

A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

Situation: While in command, 1SG Turner and SFC Goodman informed me one of my troops was having difficulty in school and had displayed unusual behavior. SPC Williams was a young female Soldier who appeared fatigued, inattentive, and impatient at times. She told the Platoon Sergeant that the responsibilities of life continued to overwhelm her. She admitted to living with her eight-month old daughter in the barracks as a single mother. She felt caught between a rock and a hard place with no relief in sight. As a new commander I did not want to report this to the battalion commander or the CSM. I wanted to avoid the impression of not having control and bring negative light to my unit. I told 1SG Turner and SFC Goodman we would handle this situation ourselves. The three of us agreed to help SPC Williams.

As an adopted child, SPC Williams did not have a supportive family. We called her adopted parents and explained Williams' situation. They said, "We can't help her." The father of the baby was not a reliable person and chose not to be involved in his family's lives. Williams worked hard to provide a stable life for herself and her baby. In the midst of trying to solve her situation we found out Williams lied during her enlistment process into the Army. She provided false documentation to recruiters which said she granted total guardianship of her daughter to her mother during her initial enlistment. The Army requires this guardianship in the event something happens to the service member during the enlistment.

I went to extreme lengths to find SPC Williams help since she did not receive any child support from the baby's father or any other type of financial assistance. I pleaded with the staff at the Army Community Service (ACS) to grant Williams sizable loans in an effort to relieve some of her initial financial needs. I assisted her by babysitting her child so she could have some personal time. We also provided her continuous moral support to help her get through the difficult times. Ultimately I could not condone Williams and her eight-month old child living illegally in the barracks. Though I thought I was trying to do the right thing I struggled with knowing she was dishonest in filing her enlistment paper work. What should I do?

REFLECTION...

At the end of day, Turner, Goodman and I felt we did the right thing by not giving her a Chapter and kicking her out the Army. We believed we kept a good person, mother, and Soldier in the Army. However, we all neglected Army's policy by not following Chapter guidelines.

Ethical Dilemma at the Time of the Incident: Mercy versus justice. If I put her out of the military she would be worse off than she is now. If I do nothing am I sending a message that this behavior is acceptable?

Rules/Laws That Apply: Army policy clearly states that a single parent Soldier must grant custody of their child or children during their first term while being a trainee. Legal custody must be given to a legal guardian for duration of the first enlistment.

At What Point Did You Say "Enough is Enough"? When And How Did You Take Action?

When a leader becomes a social worker the situation needs to be re-evaluated. I decided to take action when I realized she had no support network. It is my duty as a leader to take care of my troops though I must balance taking action versus maintaining the integrity of the Army system.

Conflict or Tension of the 7 Army Values? How Did You Resolve Those Conflicts? I struggled with my duty as a commander versus loyalty to my troop. I failed in my duty to the Army by not standing firm on my oath of office. I turned a blind eye to the situation and helped her get through her unfortunate situation. I turned to my personal feelings to handle what I considered a delicate situation regarding a mother and her child. The question I asked myself was, "Do I help a single mother and her child make it through a very difficult time in their lives, or do I put them on the streets?" If it were my daughter in that situation, I would want someone to help them and not be insensitive.

Consideration of Other COAs and the 2nd and 3rd Order Effects. As a commander, I had a few courses of action to take regarding Williams' ordeal. First, I could have ordered her to immediately move out the barracks. Second, I could have pushed for a Field Grade Article 15 for falsifying official documents. Third, I had the choice of requesting a separation for service because of breach of contract as she lied to enter government service.

How Did You Get the Courage To Do the Harder Right? I failed to do so. I failed to do the legal hard right though I believe I did the moral right. I think she needed help and not punishment.