

Commander's Guidance for Senior Leader Ethics Education

EXPLORATION TOPIC: THE TRUTH ABOUT HONESTY

The intent for this module, *The Truth about Honesty*, is to provide a platform of study and engagement with peers that will enhance an Army Professional's understanding of honesty and deception and their impact within Army environments. Both leaders and followers are constantly assessed by what they do and do not do as demonstrated in their behaviors and actions.

In many situations, the underlying issues of honesty and deception are not recognized due to a leader's rationalization of how they are used. Leaders assign values and levels of truth to certain situations in an effort to rationalize their decisions and actions. What are honesty, integrity and candor? Are they related? What about deception and half-truths? At what point does a half-truth become dishonesty and what affect does that have on credibility?

One of the most common forms of deception is exaggeration. In inflating numbers, for example, while forecasting personnel and supply needs, and knowing that the initial request is certainly going to be reduced, leaders ask for more, therefore justifying the level of truth behind the need. How does this affect the requisition process for personnel and material? Another example of exaggeration is programming and budgeting practices that occur as the Program Budget Committee and Program Objective Memorandum meet. What are the consequences of forcing them into programs, stampeding the appropriation directors to get on the team, and to fund the program at the expense of other ongoing programs? What are the results of programs originally proposed by proponents, which have then been distorted and deflated by inadequate funding due to the introduction of new programs by other proponents who change priorities at DA level?

Another example of the honesty/deception discussion involves readiness reports. Can even the most accurate unit readiness report be true (unless it is considered in the context of the Army's capability to sustain a unit in combat)? The officer efficiency report system is even more complex and telling example of how honest leaders really are or aren't. Here the ethical principle of fairness conflicts directly with the ethical principle of honesty. Am I being fair to people by rating them honestly in accordance with the intent of the OER, regulation when I know that across the Army that my contemporaries are inflating the reports of their people to get them promoted? Am I justified in waging a one-man campaign for strict honesty when it comes at the expense of my people? Are our leaders as good as their reports say they are?

How is honesty used when deciding what is shown to a supervisor when he/she comes to visit. Is it right to recommend that the normal operations be presented or should the visit be choreographed to only selected areas? Which choice would be consistent with our basic value systems?

The effects of stressors such as lack of sleep or food, or in combat situations affect reporting. Are leaders really describing the situation or has stress caused their perceptions to change?

Senior Leaders are more involved in Civil-Military relations than their subordinates are. How do honesty and candor affect dealings with elected officials? With the media? Are Army Leaders required to provide information, even when that information may be adverse to their agenda, or is silence golden?

Together with the foundational modules, *The Army Profession as Our Unifying Purpose and Context* and *Investing in Character Development*, this module promotes learning in the higher categories of the cognitive and affective domains. Learning new material, applying the learning, and engaging in topic discussion is the suggested method.