FEATURE

The (New) Horizon for Value-based Ethics:

Insights and Opportunities for Our Profession

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"Officers of all grades perceive a significant difference between the ideal values and the actual or operative values of the Officer Corps. This perception is strong, clear, pervasive, and statistically and qualitatively independent of grade, branch, educational level, or source of commission." (Ulmer, 1970, iii)

This description of the Army officer climate appeared in a 1970 study on military professionalism conducted by then-LTC Walt Ulmer[1].   His report highlighted a clear "disharmony between traditional, accepted ideals and the prevailing institutional pressures" that undermined the professionalism of the officer corps (Ulmer, p. iii).

In addition, he described a culture in need of deliberate focus on multiple factors—individual, interpersonal, cultural and enterprise-wide— which were negatively impacting the ethical and professional state of the Service. He cited an environment

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that "rewards relatively insignificant, short-term indicators of success, and disregards or discourages the growth of the long term qualities of moral and ethical strength" (Ulmer, p. v). LTC Ulmer acknowledged that the situation was "probably not self-correcting," and therefore required an integrated and multi-dimensional approach to align professional values and behaviors at all levels (Ulmer, p. vi). In the end, a number of recommendations and initiatives were proposed to correct the issues and re-establish a culture of professionalism among its leadership corps. Some of these initiatives undeniably moved the ball forward, elevating the performance and ethos of Service members at all levels.

But 45 years later, evidence in the form of survey data and specific cases requires us to acknowledge that there is still work to be done. Even in today's exceptionally professional military context, we are reminded of leaders at all levels who cross ethical lines they know better than to cross. Institutionally, reports highlight the unreasonable firehose of requirements levied on service members, reinforcing a culture of unethical "work-arounds" and pencil whipping (Wong & Gerras, 2015). In other instances, culture and climate surveys describe instances where toxic leadership climates fester, undermining trust, respect, engagement and adherence to our core values. (Steele, 2011). In still other instances, accountability to standards is perceived as inconsistent and soft[2], and those in positions of trust and power exploit that differential to their advantage. Additional evidence indicates an unfavorable percentage of people fear retaliation for coming forward and identifying misbehaviors[3]. Yes, we have challenges that demand our attention. Although these data points are not representative of the whole Profession, we must recognize that today's issues are also "not self-correcting" and must be addressed directly.

It was in the context of such indicators—largely represented by a series of General Officer violations and two cheating scandals in early 2014—that the Secretary of Defense created the position of Senior Advisor for Military Professionalism. Specifically, the position's charge was to "ensure the effective integration and implementation of ongoing efforts to further improve professionalism, moral and ethical decision-making, and the traditional values of military service" (Terms of Reference). To this end, a cross-Service team was formed to highlight best practices from the military, industry and academia to confront the issues threatening our Profession. That team's role has largely been to facilitate a critical self-evaluation of the professionalism of our force, identifying integration opportunities, and consolidating and disseminating insights wherever possible to promote institutionalized solutions.

Such critical self-evaluation is not at all unprecedented in our profession. Historically, when we emerge from a period of sustained conflict, there is a natural tendency to re-focus on those fundamental values and practices which align us to our Profession (Snider, 2014). So often, such sustained conflict can create a "drift" in focus toward the urgency of the mission, at times sacrificing the consistent adherence to standards. Today, we have an opportunity to re-examine the alignment or misalignment of our people, institutional processes, and our stated ideals.

Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey reminded us in a white paper entitled, "America's Military: A Profession of Arms":

"As learning institutions, it is imperative that we reflect on our experiences during the past 10 years to assess the impact and understand both our strengths and weaknesses. This is necessary to see ourselves so we can determine how we should adapt and institutionalize the lessons of the last decade. This will enable us to promote the knowledge, skills, attributes, and behaviors that define us as a profession, and develop our future leaders" (Dempsey, 2010, p. 3).

The general conclusion which has emerged during this examination of the state of our Profession: *we are not*

in crisis. The United States of America has the greatest, most professional and capable military force the world has ever seen. The majority of those serving this country do so with selfless dignity, integrity and passion; and often in environments of danger and with limited oversight and resources. Because of this undeniable fundamental starting point, our office has framed its mission not as "fixing" or "creating" professionalism in the DoD, but rather seeking ways to "strengthen" and "recommit" to our already proud professional identity. There is reassurance in knowing the military remains one of the most admired professions in our society, largely because of the consistent demonstration of

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the competence and character the nation expects. However, reassurance is not the target. Despite all of the bright spots, *we can and must do better.*

Reputation and admiration do not absolve us from the need to renew our focus on values-based ethics at all levels. Our profession is existentially threatened with each incident of misbehavior. Every occasion where we are out of alignment with our values undermines the sacred trust with our Service members, as well as between the military and the American people. Regardless of the trigger for this internal examination, there is little doubt the force of the future, albeit operating in an unprecedentedly complex, ambiguous and dynamic environment, will still demand of its members those things expected of all professionals demonstrated expertise in an area vital to society, adherence to the defined ethical standards (self-policing ethic) with a high degree of autonomy, and an identity as a stewards of their profession (Cook & Snider, 2014).

Scandals are a useful impetus for critical reflection and action, but to wait for crisis is unacceptably reactive--one does not need to get sick to get better. The factors that either undermine or strengthen our ability to uphold the professional standards must be addressed with a sense of urgency. No doubt, there are unhealthy personal and institutional elements within our profession that warrant a direct, corrective response. Similarly, we cannot ignore the remarkable number of "bright spots" (Heath & Heath, 2010) where, despite environmental pressures and constraints, amazingly productive outcomes are being achieved with honor and professionalism. Our survival as a profession worthy of trust and influence demands we (1) be aware of both positive and negative elements and, (2) we respond accordingly in a manner that ultimately strengthens our profession. In some cases, the approach may be evolutionary, and in other cases, revolutionary. But the solutions must be offered in such a way as to maximize the probability that they endure as an organic, integrated part of our professional culture. This must be about a stronger professional mindset, as opposed to a series of mandated, reactive programs.

So, with that as the background, this DoD-cross service team has committed to approach this effort with a lens that looks beyond the traditional compliance-based view of ethics to one that seeks to foster commitment to the identity of a professional. Indeed, there is a place for rules and regulations, which provide clear boundaries for defining what we can and can't do within our professional roles. But "not violating the letter of the law" is a threshold that falls well short of what the American people expect from the Profession of Arms. We want the ultimate calculus to balance "can we?" with "should we?", because with that lens, we're more likely to tap into the identity that will drive honorable thoughts and actions.

Ultimately, this effort requires the members of the

Profession of Arms to ask uncomfortable questions, often challenging existing processes and operating assumptions. The Profession of Arms must emerge stronger than ever, and that requires the discomfort of moving from the status quo. To succeed, our office must create awareness, promote insights, build bridges, and move the Department toward solutions in a collaborative environment.

Given all of this, our exploration has identified a collection of key insights and opportunities for our Profession.

Key Insights

We struggle because humans in organizations are complex.

In the end, issues of culture, leadership, professional behavior, ethical decision-making, trust, accountability, respect and countless other constructs related to Professionalism are all deeply human phenomena. And where humans interact in groups and organizations, certain dynamics will emerge. This comment in no way condones actions inconsistent with our core values, but recognizes that our mission is accomplished through people who are multidimensional, emotionally-influenced, diverse and (as behavioral economist Dan Ariely reminds us) predictably irrational. (Ariely, 2010) Added to that, the complexity and scale of our operations require we organize in in a hierarchy for efficiency and oversight, often in an environment of high risk and resource constraint. This interaction of the military professional (individual) in the profession/organization (context) sets the stage for potentially dysfunctional human behaviors and organizational dynamics. Our goal is to proactively understand and shape these dynamics in a way that ensures mission success in line with our values.

In an oddly encouraging sense, the issues we struggle with are similarly challenging in the non-military context.

For example, the 2013 KPMG Global Organizational Integrity Survey found that almost 75 percent of employees reported observing misconduct within their organizations in the previous 12 months, and over half of the employees surveyed reported that what they observed could potentially cause a significant loss of public trust if discovered. Across industries, there is evidence of ineffective or even toxic leadership resulting in dysfunctional and corrosive cultures. The Ethics Resource Council's 2014 National Business Ethics Survey showed that of misconduct observed in the workplace, a shocking 60 percent was conducted by someone in a leadership position. Trust in leadership is at historic lows (see 2014 Edelman Trust Barometer), affecting employee attitudes and behaviors. A recent Gallup poll shows that less than one-third of employees are engaged in their jobs, while 53 percent are not engaged, and a dangerous 16 percent are actively disengaged[4] (Gallup, 2014). Given this environment, we were not surprised to hear the topics of trust, integrity, accountability, adherence to standards, respect and commitment consistently highlighted as challenges at all of the corporate ethics roundtables, conferences and discussions in which we've participated.

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So, the somewhat reassuring news is that we in the Department of Defense are not unique when it comes to these persistent challenges. Additionally, there is promise in that we can learn from those in the corporate, non-profit and academic arena precisely because we are all working with humans in organizations. There are "bright spots" and best practices we can definitely adapt and adopt. But, we must never lose sight of the fact that the context of the Profession of Arms is unique in that our ethical missteps can have much more profound consequences than other professions.

We must be relentlessly committed to strengthening our professional ethic, for the individual and the organization, no matter how strong it currently is. Good enough is never good enough.

Success in the human dimension is about People and Environments.

The greatest weapon system and asymmetric advantage we have is our people, and it is through this resource that we achieve our success. Herein lays the importance of recognizing and focusing on the *human dimension*. As was famously stated by former Army Chief of Staff General Creighton Abrams about his beloved Service, "People are not *in* the Army, they *are* the Army." Because of this, leaders have a fundamental burden to bring out the maximum potential in their people in order to execute the task of this Profession. Simon Sinek, in a conversation at the Pentagon, reminded a group of senior leaders, "Commanders are not responsible for the mission. They are responsible for the *people* responsible for the mission."

Therefore, we must attend in a fresh way to *individuals* – who / how we recruit, select, develop, retain, promote, and place in positions of trust[5]. The behavior of our members is a manifestation of perceptions, decisions, emotions, reasoning, biases, values, abilities, traits and many other complex factors—all of which must be considered when striving to enhance professionalism and ethical behavior.

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In the preface the 1970 "Ulmer" study, Major General G.S. Eckhardt stated, "The subjects of ethics, morals, technical competence, individual motivation, and personal value systems are inextricably related, interacting, and mutually reinforcing" (Ulmer, 1970, p. i). Leadership and ethical behavior are demonstrated at the individual level, and we must be deliberately focused on reinforcing those whose behaviors align with our values, and correcting those whose behaviors don't. When developing and leading these individuals, we must "meet them where they are," understanding their unique motivations, strengths and limitations in order to maximize their potential. As Air Force Chief of Staff General Mark Welsh III has said repeatedly, "In order to lead them, you've got to know their story."

But individuals exist in a context. Often, when unprofessional behaviors are observed, we quickly conclude that the problem lies with obviously "bad apples" who must be removed. But we cannot ignore how the organizational *environment* may contribute to these behaviors as well. Policies, processes, organizational cultures, and other elements impact and often drive individual and team performance. To borrow a phrase from behavioral scientists, we must look at both the *apples* and the *barrels* (Trevino & Youngblood, 1990; Kish-Gephart, Harrison & Treviño, 2010). Wong and Gerras (2014), in their thought-provoking paper entitled, "Lying to Ourselves: Dishonesty in the Army Profession", suggest that the unreasonable number of requirements levied on many good officers and NCOs has led to a "surprisingly common" level of untruthfulness (pg. ix). While not excusing this behavior, it is important for our profession to acknowledge that it may unintentionally create conditions that encourage (or even reward) the wrong actions[6].

There are powerful, systemic pressures in place that prompt otherwise good, professional Service members to, for example, remain silent when they see inappropriate behavior from their peers; inflate scores of someone underperforming; grudgingly tolerate sexist comments in their unit; not confront a toxic supervisor, peer

or subordinate; or provide unauthorized help to a student on a test so they can meet the 100% standard.[7] Again, these examples don't excuse the specific behaviors, but to ignore the existence of environmental pressures only increases the likelihood the behaviors will continue with the next batch of "apples."

We must acknowledge that, because people are involved, there will always be some level of imperfection. We must never be satisfied with behavior that is inconsistent with our values, but it is critical we recognize that "zero defects" in the area of character and leadership is unrealistic. Too often, we respond to crises by creating formal programs that address symptoms and not root causes. This reactive posture is analogous to spraying weed killer, which may kill the specific target, but also damages the surrounding grass (i.e., individual/organizational cynicism, frustration). Rather, we must take an approach more like "weed and feed," where the healthy lawn is also nourished, strengthened and reinforced, while addressing the isolated problem spots. Just as a rich, healthy lawn chokes out any weeds trying to take root, our approach should largely be to feed and strengthen the positive culture of our profession (starting at the unit levels) so that its members address/eliminate any behaviors inconsistent with our values. This is the true nature of a self-policing ethic.

Thus, in order to cultivate such a profession, we must proactively challenge both the individuals and the environment to align with the values we espouse. We must recognize and confront areas within unit cultures, Services or the Department as a whole where pressures (even incentives) exist which undermine adherence to standards, ethical performance and loyalty to do the right thing.

People are hungry to discuss this.

As we have engaged audiences at all levels about issues of professionalism, character and ethical leadership in our profession, we have noticed a healthy energy associated with the discussions. We say "healthy" energy because these topics could potentially elicit superficial lip service from participants or, even more likely, generate into dysfunctional gripe sessions and finger-pointing. Instead, we have consistently received sincere, solution-seeking, aspirational dialog from individuals deeply invested in elevating themselves, their teams and their profession. The "sensing sessions" we have hosted generated passionate and serious conversations that demonstrate the importance with which people approach this subject. Whether speaking with Marine NCOs, Air War College faculty, Army commanders, senior civilians, Naval aviators or the many

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other groups we've seen, there is a universal interest in topics of trust, respect, integrity, accountability, healthy cultures and upholding the standards that make our profession unique. These issues resonate with Service members in their professional and personal lives, and they are eager to move the needle forward.

The interest in these topics is not new. In General Ulmer's 1970 report, he concluded that the "Junior officers (lieutenants and captains) are deeply aware of professional standards, keenly interested in discussions about the subject and intolerant of those—either peers or seniors—who they believe are substandard in ethical or moral behavior or in technical competence" (p. iii). In our current interactions with service members, this insight continues to hold undeniably true.

Without question, members of our profession are interested in the moral and ethical aspect of the work we do. They are proud of the standards, recognize when others are out of alignment with those standards, and feel frustrated when they see others, especially senior leaders, do not uphold them. Conversely, they have shared with us countless examples of the Core Values being embraced and lived out by junior members to senior leaders across all components of our profession. Interestingly, there is also a consistent thread of humility where many of these same Service members acknowledge their shortcomings and commitment to strengthening their own performance, personally and professionally.

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But it is not only important *that* we communicate on these topics, it is equally important to consider *how* we communicate on them. These are intimate and challenging issues that require a level of personal reflection, synthesis and commitment. Because of that, the conversations must be offered in an engaging way that requires a level of candor and transparency potentially unfamiliar to our profession as a whole. When it comes to addressing personal character issues and complex ethical decisions in the real world, we must move away from traditional computer-based modules, predictable down-day mass briefings, compliance-focused training and reactive programs. Instead, to connect with the identity of the professional, we must move to a more intimate, interactive, applied and personal approach.

The solution must be organic and value-added, and it must directly link the desired identity and behaviors with mission accomplishment in people's day-to-day lives. This will require leaders at all levels to commit to not only modeling

this as part of their role as stewards of the profession, but also to ushering in a new era of (to use an Army term) "foot locker conversations" to keep a focus on the constant expectation of honorable thoughts and actions.

Leaders must build cultures that bring the Profession to life.

All of the Services have core values they hold sacred. These are essential guideposts representing what is expected in their respective part of the profession. But the core values can remain broad, aspirational "bumper stickers" to the service men and women if they are not brought to life by the leaders in their units. Those in leadership positions across the Department must embrace the responsibility to translate and clarify what these core values look like in day-to-day life in their respective organizations, and then unquestioningly uphold those standards. For example, if an organization claims to value service, respect, courage or even innovation, then the leader must ensure those values are relentlessly present, obvious, demonstrated and reinforced everywhere within the organization.

In our visits with military units, there are many wonderful examples of leaders at all levels who are clearly modeling "what right looks like." In some powerful cases, they also communicate with absolute clarity what will not be tolerated.[8] Leaders are connecting their people with the pride associated with serving a noble cause, and are reinforcing the importance of stewardship to the profession. They are taking intentional steps to create cultures of trust and respect, and are growing the next generation of leaders.

But there are also cases where those in leadership positions have missed the mark in a big way. Although this represents a minority of the population, there are instances where those in positions of trust and authority have allowed power to negatively influence their decision-making and behaviors. In other cases, leaders have allowed dysfunctional or toxic[9]

subcultures to emerge, perhaps even as a result of their personal example or their unwillingness to uphold standards and maintain accountability. In still other areas, the absence of candor, transparency and open feedback by the leader serves to drive out healthy communication, ultimately undermining organizational trust and performance. As the saying goes, "A fish rots from the head"; so too does an organization with an unhealthy leader.

Over and over again, in our interactions with military and civilian organizations, as well as through insights from thought leaders and the academic literature, we are reminded of the importance of the *local* leader (i.e., the immediate supervisor) in people's lives. To a large degree, that person is the face of the profession for their subordinates. Yes, Service members will definitely have opinions about their degree of trust toward their most senior leaders (e.g., Secretary of Defense, Service Secretaries and Chiefs), but the perception most closely associated to the member's commitment, attitude, effort and performance, is that of the leader *directly* above them. As a result, we must ensure these leaders see the enormous responsibility in how they articulate and reinforce the expectations of those in their immediate charge.

Peter Drucker famously stated, "Culture eats strategy for lunch." This is because culture is the mechanism by which the human capital converts strategy into action. A strong culture can be a force multiplier for strategy, whereas an unhealthy culture can undermine even the best strategy. A 2013 study by the Ethics Resource Council demonstrated that in organizations with strong ethical cultures – that is, where leaders consistently communicated the importance of ethics and values, led by example, and held people accountable—the percentage of employees who observed misconduct was significantly lower than those with weak ethical cultures (20 percent in strong ethical cultures vs 88 percent in weak) (2013 ERC National Business Ethics Survey). Leaders set the tone the organization will mirror. Dr. Jeff Smith from the Air Force's new Profession of Arms

Center of Excellence went so far as to say, "A culture is largely defined by the worst thing a leader is willing to tolerate." One challenge we can offer is to ensure even our lowest-set bar still meets the professional standard for we can be proud.

But leaders must be on the lookout for cases where even well-intentioned approaches may work against the desired effect. For example, a "zero-defect" culture may originate from a pursuit of excellence, but can have the unintended effect of encouraging members to find unethical ways to maintain the appearance of 100% compliance in order to avoid a damaging professional outcomes (as was the case in the 2013 cheating scandal at Malmstrom Air Force Base) (Guiberson, 2015). Other examples include commanders who relax standards to set an informal, collaborative tone only to find military discipline spiral out of control, or a culture that espouses innovation and initiative undermined by a desire to drive out any risk in the organization.

In the end, leaders own the cultures and climates of their organizations, and must be deliberate about engineering an environment that truly reflects the values they espouse. Culture can be shaped and reinforced through policies, processes, decisions, communications (formal and informal), symbols, artifacts, awards, stories, behaviors and of course, the language of the organization. Again, what is modeled and reinforced by the leadership team clearly defines for the members what an organization truly values.

It all starts and ends with trust.

In his best-selling book, "The Speed of Trust," Steven M.R. Covey defined leadership as "Getting results in a way that inspires trust" (p. 115). Mission accomplishment that shatters trust is not true success. He goes on to argue that the ability to establish, grow, extend and restore trust (what he calls trust abilities) "is the key leadership competency in the new global economy" (p. 106). Indeed, in our interactions with leaders from corporate, military, non-profit and academia, there was one, undeniable central tenant of organizational success that came up over and over again:

trust. This powerful topic has been shown by scientists to significantly enhance retention, satisfaction, commitment, leadership effectiveness, ethical behavior, engagement and performance (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). In any relationship, it's the golden ticket.

Yet we know that trust, while critically important, is fragile and requires continual nourishment. General Dempsey's white paper "The Profession of Arms," stated clearly that the American people will judge the "extent to which we are a profession, and will do so based on the bond of trust we create with them based on the ethical, exemplary manner in which we employ our capabilities" (Dempsey, 2010, p. 1). This trust is earned through demonstration of *competence* and *character*, consistently aligned with our core values. When either competence or character is absent, the foundation of the relationship buckles—and we would argue that breaches of character do more damage and are harder to rebuild. Within the Profession of Arms, the trust of the members with their profession, the trust of the Services with each other, and surely the trust of the American people (and her leadership) with the profession represent our core lifeblood. To break that trust, we threaten the unique autonomy afforded us by the Nation. Ultimately, we must deliver on our promise to do what we say we will and be who we say we are.

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Trust always involves some degree of risk and vulnerability by at least one party in the relationship. Without this, there is no need for trust. The notion of vulnerability becomes particularly important as we look to the future of the warfighting environment--one that is immersed in volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA). In short, our future operational environment is one where innovation, agility and initiation, and therefore, risk-taking, will be

absolutely necessary. Yet, large bureaucratic organizations like the Department of Defense are not inherently agile or comfortable with risk and vulnerability.

In order for us to stand successfully in the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity-laden future, we must build a bridge based on a culture of "bi-directional trust". The *upward* trust of our superiors must be earned through the consistent demonstration of competence and character and adherence to our espoused standards. Conversely, superiors in the Department must be willing to extend *downward* trust by empowering subordinate organizations and individuals to take responsible risks and explore new ideas that may require an unfamiliar level of vulnerability from the institution. We have amazingly talented and innovative Service members, eager to carry the Department of Defense from where we are to where we must go. To convert that potential energy, we must create a culture where the innovation and initiative we desire are met with support and trust.

The path to professional excellence is through habits.

Notice we said character and competence must be *consistently* aligned with our values. This notion of consistency is critical. In our profession, we already embrace this when it comes

> to the competence-related aspect of professionalism. We are relentless about training and repetitive rehearsal as the way to ensure consistently excellent performance. We "fight the way we train," and we expect the trained response to become automated.

The same focus must be applied to the character-related aspect of professionalism, leveraging intentional repetition to creating what amounts to moral muscle memory.

Let us acknowledge that very few of the senior leader misbehavior and cheating scandals that led to the establishment of our office– or any ethical, unprofessional behaviors that draw shock and disgust – happen for the first time in one dramatic event. Rather, the scandal is often the

culmination of a series of smaller transgressions that were easy to rationalize and justify, especially if no consequence emerged. Minor missteps reinforced the next larger misstep. The discussion about professionalism and character can be cleanly guided by the words of Aristotle, who stated, "We are what we repeatedly do; Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."

These habits, developed and strengthened in peace, prove critical during moments of intense conflict and challenge. They also arm us to stand firmly on the path we intend when the distractions of life might otherwise convince us to flirt with the slippery slope in all domains of our lives, whether physical, professional, relational, spiritual or other. And it is a journey that never ends – a "mountain with no top".[10] In his 1993 address at the Citadel, President Reagan beautifully articulated how, when forging our character, we truly do become "what we repeatedly do":

> *[The display of character in life's critical moments] has been determined by a thousand other choices made earlier in seemingly unimportant moments. It has been determined by all the little choices of years past—by all those times when the voice of conscience was at war with the voice of temptation—whispering the lie that it really doesn't matter. It has been determined by all the day-to-day decisions made when life seemed easy and crises seemed far away—the decisions that, piece by piece, bit by bit, developed habits of discipline or of laziness, habits of self-sacrifice or of self-indulgence, habits of duty and honor and integrity—or dishonor and shame.[11]*

When these testable moments arise, the challenge is to have the strength and stamina to align action with intention and one's identity. The concept of "ethical fitness" (Kidder, 2005) is a natural analogy for the military profession. We have undeniably embraced *physical* fitness as an organic element of our culture, where it is deliberately expected and practiced by our service members as a fundamental element of their professional lifestyle. Standards of performance are clearly understood, and are easily integrated into our daily activities. Just as physical fitness is a mindset and "lifestyle" commitment, so too must *ethical* fitness become part of the organic experience and conversation in our units at all levels to build strong, automated habits of honorable thoughts and actions.

So often, when we are offered the opportunity for professionalism or character development, the response is, "People should have learned these things from their parents by fifth grade." So we tend to enter the discussion as if we have already "arrived"; implying that this conversation must be for someone else, and that those who have failed are simply weak, didn't learn what we did as children, or are simply bad apples. In reality, many of us *did* get exposed to the fundamentals of professionalism and character early on. We may have even developed some strong habits. But one thing is clear: the test never ends. As we progress from fifth grade, new and more complex opportunities emerge to test our resolve on things we have learned earlier (like patience, humility, fairness, cheating, loyalty, generosity, self-discipline, etc.). We do not keep getting fifth grade tests. Just because we are familiar with these values does not mean they cease to become challenging (or require reminding). Very intelligent, (previously) professional and ethical people found themselves in situations they never expected (to include the front page of the newspaper) because they

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stopped focusing on the test, and started building habits of *dis*honor, one moment at a time.

The intent here is not to be patronizing, but rather to offer a possible avenue for developmental conversations to follow. All of us are either in or out of alignment with our espoused

values, moment to moment. Based on our membership in this profession, there are values, expectations and standards that we have explicitly or implicitly agreed to uphold and demonstrate. As the testable moments emerge, we are either "in integrity" or "out of integrity" with our word (a notion defined as Behavioral Integrity)[12]. As members of the Profession of Arms, as well as in our roles as parents, citizens, spouses and peers, how we perform during those moments is the basis for our identity, with ourselves and others. This lens of behavioral integrity may be useful for discussing personal and professional behavior in a way that does not reduce conclusions down to "you either have it or you don't".

Science can provide clarity in the human dimension.

One thing that distinguishes the world of the 1970s Ulmer report from today is what we know about the human condition. Advances in the fields of behavioral economics, statistics, industrial and organizational psychology/ organizational behavior and other behavioral sciences have provided insights that we must leverage. In just the last 10 years, advances in human decision-making, development and motivation have challenged long-standing assumptions and highlighted opportunities our current systems are slow to recognize.

For example, recent research in behavioral economics highlights the limitations of traditional rational models of decision-making. In particular, we better understand the profound influence that biases, priming, framing, power, emotions and environmental cues have in shaping our behaviors[13]. This knowledge can be used both to explain unfavorable behaviors (to include sexual harassment/ assault, bystander apathy, cheating, toleration, turnover, low performance, etc.) and to shape conditions for positive behaviors and outcomes. At the very least, these insights can affect how we access, train, organize, motivate, promote and retain the "Force of the Future". Our knowledge of the world and the human mind has advanced, and we would be remiss to not take advantage of it.

In the same respect, there is a science to development. Scholars in areas from identity development (e.g., Erikson, 1980), military ethos formation (e.g., Snider, 2012) and adult learning theory (e.g., Mezirow, 1995) have examined how to best strengthen individuals' sense of self. As a profession, we must ensure the latest insights are integrated into our developmental approaches, to include the application of technology in case studies and simulations, using psychometric tools for self-awareness, and leveraging episodes of failure for positive growth. For example, the Service Academies have implemented remediation programs for those with honor code violations. In many areas, these programs have garnered great results, including higher levels of commitment to the honor code and core values for those who have gone through the program versus those who have not. Perhaps these insights can travel into other aspects of our profession.

The science available also includes an understanding of the fundamental principles for character development program design. As we expend effort and resources in shaping our profession, we must leverage the principles that have been researched and validated over time[14]. In many cases, the military profession has been the benchmark in this arena, but our colleagues in industry and academia have much from which we can learn[15]. An opportunity exists for us to better leverage this expertise and collaborate in this area of common interest.

One encouraging example of applied science surrounds the area of assessment. From 360-degree feedback to culture/climate surveys to psychometric tools, all of the Services have continued to pursue better ways to understand their people and organizations. Particularly promising is the research surrounding the use of non-cognitive measures for personnel selection and job placement. Extensive research is demonstrating how assessing individuals on non-traditional dimensions (e.g., grit, self-discipline, risk-

tolerance, conscientiousness, emotional stability, etc.) can provide increase prediction of success beyond the academic/cognitive assessments we've historically used.

Leadership and warfare are indeed art and science, but since both are inherently human phenomena, we should recognize that science has taken a huge leap forward. Yet the DoD may be out of balance in its approach. We expect our members to demonstrate a necessary level of expertise, embrace their roles as stewards of the profession, hold themselves and others to a standard consistent with our core values, and earn the trust so critical for our health and success. We must understand and leverage the potential of our human capital as much as we do our technical capabilities, and science is our force multiplier.

> The discussion about professionalism and character can be cleanly guided by the words of Aristotle, who stated, "We are what we repeatedly do; Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."

Opportunities Ahead

Over the past 15 months, our office has been clearly reminded that the Services and the Joint Staff take the issue of professionalism very seriously. There are countless examples of deliberate efforts being taken to develop and strengthen the Profession of Arms. Our ethos remains strong due to the efforts of those across the Department. But an opportunity lies in aligning these efforts so we are more aware of and integrated with each other's "cylinders of excellence." On many occasions, we discovered instances where outstanding but very similar efforts were underway in different corners of the Department. Time and resources might be saved, with possibly bigger impact, if these groups coordinated more closely. There is a natural tendency in any organization for functional stovepipes to develop. To some degree, this is appropriate and necessary to accommodate the unique requirements of the respective Service missions. But across the Department, there are natural points of commonality – particularly around the human dimension

and our Professional expectations – where we must align and integrate.

This type of coordination also applies to 'connecting the dots' in our professional education programs. Officer, enlisted and civilian members of our profession attend formal training courses which, in many cases, include very limited curriculum on professionalism and values-based ethics, instead focusing on compliance and legal aspects of ethical behavior. In addition to enhancing the professionalism content in these formal courses, we must also recognize that significant gaps in time exist between these formal "mountaintop" events. Some people may go 5 or more years between formal courses, yet they are expected to strengthen themselves as members of the profession. This is where the informal development efforts must deliberately extend and reinforce what is learned in the formal programs.

Strengthening professionalism is about committing to an identity; it is a mindset for how people connect what they do (on and off duty) with who they are trying to be. The issue of developing professionalism must be addressed in a manner that does not feel programmatic or reactive (i.e., a down-day or initiative in response to the latest scandal). This is less about doing something new, and more about approaching what we already do in a new and purposeful way. Members from the Josephson Institute, when talking with Air Force Academy faculty about their responsibility for bringing character development into the classroom, once stated, "Character is not something you add to the plate, it *is* the plate." So too is the case with professionalism in relation to our work lives. It must be "baked in" to everything we do.

To elevate the professional thoughts and actions even above today's exceptional level (for the vast majority of our service members), we must continue to recruit, select, develop and retain the highest potential service members. Luckily, within the Profession of Arms, we have a noble and compelling mission that attracts a special caliber of applicant. To a large measure, those who raise their hand to serve do so knowing there are standards and expectations unique to this profession, and they accept those standards. We must be absolutely clear about communicating those expectations to the population to fan the flames of commitment and enhance the likelihood of a fit between personal and organizational values.

The human dimension is the key resource through which we accomplish the mission. We can use this period of reflection to leverage the interest in this topic among our members, the advances in science and the strong foundation

But across the Department, there are natural points of commonality – particularly around the human dimension and our Professional expectations – where we must align and integrate.

on which we currently stand. Our actions as members of this profession are reflective of our individual values, beliefs, attitudes, experience, strengths and weaknesses. But they are also shaped by the environment in which we operate. The Australian Defense Force's "Pathway to Change" document, which describes the strategy for strengthening their own profession, states, "The strategy starts with accepting individual responsibility for one's own behaviour, assisting others to live the culture, and putting the onus on leaders to be exemplars of positive and visible change at all times. It also involves amending policies and processes that do not align" with our values (p. 1).

For us, the subjects of ethics, morals, competence, motivation and values systems will always remain integrally related, because they are so fundamental to our identity as military professionals. General Dempsey's white paper makes it clear that, "Our profession is *defined* by our values, ethics, standards, code of conduct, skills, and attributes" (Dempsey, 2010, p. 4; emphasis added). We operate in the domain of combat, and to that end, we have been afforded a level of autonomy and responsibility not found in other professions. In return, we must consistently deliver on the promise to the American people an unquestionable competence and character worthy of that autonomy. When that promise is broken, the casualty is trust we cannot afford to lose.

Yes, today we can still recognize challenges shared with the profession described 45 years ago by then-Lieutenant Colonel Ulmer. But we are undeniably stronger as a profession, and it is largely because we stay committed to never accepting "good enough." Yet again, we find ourselves in a period of reflection and re-commitment, and we are forcefully taking on the challenge. We acknowledge that, because humans are involved, this will be an unending journey of testable moments and alignment with our identity. Leaders must always model what right looks like. Cultures that promote our values must be continuously nurtured. Our service members must be relentlessly vigilant about the slippery slopes that promote ethical "drift" in their personal and professional lives. And on and on it goes...for the next 45 years and beyond. The thing that makes this frustratingly persistent struggle so wonderful is that it matters. This *thing of ours* – this noble and honorable profession--remains a mountain with no top, but a mountain worth climbing.

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Acknowledgements

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Notes

1 Lieutenant General Ulmer's remarkable career of distinguished service spanned 33 years. He commanded at the Brigade, Division, and Corps levels, and served as the Commandant at West Point, where he presided over the introduction of the first female cadets and the adjudication of West Point's 1977 cheating scandal. After retiring, he went on to become the president and CEO of the Center for Creative Leadership.

2 18% of respondents in the 2013 Army's Annual Survey of Army Leadership indicate there was a state of discipline problem. 51% of Sailors surveyed in an independent study of Navy Retention by Snodgrass and Kohlmann stated they do not believe senior leaders hold themselves accountable.

3 Both the 2010 Department of Defense Ethical Culture Survey Project (Human Resources Research Organization, Council of Ethical Organizations) and the 2014 Navy Retention Study Survey Report by Snodgrass and Kohlmann present data where respondents do not report misbehaviors out of (among other things) fear of retribution. This can take the form of social punishment and isolation from peers to personal and professional consequences from supervisors.

4 Engaged employees are involved, enthusiastic and committed to their work. Engagement is strongly correlated to productivity, profitability, customer satisfaction and organizational performance. Disengaged employees are apathetic, "going through the motions," and "checked out," putting little energy or innovation into their organization. Actively disengaged employees are destructive to cultures and undermine their jobs and employers, driving down morale and performance.

5 Secretary of Defense Carter's "Force of the Future" initiative is directed at revolutionizing the Department's approach to these human capital activities, and moving it to a more innovative, agile system reflective of the information age (as opposed to the industrial age it currently reflects).

6 Kerr's (1975) classic article, "On the Folly of Rewarding 'A,' While Hoping for 'B'" is an outstanding primer for how common this unintended reinforcement is in organizations and our society.

7 Marshall Goldsmith's book, "Triggers: Creating Behavior that Lasts—Becoming the Person You Want to Be" is an outstanding resource for understanding the power of environmental cues in shaping behavior.

8 For an outstanding example, see Australian Army General Morrison's bold stance regarding sexual harassment and assault at http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=Australian+Army+Morrison&FORM=HDRSC3#view=detail&mid=E228103406DA89253DC4E228103406DA89253DC4

9 The Army has inserted language about toxic leadership in their Army Doctrinal Publication 6-22, Leadership (soon to be in Army Regulation 600-100, Leadership), in order to draw attention to this issue, and to clearly articulate that such behavior will not be tolerated.

10 This phrase has been attributed to Dr. Mike Jensen

11 This powerful speech in its entirety can be found at http://www3.citadel.edu/pao/addresses/reagan.htm

12 Behavioral Integrity (BI) is defined as the perceived pattern of alignment between an actor's words and deeds (Simons, 2002). It reflects impressions of whether the target (e.g., leader) consistently "walks" the values he/she espouses and keeps his/her promises. BI is a key pathway for trust formation and outcomes to include subordinate commitment, engagement, deviant/ethical behavior, performance, etc. For more on Behavioral Integrity, see work by Simons (2002) and Palanski, Kahai & Yammarino (2011).

13 See work by Kahneman (2011); Dan Ariely (2010); Thaler & Sunstein (2009); Haidt (2007); Goldsmith (2015).

14 See the "Conceptual Framework for Developing Leaders of Character" by the Air Force Academy's Center for Character and Leadership Development for a well-designed developmental model. The document summarizes many principles for development worth considering, and the "Own-Engage-Practice" model integrates many foundational theories of human development. Also, the Marine University's Instructor Mastery Model (Ross, Phillips & Lineberger, 2015) is a useful framework for identifying developmental stages and transition points.

15 For example, Center for Creative Leadership, The Josephson Institute, Boeing Leadership Center, Johnson & Johnson's Human Performance Institute, Institute for Excellence & Ethics.