

## **REPAIRING FRACTURED BEDROCK:**

### **Senior Leader Stewardship of the Army Profession**

#### **Introduction**

*You must know that it is no easy thing for a principle to become a man's own, unless each day he maintain it and hear it maintained, as well as work it out in life.*

– Epictetus<sup>1</sup>

The Army Chief of Staff, General Raymond T. Odierno, in recent doctrinal publications makes clear his expectations for all Army leaders:

You must internalize the Army's Values, demonstrate unimpeachable integrity and character, and remain truthful in word and deed. Soldiers trust their leaders. Leaders must never break that trust, as trust is the bedrock of our profession.

My leader expectations are straightforward:

- Have a vision and lead change
- Be your formation's moral and ethical compass
- Learn, think, adapt
- Balance risk and opportunity to retain the initiative
- Build agile, effective, high-performing teams
- Empower subordinates and underwrite risk
- Develop bold, adaptive, and broadened leaders
- Communicate—up, down, and laterally; tell the whole story<sup>2</sup>

Our duty is unambiguous and our subordinates expect and deserve nothing less. All Army professionals are stewards, responsible for ensuring the Army Profession maintains its essential characteristics\* both now and in the future. As Army leaders our decisions and actions affect units and organization, large and small, at all levels. We have an obligation that goes far beyond professional competence.

The American people entrust Army professionals with an extraordinary degree of responsibility and authority. We play a critical role in ensuring our nation's security, both on and off the battlefield. Of great importance within the Army Profession is the duty of each of us to be a steward of our profession and to maintain its essential and hard won trust with society. This is a dimension of stewardship that transcends a transactional focus on budgets, beans, and bullets. It is a transformational form of stewardship. As Army professionals, we have professional responsibility, not only for our own character, but also, in a broader sense, for the Army Profession's collective character, its culture. Our decisions and actions directly influence the

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\* Trust, military expertise, honorable service, esprit de corps, and stewardship. (ADP 1/ADRP 1).

members of our profession and affect the Army Profession's collective spirit - the ethos of the Army. We have the moral and legal responsibility, as standard-bearers, to set the example.

“Leaders who unwaveringly adhere to applicable laws, regulations, and unit standards build credibility with their subordinates and enhance trust from the American people they serve.”<sup>3</sup>

However, beyond adhering to legal or regulatory codes, this is about upholding the Army Ethic, its principles and Values. Consider for a moment how our peers and subordinates look to us to set the standard. Expectations of respect, integrity, and service, all Army Values<sup>†</sup>, come to mind. Army leaders, especially senior leaders, whether uniformed or civilian, must be exemplars. We can be nothing less. By virtue of position, senior Army leaders must be leaders of competence, character, and commitment. This is how we earn, sustain, and develop trust. . When we reflect on our decisions and actions, what do we see? We are all human and prone to make errors in judgment and to succumb to temptations. Are our errors of omission and commission individual instances or have they become chronic habits. What do we see and how do we respond? Are we truly disciplined stewards of ourselves, our families, our organizations, and our profession? Whatever we admit, both good and bad, we know that our subordinates and peers see us for who we really are.

The recent public failure of some senior Army leaders, making decisions and acting in ways *inconsistent* with Army Values, compromises trust. These incidents fracture the bedrock upon which our profession is built. The American people – the citizenry and our elected leaders – see our profession's principal stewards, breaking faith and acting in contradiction to our espoused Values. The number of incidents may seem small, but even a single incident can have profound impact. These failures include toxic leadership, inappropriate use of government resources, sexual misconduct, and similar failures in character. The media, academics, and others offer explanations and excuses that implicate the social or cultural environment, the corrosive effects of prolonged warfare, personality issues such as narcissism, and disorientation induced by success and pride. However, trustworthy Army professionals are not co-opted. Further, we must all uphold the Army Ethic; we cannot tolerate unethical conduct. If we permit ethical misconduct we are complicit. by silence and by our failure to explicitly develop the character of Army professionals.

There is the belief, in the ranks, among lawmakers, and with the public, that we are unwilling or unable to eradicate and effectively redress unethical conduct. In recent decades, the messages from the service chiefs are essentially unchanged. “These acts...will not be tolerated. This is about inculcating a culture that is in line with our values, specifically treating all with dignity and respect.”<sup>4</sup> So, why is it that senior leaders cannot effect change? Is our Army culture tacitly tolerant? We cannot merely hope that our Soldiers and Civilians will be professionals of character, we must explicitly provide for their character development in our education, training, experience, and self-development.

Our Soldiers and Civilians perceive hypocrisy among senior leaders in the form of inconsistent consequences for unethical conduct based on the rank of the offender. This perception may

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<sup>†</sup> Loyalty, Duty, Respect, selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and personal Courage.

have long-term consequences as subordinates “learn what to do, as well as what not to do, by observing their leaders’ behavior and its consequences... Modeling by leaders can influence followers to be ethical or unethical. Leaders who engage in unethical behaviors create a context supporting parallel deviance.”<sup>5</sup>

Why are senior leaders, succumbing to temptations? Is this something new or is this an enduring problem that periodically crosses some threshold to deserve public scrutiny? Sexual misconduct, toxic leadership, disrespect, careerism, and other ethical misconduct have always been present. However, thirty to fifty years ago, the public airing of senior Army leader misconduct was a rare event. Since 1996, beginning with the Aberdeen Proving Ground basic training scandal many other instances of leader misconduct have come to light. During the ensuing four years several brigadier and major generals and some of the Army’s most senior NCOs, including the Sergeant Major of the Army, were found to have engaged in chronic unethical conduct..<sup>6</sup> Today, some of the leaders involved in chronic unethical conduct are lieutenant generals and generals, the Army Profession’s most senior stewards. Has the likelihood of “getting caught” increased or have we permitted, even fostered misconduct. in our ranks.?

How is it, given our profession’s focus on both character and leader development, that some senior Army leaders, despite sometimes-obvious flaws or chronic negative leadership, exhibited for years, were never confronted, and were able to succeed and achieve high rank? At least a portion of this answer may lay in the primacy placed on competence. Has our not-so-disguised focus on competence come at the expense of character? Do we place character defects, both great and small, in our “blind spot”?

We must closely examine ourselves, the Army as an institution and a profession, and our Army culture. We cannot ignore or superficially address these issues. A good place to start is with Army Values.

Research indicates that we cannot *consistently* act in opposition to our *true* values.<sup>§</sup> While environmental and situational factors may contribute to an error in judgment or a mistake in behavior, they cannot explain chronic misconduct. Our values, always important, are the principles that guide our decisions and actions. If we act in contradiction to the values we proclaim it is because those are not, in fact, our values.<sup>7</sup> The recurring unethical decisions and misconduct of some Army leaders demonstrates that these men and women, despite decades of service vocally supporting Army Values, held personal values that conflicted with those of the Army Profession. None of us are invulnerable or immune

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<sup>†</sup>Examples include: MG John Longhouser, †commander of Aberdeen, retired early after he admitted having an affair while separated. SMA Gene McKinney was accused of 18 counts of sexual misconduct and convicted of one count of obstructing justice. MG David Hale, the first general officer ever prosecuted in retirement, was charged with having inappropriate relationships with the wives of numerous subordinates and was reduced to BG. USAREUR CSM Riley C. Miller was charged with sexual assault and found guilty of fraternization. MG John Maher III was charged with having a long-term inappropriate relationship with wives of his subordinates and was reduced to Colonel. MG Larry G. Smith was accused of wrongful sexual advances and harassment.

<sup>§</sup> For this paper, we define a “value” as a principle or concept that is always important, therefore revealed and demonstrated in decisions and actions. A person of “integrity” makes decisions and takes action consistent with espoused and professed values.

This is a serious matter and it is a matter of choice. Depending on their decisions and actions, senior leaders do great good or great harm. As importantly, the actions of senior stewards in response to the ethical failings of subordinates, peers, and even their seniors resonate within the Army Profession, influencing the way in which Soldiers, Army Civilians, and the American people perceive the profession. Senior Army leaders must set the example and effectively uphold the Army Ethic. As senior leaders there is an imperative to make right decisions, take right action, and to be intolerant of unethical practices.. .

Writing for *Parameters* in 1985, MG (Ret) Clay T. Buckingham called attention to a set of tensions within the Army Profession – tensions between culture and institution, between policy and practice, and ultimately between bureaucracy and profession. These tensions provide fertile ground for ethical failure; they make it tempting for leaders to rationalize wrong behavior. Buckingham cites abuse of authority, unethical application of force, misplaced loyalty, selfish ambition, and deception among examples of unprofessional conduct that he observed during his career of service. He does not conclude that the remedy is easily within our grasp.

*I can give no easy answers regarding these ethical tensions.... Standing firm ethically can exact a cost, perhaps a steep one. As professionals we must be willing to pay it.*<sup>8</sup>

Fundamentally, he argues that we ought to assess the ethics of a decision and action based on the propriety of ends and means. Today, the Army Profession remains governed by the same documents intended to guide the decisions and actions of senior military leaders throughout MG Buckingham's time in service (Korea, Vietnam, and Cold War).

Today, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 1, *The Army*, recognizes that a right decision and action is specifically associated with sustaining and strengthening *trust* – an absolute and fundamental requirement in the Army Profession. In paraphrase:

*Our ability to fulfill our [mission] depends upon trust.... Building trust in an Army as diverse as ours begins with developing common values.... The Army Values become the catalyst to developing the trust between Soldiers, and these values instill traits needed not only in war but for the remainder of their lives.*<sup>9</sup>

The Army Profession earns and sustains the essential “ethos of trust” with the American people as it provides military expertise, contributes honorable service, demonstrates its courageous “winning spirit” – esprit de corps, and exercises effective and ethical stewardship. Within the Army Profession, we earn and sustain the trust that is essential to the success of mission command, by consistently demonstrating our competence, character, and commitment in the performance of duty, with discipline and to standards.

This is a call to action for senior leaders in the Army Profession to take appropriate steps to develop character in ourselves and all Army professionals; and to stop unethical practices that fracture the essential bedrock of Trust. The goal must be to sustain trust.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Armed Forces Officer* (Potomac Books, Inc.: Dulles VA 2007), 43.

<sup>2</sup> Department of the Army, ADP 6-22 *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC, 10 September 2012), CSAs Forward,

<sup>3</sup> Department of the Army, ADP 6-22 *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC, 10 September 2012), 6.

<sup>4</sup> Nancy Montgomery, "After two decades of sexual assault in military, no real change in message," *Stars and Stripes*, 8 June 2013, <http://www.stripes.com/news/after-2-decades-of-sexual-assault-in-military-no-real-change-in-message-1.229091>.

<sup>5</sup> Linda Klebe Trevino and Michael E. Brown, "The Role of Leaders in Influencing Unethical Behavior in the Workplace," Chapter 3 of Roland E. Kidwell and Christopher L. Martin, *Managing Organizational Deviance* (SAGE Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, 2005), 72.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Richter, "Accused General Is Nominee for No. 2 Job," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 April 2000, <http://articles.latimes.com/2000/apr/07/news/mn-16931>; "Army Command Sgt. Maj. Loses Appeal," *Associated Press*, 7 January 2000, <http://www.apnewsarchive.com/2000/Army-Command-Sgt-Maj-Loses-Appeal/id-776c91ba40bb655afcdadc22cadf9c58>; Mark Thompson, "Sex, The Army And A Double Standard," *Time Magazine*, 5 May 1998, <http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1998/04/27/time/pentagon.html>; Paul Richter, "Army Demotes by 1 Rank Retired General in Sex Case," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 September 1999, <http://articles.latimes.com/1999/sep/03/news/mn-6364>; Tom Bowman, "Army sends message, strips general's rank for misconduct," *Baltimore Sun*, 17 November 1999, [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1999-11-17/news/9911170120\\_1\\_maher-army-official-sexual-misconduct](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1999-11-17/news/9911170120_1_maher-army-official-sexual-misconduct); Maud Dillingham, "The evolution of sexual harassment awareness," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 14 November 2011, <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2011/1114/The-evolution-of-sexual-harassment-awareness/Gen.-Larry-Smith-Lt.-Gen.-Claudia-Kennedy>.

<sup>7</sup> Marvin W. Berkowitz, "What works in values education," *International Journal of Educational Research* 50 (2011): 153-158; Marvin W. Berkowitz, Wolfgang Althof, Val D. Turner and Daniel Bloch, "Discourse, Development, and Education," *Getting Involved* ed. Fritz Oser and Wiel Veugelers (Sense Publishers, 2008), 189-201; Marvin W. Berkowitz, "The Role of Discussion in Moral Education," *Moral Education: Theory and Application* ed. Marvin W. Berkowitz and Fritz Oser (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers: Hillsdale NJ, 1985), 197-218; Marvin W. Berkowitz and Melinda C. Bier, "What Works In Character Education," *Journal of Research in Character Education* 5:1(2007): 29-48.

<sup>8</sup> Clay T. Buckingham, "Ethics and the Senior Officer: Institutional Tensions," *Parameters* Autumn (1985): 23-32, <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/Articles/1985/buck.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> Department of the Army, ADP 1, *The Army* (Washington, DC, 17 September 2012), 2-2.

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