

CHOOSING THE HARD RIGHT OVER THE EASY WRONG

Situation: As an incoming company commander conducting my change of command inventories, I soon discovered there were a number of unaccounted pieces of government property and equipment. I noted this and brought it to the attention of the outgoing commander in an effort to locate the missing items. With approximately one week remaining until the change of command ceremony, the outgoing commander was pressuring me to speed up the inventories so that he could finish his Permanent Change of Station (PCS) procedures, out-process, and move on to his next duty assignment. I began conducting my change of command inventories of the company which had just returned from a short-notice 12-month deployment to Iraq. All of the equipment had recently arrived back to the unit with the majority of it still packed in the shipping containers. I was literally looking at much of this equipment for the first time since it was packed in Iraq for redeployment back to the United States. This situation frustrated me: the outgoing commander who was ready to PCS and the tired Soldiers and NCOs spending many long hours daily sorting through and laying out all of this property. At the end of each day I sat down with the outgoing commander, company executive officer (XO), and Supply Sergeant and conducted an after action review (AAR) of the day's activities. Specifically, we discussed our daily progress, identified any issues, and reviewed our plan for the next day. Additionally, the company first sergeant (1SG) was out-processing in preparation to retire from the Army and was rarely around. My new 1SG had not yet been identified.

During the change of command inventory a glaring issue reared its head. Approximately 25 Dell laptop computers, amounting to a conservative estimate of \$60,000, were unaccounted for. I pointed this out to the outgoing commander and told him I would continue to search for them as I completed the remainder of my inventories. The company Supply SGT and I relentlessly searched for the laptops but with no success. At the end of the first week of inventories I told the outgoing commander about the laptops again. I now had just one week left to complete my inventories, explained to the outgoing commander that I would continue to search for the laptops, and that the Supply SGT should begin preparing the necessary paperwork for a Report of Survey (RoS) in the event we did not find the computers. According to Army regulations the property book office must receive the RoS before I signed the company property book and took command of the company. The outgoing commander did not like the idea of having a RoS on this equipment because it was a large dollar amount and a negative note upon which to leave command. He could also be found negligent and financially responsible for the property loss. I continued with my inventories. The next morning I met with the commander, the XO, and the Supply SGT. The outgoing commander proposed a solution to account for the missing equipment. The company Supply SGT knew his way around post well having been assigned to the unit for several years and knew a number of the "right" employees in the installation property office. The idea was that the Supply SGT would talk to his friends at the installation property office and they would erase the missing laptops from the property record, the problem would be solved, nobody would be inconvenienced with paperwork or financial loss, and everyone would be happy. Nobody else would have to know about this. The outgoing commander, XO, and Supply SGT all sat there silently awaiting my answer. Should I go along with this plan? Reflection: In the end, my faith, moral judgment, and ideals guided me through this situation. These, along with the good examples of leadership I had already witnessed during my military career, played a large role in helping me to make the correct ethical decision. I could have chosen the easy wrong instead of the hard right, but that would have led to a number of negative consequences. Those computers represented taxpayer dollars. Covering up their loss would have been a fraudulent act to both US taxpayers and the government. Additionally, an audit of my supply records at a later date could have raised questions and pointed right back to me. Regardless, I would have known that I had been dishonest and sacrificed my integrity. To be clear, my decision to take the high ground in this situation did not make things any easier in the weeks and months ahead, but resulted in strained relations with my XO and Supply SGT. This made my new task of commanding the company and transforming it into a unit prepared to redeploy to Iraq in less than a year doubly difficult. However, by not giving into the temptation of peer pressure in this situation, I walked away from it both stronger and wiser knowing that I made the right decision. I maintained my integrity and could hold my head high as I stood in front of my new company ready to command and lead them into the challenges that lay ahead of us.

REFLECTION...

At this point, I was faced with a critical decision. I could agree to the proposed plan and help cover up the loss of government and taxpayer property. On the other hand, I could say no to this plan, forcing the outgoing commander to do the right thing. This placed the responsibility on him to either find the missing equipment or report it. Additionally, I could have reported his unethical proposition to the chain of command, but decided not to escalate it to that level unless absolutely necessary. Fortunately, it never came to that and I never mentioned that possible course of action to the outgoing commander. Ultimately, if the laptops remained unaccounted for and missing, a RoS would need to be submitted and the property loss would then be investigated to determine responsibility, etc.

I told the outgoing commander that I would not go along with his plan for obvious reasons. Again, this was not what he wanted to hear. To say the least, my unwillingness to budge on this issue and go along with his idea created a tense and unpleasant working environment for the remainder of the inventories. The outgoing commander stepped up his efforts to search for the missing laptops. A handful were eventually located and accounted for, but the majority remained missing. I remained firm in my position on this matter and a RoS was submitted prior to the property book signing and change of command. The investigation that followed found the outgoing commander and Supply SGT negligent and financially responsible for the loss.

Rules/Laws That Apply: Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), Army Supply and Accountability Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

At What Point Did You Say "Enough is Enough?" When And How Did You Take Action? When this option was explained to me I knew that this did not feel right or go along with what I thought was right. At this point I faced a critical decision. I told the outgoing commander that I would not go along with his plan for obvious reasons. A handful of laptops were eventually located and accounted for but the majority remained missing. I remained firm in my position on this matter and submitted a RoS prior to the property book signing and change of command. Conflict or Tension of the 7 Army Values? How Did You Resolve Those Conflicts? I could have easily gone along with this but I knew it was not right. It violated my leadership values, personal ideals, my integrity, and faith. I told the outgoing commander that I could not go along with this plan and that he and the supply sergeant needed to find the computers or prepare the RoS.

Consideration of Other COAs and the 2nd and 3rd Order Effects. I could choose to do nothing and allow the proposed plan to go forward, force the outgoing commander to find the computers, and/or report this issue to my battalion commander. At this point reporting it to the higher chain of command was not necessary so the second COA was really the only one that was feasible.

How Did You Get The Courage To Do the Harder Right? My faith, ideals, principles of right and wrong, and the good leadership examples I witnessed throughout my life and military career.