, then go ahead." In ethics as in all training – NCOs lead the way.

Editor's note: Chap. (Maj.) Jeffrey Zust is the chaplain for the 35th Air Defense Artillery Brigade, Ft. Bliss, Texas.

References and suggested resources

References

A Moral Military by Sidney Axinn.

Military Ethics and Professionalism: A Collection of Essays by James Brown.

The Moral Warrior: Ethics and Service in the U.S. Military by Martin L. Cook.

On Killing: The Psychological cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society by Lt. Col. David Grossman.

Srebrenica: Record of a War Crime by Jan Wilhem Honig and Norbert Both.

Morality, and Contemporary Warfare by James Turner Johnson.

Casualties of War by Daniel Lange.

Just and Unjust Wars by Michael Walzer.

True Faith and Allegiance: The Burden of Military Ethics by James H. Toner.

The NCO Journal

Ethics 101: The Ethical Reasoning Process by Mark Kalinowski. Fall 2002.

Ethics 102: The Ethics Land Navigation Model by Jeff Zust. January 2003.

United States Army Field Manuals

FM 22-100	Army Leadership
FM 27-10	The Law of Land Warfare
FM 600-20	Army Command Policy

Web sites

<http://ethics.sandiego.edu/Applied/Military/index.asp>

<http://www.usna.edu/Ethics/>

<http://www.usafa.af.mil/jscope/>

<http://www.chowan.edu/acadp/ethics/studies.htm>

Movies

A Few Good Men, Rules of Engagement, Band of Brothers (historical interviews), Platoon, Gardens of Stone, Saving Private Ryan, Hamburger Hill, Tears of the Sun, Hanoi Hilton, We Were Soldiers Once, Gettysburg, Master and Commander, Glory, The Last Castle, BAT 21 and Casualties of War.