

GETTING THE JOB DONE

Situation: During OIF, my company was operating in Northern Iraq. We had been on the ground in Iraq for one month and everyone finally knew their way around and what was going on. We made the necessary contacts on the base for maintenance, construction and other supporting activities. But, it seemed like there was always a problem getting anything done. Our mission was to install, operate and maintain strategic communications. Often installing and maintaining required support from other elements on the base. It is surprising how hard it is to get someone to dig a trench. It was either not in the contract or it required a document request sent up through another unit's chain of command (these rarely came back down). At the three month mark, something changed, the Officers and NCOs started getting things done and stuff was just there when we needed or wanted it. When I asked, the answer was usually, "I told them it was for life support instead of morale, welfare, and recreation (MWR) purposes", "I've got this buddy at the maintenance shop", or "the contractor needed something and we traded". Initially I discussed some of the issues but decided not to raise any flags with the commander. I was surprised how well the Soldiers learned to wheel and deal. The barter system was alive and well in Iraq, and I quickly learned "it is not what you know but who you know and what you have to trade." Soldiers making things happen, isn't this what we all want? I often heard that we are all working for the Department of Defense, so let's get the job done and go home. There are other phrases, but most come down to making light of a potentially unethical situation. At this point I realized, we could either keep "getting" stuff or fill out the paperwork and hope to get it. Even if the paperwork route worked, it was usually too late.

Most of us will look at this scenario and realize this is how things work sometimes. The contract only allows digging for life support infrastructure, so if you write life support on the request instead of MWR, or if you can catch the operator and give him a case of meals ready to eat (MREs) he'll dig a trench to share satellite over at your buddy's hooch. What's wrong with helping someone out and then allowing them to show their appreciation? Where does trading MREs for a trench violate cultural norms? Where is the major ethics violation? Everyone at some point has entertained thoughts of doing something we know is wrong or we have done the wrong thing for what we thought were the right reasons. Where do you draw the line?

REFLECTION...

As a First Sergeant I was responsible for enforcing the ethical standards in the unit. My supply duties required keeping the commander out of trouble and documenting transfers and accountability inventories of all government property and supplies. We all have an internal compass that tells us when things are not right. The problem is in justifying whether it is not right because of personal beliefs or cultural norms. At this moment, I feel there is a weight on my shoulders. I had the chance to do the right thing, but I did not. I have learned a valuable lesson here, and I'm not sure if I'd do it again. I just hope that someone else faced with this situation can find a solution I didn't.

Ethical Dilemma at the Time of the Incident: Is manipulating the request paperwork acceptable to complete the mission or is this just a lie that sets a poor ethical climate in the unit?

Rules/Laws that Apply: Uniform Code of Military Justice, General Orders, Commander's Philosophy and Policy Memos.

At What Point Did You Say "Enough is Enough"? When and How Did You Take Action? I didn't take a stand and tell the Officers and NCOs to stop falsely classifying requests as life support. Also, I personally engaged in trading unaccountable items with other units to support missions.

Conflict or Tension of the 7 Army Values? How Did You Resolve Those Conflicts? No one ever asked me if I violated the Army Values until now. Soldiers compromised their integrity which eventually led to a conflict between myself and one of the platoon sergeants. We had a heated discussion regarding the importance of making things happen, but he refused to tell the contractor the trench was for conduit instead of communications. For some reason conduit was authorized, so another Soldier told the contractor it was for conduit. Then we pulled the cable inside the conduit.

Consideration of Other COAs and the 2nd and 3rd Order Effects. Fast and easy was the choice we made. Alternatively, we could have properly submitted requests with full disclosure and used our chain of command to fix the system in place. Perhaps we would not have fully completed our projects, but the next unit would not need to compromise their integrity. When Soldiers compromise their integrity it can eventually lead to other undesirable behaviors. We had a Soldier reported for stealing equipment worth \$300 from another unit. If we had not established an unwritten policy of integrity violations then maybe the theft would not have occurred.

How Did You Get the Courage To Do the Harder Right? I never got courage to change things in this situation. I guess I was more interested in what I thought we needed at that moment. I suppose I should have thought about the future and how unethical behavior can have detrimental effects in other areas.