

Desperate Measures

Situation: One afternoon the Chief and I were returning from a meeting. I was a young Second Lieutenant learning the ropes. As we approached the rear side of the building we saw two Privates in an altercation. They were trading blow for blow and both bleeding from the mouth and nose. The Chief and I broke up the fight and proceeded to the office to discuss the matter. As it turns out they were fighting over a female. This particular female was a fellow Soldier. The Chief was quick to dismiss the incident and followed with a firm verbal lashing driving home Core Values and professionalism. We thought this was the end until a month later the Unit's OIC; Captain Jenner received a phone call from Public Health. The medics asked if his unit had just returned from deployment and Captain Jenner explained they had been home approximately six months. The medics continued, they had identified an STD outbreak in his unit and they believed 15 of his troops were from the same platoon on the night shift. Perplexed, the Captain questioned the Platoon Sergeant who explained he knew nothing about the after hour behavior of his troops. The Captain was skeptical. He and the Chief continued to question the entire flight. While questioning two of the Privates who were involved in the fight the month before, one of them mentioned the same female. During further questioning of other Privates she became a common thread of discussion during each questioning. One of the Privates explained she needed money and would do "favors" for the guys working the night shift. While working the flight line at night, they would stop by her aircraft to "assist" with heavy maintenance. If she was "available" the aircraft interior lights would be off while the tail lights of the aircraft would be lit to give the impression work was being done to the aircraft. In reality, she was performing sexual favors in the back of the aircraft. If someone were to board through the forward troop door, it would give them enough time to "get themselves together".

When the female troop was questioned, she explained she was a single mother and hardly made enough to support herself and her child even with food stamps. She mentioned she had talked to her Platoon Sergeant but he gave her little advice. She explained she resorted to prostitution out of necessity; she would do whatever it took to take care of her child.

As cut and dry as this situation seemed, it was not. The Chief was convinced she needed to return to civilian life. It would have been easy to dismiss her from the military but she was a good troop who had made a mistake for the right reasons. Although she displayed very poor judgment, she was trying to provide for her child. What should I do?

REFLECTION...

Reflection: She would receive an Article 15 and 30 days of correctional custody and returned to duty in another Squadron. I was not trying to get rid of my problem troop, but she needed a fresh start. Her supervisor knew this was going on and he did nothing about it because he viewed it as a morale booster for the unit. He received an Article 15 and a reduction in rank. He eventually left the military. As for the troops who participated, they all received Letters of Reprimand and some were sent to other units, there was no other way to overcome the impact this had on good order and discipline in the unit. Ultimately, the Chief was right. I had long left the Unit but found out not more than two years later, she was arrested for illegal drug distribution. Her defense: she was a single mother trying to provide for her child. She was court-martialed and went to prison.

Ethical Dilemma at the time of the event: Mercy versus justice. If I court-martialed her and put her out of the military she would be worse off than she is now. After all, she resorted to this behavior after seeking assistance and guidance from her supervisor. If I do nothing am I sending a message that this behavior is acceptable?

Rules/Laws that apply: UCMJ, good order and discipline, conduct unbecoming of a service member.

Conflict or tension of the 7 Army Values? How did you resolve those conflicts? Respect and Honor were the conflict in this situation. First, respect for one's self. Though her intentions seemed focused on taking care of her child, they were obviously misplaced. Speaking of Honor, the importance of character was lost. At the time, I thought the conflict was resolved by pointing out her misguided attempt to provide for her child. Giving her a second chance to reconcile what she had done and to start fresh seemed to be the right thing to do. It was right for me...not for her. She had not internalized the Army Core Values thus this lesson was lost on her.

Consideration of Other COAs and the 2nd and 3rd order effects: 1) I could send her to jail, court-martial her or use non-judicial punishment. All of these choices would in fact punish her for her actions, though would not necessarily adjust her reasoning for getting in this situation. From her point of view, she was trying to be a good mother and provide for her child. 2) I could do nothing. This would send the wrong message to other troops saying it is "OK" to take whatever actions necessary, just as long as you are taking care of your children. 3) Additionally, I could send her to another unit. My issue with this was the perception I was pawning my problem troops off on somebody else. Though I had moved some of the other troops who had participated, she was the root cause and mine to deal with.

How did you get the courage to take the "harder right"? Actually, I don't believe I took the harder right. If I would have listened to the Chief's advice, this situation would have been solved much sooner. But instead, she eventually went to prison for selling drugs and someone else had to deal with that.