

Ethics, Morals, Values

PURPOSE

This lesson explains ethics, morals, and values as they relate to the Marine Corps.

Introduction

What leads you to make a decision in a given situation? What tells you when to act and when not to act?

You determine whether you are acting in a correct way based on your personal **code of ethics**. This is not usually a conscious effort. However, you may find yourself in a situation that does not have an easy solution. It is then that you must think carefully and decide what is the appropriate thing to do. In other words, you must rely on your **ethics** and **morals**.

Definition of Ethics and Morals

Many of the great minds of history have directed their thoughts toward the complex subject of ethics. For our purposes, the definition of ethics will concern how you go about determining whether or not you are acting in an acceptable manner. Refer to the following definitions:

- Ethics are a set of standards or a value system by which human actions are determined to be right or wrong, good or evil.
- A code of ethics contains rules of conduct generally recognized as related to a particular class of actions.

Morals are defined as conforming to an established set of codes or accepted notions of right and wrong.

Marine Ethics and Morals

In the Marine Corps, ethics and morals are constantly tested. Throughout their history, Marines have been called upon to make life or death decisions. They have been given the trust of the American people. For this reason, they are expected to be disciplined and show courage in defense of their ethics and morals.

While there is no written list of rules for ethical behavior, some standards have been established. Two primary examples of Marine Corps standards include the following:

- A Marine's word is his bond.
- Marines take care of their own.

The above is an example of written standards. A personal code of ethics is not documented. It is not carved in stone, nor is it handed down from superiors. A code of ethics evolves naturally through an individual's upbringing, education, maturity, and social influences. The Marine Corps, then, gives the guidelines and guidance that should allow for further development of this code.

Take note that these standards not only apply to Marines but also to MCJROTC cadets. As a MCJROTC cadet, you are a reflection of the Corps itself. Therefore, you must develop ethical standards in line with the standards of the Corps.

Professional Ethics

Marines have a basic set of professional ethics to guide their actions. Not only must they act in accordance with these guidelines, but they must also inspire and encourage others to follow this code.

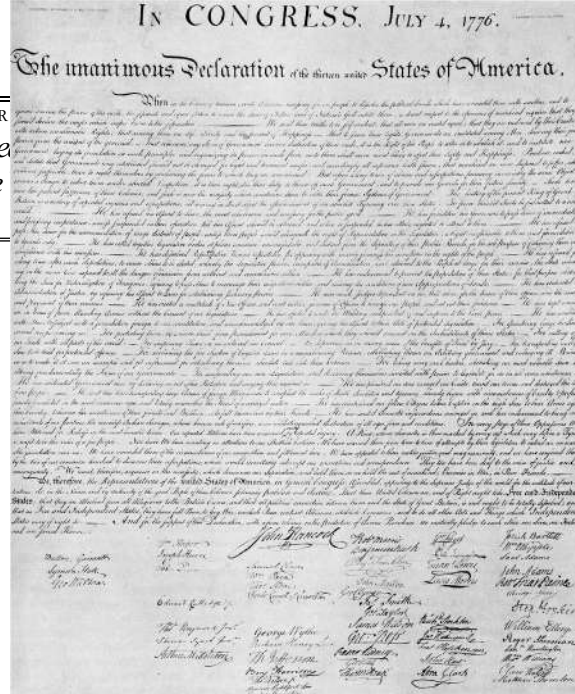
The professional beliefs and **values** that are encouraged in the Marine Corps consist of the following:

- Loyalty to the Ideals of the Nation
- Loyalty to the Unit
- Personal Responsibility
- Selfless Service
- Self-Discipline

Background

You may be asking where did this code come from and who decided that things should be as they are?

The code of ethics of the United States Marine Corps is directly traced to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. These documents are the basis of American life, for they guarantee freedom and justice. They state the rights of all human beings. The authority of freedom and justice is indisputable. It is upon these values that the founding fathers constructed this nation.



It is upon these values that the great leaders of American military history based their code of ethics. In order to maintain the honor of the nation, Marines must act in a moral and upright manner. This kind of behavior will only be possible if they have a code by which to judge their actions. They must also remember that their professional code must come before their personal values. They must be absolutely committed to the institutional values that form the basis of the professional ethic.

Loyalty to the Ideals of the Nation

The first of these values is **loyalty** to the ideals of the nation. The Marine Corps exists for the defense of the nation. It is the function of the military to enforce the policies of the nation, not to dictate them. This requires that every military leader must be prepared to carry out orders, as long as they are lawful and moral.

Loyalty to the nation means a number of things. It means believing in truth, justice, freedom, and equality. For Marines, it means they are willing to defend these ideals, ideals for which many wars were fought, and many Marines died. Actions that support these ideals are right and actions that do not support these ideals are wrong. Therefore, Marines must always support the ideals found in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, regardless of where they are or what the circumstances are. This demands both loyalty

and commitment, and asks that Marines desire only to serve their country. Marines are defenders of their country, which is an honorable profession. There is no greater calling, nor higher virtue.

As a MCJROTC cadet, it is important for you to be familiar with these aspects of professional ethics and to understand the concept behind each.

Loyalty to the Unit

Loyalty to the unit is of great importance to any leader. Next to the accomplishment of the mission, the most important thing for a leader is the unit. Leaders have certain obligations to the unit. These obligations include the following:

- Conservation of Lives
- Well-Being of their Team
- Development of a Cohesive Group

Conservation of Lives

Although the accomplishment of the mission comes first, a leader must also be concerned with the conservation of lives. Everyone admires courage, while no one admires foolishness. To be reckless in the accomplishment of the mission is wrong, for it is unethical to unnecessarily put anyone's life in danger.

Well-Being and Pride of their Team

Leaders must also see to the well-being of their team. This means that they must ensure that their unit has the best possible care. Marines should be devoted to their unit and proud of their

unit. Much of what they do as leaders will affect whether their team members share in their pride and devotion. If a leader is not devoted to the unit, the members of the unit will not be devoted to the unit either. This results in a lack of cohesion.

Development of a Cohesive Group

Cohesion is very important and must be one of the main concerns of a leader's decisions. A leader must develop a unit from a group of individuals. To accomplish this, it is necessary to form and mold the individuals into a unit that can accomplish its mission. The unit must see itself as a team, and must place the goals of the unit ahead of their own personal needs and desires.

If Marines are loyal to their unit, it will help the unit gain in strength and character. Loyalty to the unit is a significant part of the Marine code of ethics. Likewise, cadets in the MCJROTC must be loyal to their units, thus developing a unit with high ethical standards.

Personal Responsibility

To be personally responsible means that Marines are obligated to accomplish their mission to the best of their ability. It also means that they should attend to their commitments, and seek to improve themselves in all ways at all times.

Personal responsibility means that leaders are responsible for their actions and for the actions of those in their command. Personal responsibility for MCJROTC cadets applies to their obligation

to accomplish their assigned tasks and performances to the best of their ability.

Selfless Service


Selfless service means that a leader's actions and the unit's actions should always reflect what is best for the Corps and the nation. For Marines as individuals, selfless service means that the needs and goals of the nation, the Corps, the unit, and other Marines come before their own. Service is a Marine's job and this means that each Marine should strive to work harder than anyone else in the unit.

Keep in mind that the mission always comes first, then the unit, and then the leader. In order to accomplish these priorities, a leader must have self-discipline. The ideal of selfless service in the MCJROTC is upheld, although on a smaller scale.

Self-Discipline

As an individual and a MCJROTC cadet, self-discipline means that you do what needs to be done regardless of stress, exhaustion, or other conditions in the situation. Self-discipline will help you develop your natural talents and abilities. You will be able to withstand more and you will be able to do more in various situations. In order to develop the kind of self-discipline that will be needed, you must have pride in your unit and yourself.

This pride cannot be taught, but it can be



developed. It must come from within the individual, who must be proud to be a cadet, and proud to be a member of the MCJROTC. Cadets must be concerned with their personal standards of conduct. A MCJROTC cadet possesses the right attitude, a sincere sense of obligation, and high standards.

Core Values

In order to develop this sense of pride in the unit and the MCJROTC, cadets must be in tune with their values. Values are your attitudes about the worth or importance of people, concepts, or things. It is upon these values that the fate of the program rests, so these values must be of a high enough caliber to allow each member of a unit to become a good cadet. Traditionally the core values are:

- Honor
- Courage
- Commitment

Honor

Honor is the quality that guides Marines to exemplify ethical and moral behaviors, such as:

- Never lie, cheat, or steal

- Maintain integrity
- Respect human dignity

Courage

Courage means doing the right thing, regardless of the consequences, and taking responsibility for all actions. Moral courage, not physical courage, is what it takes to do the right thing in the face of adversity and disapproval.

For you, there may be a time when having to make a decision will be a very stressful situation. You might be under pressure from a superior, a peer, or a team member to act in a manner not in accordance with your code of ethics. In times such as these, you will need to exhibit great courage to adhere to your ethics. An example of these situations might include cheating on exams, using drugs, or any number of other unethical activities. You must act in a correct manner, regardless of the source or the kind of pressure. (Courage is discussed in more detail in a subsequent lesson.)

Commitment

Commitment is the spirit of determination and dedication within individuals. Commitment is defined as an agreement or pledge to do something.

When contemplating possible solutions to a problem or dilemma, you should remember that you are committed to your school and to the MCJROTC program. You must remember that you have the responsibility to act in a manner that exhibits your dedication and devotion.

Values and Standards

In the Marine Corps, Marines must be committed to adhering to the values and standards

that will lead them to act correctly. These values and standards are listed as follows:

- Legal Standards are formal regulatory standards contained in law.
- Basic National values established in the Constitution, Declaration of Independence, and other documents and traditions that provide the foundation for required behavior for all Marines.
- Traditional Marine Corps values are required behavior for all Marines. These values include Loyalty to the Ideals of the Nation, Loyalty to the Unit, Personal Responsibility, and Selfless Service.
- Actual Marine Corps values are the values that are functioning in the local units. They are the standards governing day-to-day behavior in the Corps. Actual Marine Corps values are often the same as traditional Marine Corps values.
- Individual values are values held by the individual Marine involved in the situation.
- Institutional pressures are elements of Marine Corps policies, procedures, operations, and other aspects that influence the ethical behavior of Marines.

As a MCJROTC cadet, if you keep all of these values and standards in mind when making decisions, you will be able to act in a responsible manner. You will be able to stay within your code of ethics. It should be remembered that ethics are an extension of the individual.

Conclusion

As you can see, the subject of ethics is very involved and complicated. Ethics involves your attitudes about your unit and yourself. You

have learned that your ethics should be based on values that are traditional and beyond question. If you remember what you have learned today, you will be better equipped to make tough decisions in the future. ❖

