

HOOKING AND CROOKING

Situation: From 2004 through 2006 I served as a company commander in a recruiting battalion in Southern California. Before arriving, I had no idea what recruiting conditions were like in the area and reality came as a shock. Our company had not accomplished its annual mission goals in ten years and struggled to achieve mission accomplishment during even one month of the year. The climate in the battalion was captured for me by my first sergeant's comment that "sometimes you have to step into the gray" when trying to make mission. He was typical of senior cadre recruiting NCOs in our battalion who often referred to their peers (never themselves) "hooking and crooking" to "get the job done." From the beginning I made an extra effort to instill an ethical climate in my company. I told my recruiters that making mission was never an excuse for unethical "recruiting improprieties." This appeared to sit well with them but it became obvious to me they were not getting the same message from battalion level. At the heart of the problem was the battalion sergeant major. He was an infamous character, known throughout United States Army Recruiting Command (USAREC) and feared by everyone. He was assigned to our battalion with the sole purpose of extracting performance and to "turn the battalion around." He and I found ourselves at odds from day one. Almost daily he would harass me saying I was being too soft on my Soldiers. He said I needed to threaten them with Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) action and relief for cause if they failed to make mission. Meanwhile, he was calling my senior NCOs, often late at night, and harassing them and undermining me by telling them I was not "in it to win it." Other companies in the battalion began making mission after six months of this treatment. These companies were held up as stellar performers and mission focused. At first, I was perplexed at how they seemed to be succeeding when my company was floundering. Soon I was assigned as an investigating officer, per Army Regulation 15-6, on these other companies. These investigations involved everything from forged diplomas and test "ringers" to true criminal activity, including sexual abuse of recruits. After conducting a number of these investigations I brought up the patterns I saw to my chain of command; my observations and conclusions were met with anger by the commander and CSM. They said I was just trying to divert attention from my company's failure. They commented investigations were "a by-product of hard work" in recruiting and they were "isolated incidents." After months of investigations, most involving the same companies – the highest performing companies in the battalion – I contemplated going over the head of my chain of command. At the same point, the CSM began working hard to get the battalion commander to relieve me. We had a battalion Quarterly Training Brief (QTB) at a local hotel and the rumor was that I was going to "get the axe" during it. I was extremely conflicted.

I had never been presented with such a dilemma before. Do I show loyalty to the battalion and do what it takes to make mission and gain my commander's confidence? Or, do I 'blow the whistle' on the various battalion personalities and the schemes they were running to make mission?

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My loyalty to the Army and my sense of loyalty to my superiors was keeping me from becoming a 'whistle blower' but I felt conditions were becoming intolerable. The last straw came when I overheard the CSM explain to the battalion's assembled NCOs that high-performance recruiters could "get away" with certain things, specifically driving under the influence of alcohol. It was at this point I notified the USAREC Enlistment Standards Division of my suspicions. This triggered a battalion wide investigation – which involved my company as well, although we were found free of impropriety – which resulted in the relief of the battalion commander, CSM and two company commanders. A third of the battalion's recruiters received criminal or administrative action for unethical behavior – none were in my company. I learned from my decision to call USAREC that my loyalty isn't necessarily to the person in command but to the principles and values of the command. In the end, this command team was not one I could be loyal to.

Ethical Dilemma at the Time of the Incident: My dilemma I faced was in deciding which road to take. I had two choices: 1. Do nothing and go along with the schemes to make mission, 2. Blow the whistle on the inappropriate measures and schemes the command team was "turning a blind eye" to.

Rules / Laws That Apply: The USAREC guidelines are laid out in numerous regulations, pamphlets, circulars, supplements, and manuals. Within these publications are very specific guidelines on the conduct of recruiting commands, and the "how tos" of recruiting operations. These guidelines were clearly being overlooked, starting at the top.

At What Point Did You Say "Enough is Enough"? When and How Did You Take Action? My decision to call USAREC was in large part due to the fact I had personal courage. Mind you, I knew the investigation would encompass my company too, but I was sure that the climate I set in my company was so radically different than the battalion's that we would not be tarnished.

How Did You Get the Courage To Do the Harder Right? I had to be strong and show courage to make the call – it was the harder right and I'm glad I chose it. My recruiters – no recruiters for that matter – should not have to work under such unprofessional, unethical, and stressful conditions.