

SILENCE IS THE GOLDEN RULE

Situation: My unit had an important job. It was responsible for operational level logistics planning for Central Command's (CENTCOM) war fighting mission. Unfortunately, some of its leaders seemed to take advantage of their deployed situation by focusing on their own personal interests rather than on the mission. We were still getting the job done, however, so there was no outside suspicion of wrongdoing, and no one assigned to the unit wanted to rock the boat. Although the unit's cases of fraternization and adultery were not blatant, I knew something was wrong soon after my arrival.

I quickly made a name for myself as a hard worker and dedicated Soldier in the unit. I was looking forward to the opportunity to make a difference in the war effort. There were about 20 other people in the unit, mostly reservists. Many active duty Soldiers called some of the reservists "tour babies," referring to their continually renewed activation orders that kept them in their same position for 4-5 years. The deployment was a great deal for these reservists. They were paid full per diem, set up with an apartment downtown, and only had to work 5 days a week. It was no wonder they worked the system to maintain their posh jobs. All officers were lieutenant colonels or above, except Warrant Officer (WO) Thomas and me and there were only a handful of enlisted Soldiers to round out the unit.

I liked my direct supervisor, LTC Smith. He was a mentor to me and taught me the subtle, but extremely important, nuances of the job. However, I began to notice something was amiss when LTC Smith started to attend daily physical training (PT) sessions with an attractive female coworker, LTC Jones. This was not an issue by itself, but my supervisor was married, and not to LTC Jones. I learned through office gossip and through some of LTC Smith's passing comments that his PT sessions with LTC Jones consisted of wrestling matches and other forms of physical contact. In addition to their workouts, they would attend functions together, go out to dinner, and call each other continuously. They were almost inseparable!

Unfortunately, my direct supervisor was not the only coworker who was fostering a relationship within the unit. Our deputy commander, COL Sims, also displayed extreme attachment to WO Thomas, albeit more inconspicuously than LTC Smith. I timidly discussed the issue with an enlisted reservist in the unit who told me that things like this commonly happen in reserve units. I did not accept this as an excuse because, even though they were reservists, the two officers should uphold the leadership values common to all military officers. These senior officers routinely used their rank as a tactic to keep the unit's secrets internal. I was not comfortable voicing my concerns to LTC Smith, let alone go higher, to stop the impertinent behavior. Therefore, I did the only thing I thought I could do... do my job and keep my mouth shut.

Would you have blown the whistle on the unit? Who would you have talked to about the issues?

REFLECTION...

Today, I realize even though I felt powerless, I should have said something. I know now that the good order, morale, and discipline of the unit suffered. My morale suffered because I began to wish for the end of my tour. Further, the enlisted Soldiers did not respect our leaders. Finally, the leaders could not effectively deal with discipline issues because they displayed no discipline themselves.

In part, my feeling of helplessness came from the fact that I did not have any peers to confide in. The next highest-ranking officer was my direct supervisor and he was culpable in the dilemma. The fact that our unit was demoralized without a disciplinary or accountability structure should have spurred me to bring the fraternization and adultery infractions to someone's attention. I have grown as a leader. I only wish I could go back in time to affect a positive change in my unit.

All leaders have a responsibility to unit members and the unit's health. Lower ranking individuals may have a tough time raising disconcerting issues to their leaders. Therefore, the leader must foster an environment in which subordinates feel comfortable enough to voice their concerns. Anyone can affect positive change in an organization if they have the courage to do so.

The Role of the Major Participant in the Scenario: I was a newly assigned captain in the unit chiefly manned by reservists. My deployment was 6 months long.

Ethical Dilemma at the Time of the Incident: A unit performing an important logistics mission for CENTCOM experienced moral and integrity issues because of senior leaders' role in furtive fraternization and adultery.

Rules/Laws That Apply: Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) and the 7 Army values outlined in FM 6-22, Army Leadership.

Conflict or Tension of the 7 Army Values? My lack of action in the situation directly conflicted with the values of integrity and personal courage. I knew fraternization and adultery cases existed in my unit, but I did not feel empowered enough to blow the whistle. I just wanted to do my job and mind my own business until my tour was over.

Consideration of Other Courses of Action (COA) and The 2nd And 3rd Order Affects: I could have talked to LTC Smith and COL Sims about the perceptions of inappropriate behavior they were imparting on the unit. They may have listened and stopped their inappropriate actions, but they could also have denied any wrongdoing. After all, I did not have proof they were actually having extra-marital affairs. I could have circumvented my chain of command and addressed my concerns with the higher headquarters. An investigation may have ensued, but my concerns were mainly based on feelings and perceptions, not hard facts. In the end, it would probably have been my instincts against their denials.

How Did You Recognize Unethical Behavior? There were no blatant actions or conversations in front of unit members. I did not have proof of the adulterous relationships, but I believed they were occurring. The fraternization was easier to recognize because they had excessive contact outside of work.

How Did You Process Or Judge This Was An Ethical Dilemma? I thought, "What can a young captain do?" The unit leadership treated me well, and I had no problem with them except for their unprofessional behavior. They were easy to work for and we did accomplish the mission. Also, I was afraid that my allegations would be difficult to prove. I thought whichever senior leader I decided to talk to would tell me that my perception was wrong, that they were only friends. I felt I needed to protect my career and myself by tolerating their misconduct until my short tour was over.