



Command Sgt. Maj. James Coroy (left), command sergeant major of the 199th Infantry Brigade at Fort Benning, Ga., discusses routine ethics with two lieutenants recently.

# CSM Coroy: Routine Ethics for Company-Level Leaders

*By Command Sgt. Maj. James Coroy*

199th Infantry Brigade

**T**welve years of persistent conflict has inculcated an entire generation of leaders with moral and ethical lessons. Incidents in Abu Ghraib and Mahmudiyah highlighted the need to refine ethics training within the officer and non-commissioned officer education systems. Currently, officer candidates and Infantry Officer Basic Course students review historical

vignettes and participate in open discussions. Academic exercises stimulate further critical thinking; however, students quickly realize that combat rarely offers wholly ethical or unethical solutions.

While vignette training has become an important part of leader development, Soldiers should also focus on the routine ethical dilemmas they encounter daily. Routine

ethics, as in combat, seldom present clear choices but failure to practice them can disrupt preparedness and affect readiness. Routine ethics don't often make headlines but they can ultimately decide unit success. By focusing on four areas, first sergeants can establish a positive command climate, which supports ethical behavior during periods of stress and uncertainty.

Property accountability offers young leaders their first opportunity to behave ethically. Maintaining proper inventories, hand receipts, turning in excess equipment and strict command supply discipline will inspire leaders to become good stewards of government property. Leaders must instill a sense of ownership in individual equipment and vehicle fleets. Company-level leaders must have a thorough understanding of financial liability investigations of property loss (FLIPL), statement of charges, commanders' inquiries, shortage annexes, and property book adjustment procedures. Officer and NCO education programs of instruction must contain updated curricula to account for relevant practices.

Avoiding fraternization and improper relationships presents another opportunity to practice ethical behavior. Newly arrived and newly promoted leaders face tremendous pressure to conform. Commanders and first sergeants must integrate new leaders while discussing fraternization's negative impact. A sponsorship program can mitigate risk associated with a PCS move. Sound sponsorship programs can help units effectively assess personality and character. First sergeants must understand the Sponsorship Program Counseling and Information Sheet, DA Form 5434, and adhere to AR 600-8-8, The Total Army Sponsorship Program.

Sanctioned events such as Family Readiness Group cookouts or unit sporting events can build the team while allowing leaders the opportunity to mentor in a relaxed social setting. Proper leader development depends on understanding the differences between fraternization and off-duty team building. Commanders and first sergeants clarify these differences using personal examples and mentorship.

The pressure to conform often prompts leaders to omit initial and performance based counseling. Not having written expectations keep subordinates guessing. Detailed, written counseling helps leaders avoid evaluation inflation that disenfranchises high performers while building a culture of mediocrity. Evaluation inflation allows marginal performers to escape accountability. First sergeants must inspect and coach subordinate counselors, while displaying expertise in noncommissioned officer evaluation report counseling. Leaders should evaluate subordinates using the attributes and competencies found in the Leader Requirements Model of Army Doctrine Publication 6.22

When company-level leaders find themselves in the undesirable position of disciplining competent performers who suffer ethical transgressions, such as alcohol incidents or substance abuse, they must resist the temptation to exalt competence over character. Highly competent, low-character Soldiers negate efforts to establish an ethical command climate. In future leadership roles, these individuals will likely dismiss ethics' importance, creating a negative feedback loop that decimates long-term morale while imprinting poor ethical traits on the next generation.

Company-level leaders can expect ethical challenges in property accountability, fraternization, evaluation inflation and disciplining competent Soldiers. Developing methods to mitigate these dilemmas must encompass every commander and first sergeant's strategic vision. By openly collaborating and discussing solutions, company-level leaders can forge skilled teams while creating an ethically sound command climate.

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