

Chapter 18 – Ethics

“If you don’t stand for something, you’ll fall for anything!” - Steve Bartkowski

Introduction to Ethics in Government

The Office of Government Ethics has established Standards of Conduct that apply to all US government employees. The Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security, along with the military Services, have promulgated specific rules and regulations on ethics standards for its employees.

All government employees should be familiar with their responsibilities under these regulations and Federal conflict of interest laws. The rules are derived from the following fourteen principles of ethical conduct in Executive Order 12731:

- ✓ Public service is a public trust, requiring employees to place loyalty to the Constitution, the laws, and ethical principles above private gain.
- ✓ Employees shall not hold financial interests that conflict with the conscientious performance of duty.
- ✓ Employees shall not engage in financial transactions using nonpublic Government information or allow the improper use of such information to further any private interest.
- ✓ An employee shall not, except pursuant to such reasonable exceptions as are provided by regulation, solicit or accept any gift or other item of monetary value from any person or entity seeking official action from, doing business with, or conducting activities regulated by the employee's agency, or whose interests may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of the employee's duties.
- ✓ Employees shall put forth honest effort in the performance of their duties.
- ✓ Employees shall make no unauthorized commitments or promises of any kind purporting to bind the Government.
- ✓ Employees shall not use public office for private gain.
- ✓ Employees shall act impartially and not give preferential treatment to any private organization or individual.
- ✓ Employees shall protect and conserve Federal property and shall not use it for other than authorized activities.
- ✓ Employees shall not engage in outside employment or activities, including seeking or negotiating for employment, that conflict with official Government duties and responsibilities.
- ✓ Employees shall disclose waste, fraud, abuse, and corruption to appropriate authorities.
- ✓ Employees shall satisfy in good faith their obligations as citizens, including all just financial obligations, especially those --such as Federal, State, or local taxes --that are imposed by law.

- ✓ Employees shall adhere to all laws and regulations that provide equal opportunity for all Americans regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, or handicap.
- ✓ Employees shall endeavor to avoid any actions creating the appearance that they are violating the law or the ethical standards promulgated pursuant to this order.

What's the bottom line? Ask if a reasonable person who knew the relevant facts may think that the law or ethical standards had been violated. Employees must avoid even the appearance that they are violating the law or any ethical principles. Violations may subject one to administrative, civil, or even criminal penalties. In case of doubt, ask your supervisor or command ethics advisor.

Organizations and Ethical Behavior

Ethics includes the rules or standards that govern the conduct of the members of a group. In addition to being a part of the “government employee” group, we in MWR are also members of smaller groups: part of an installation, an MWR unit, an individual MWR activity. In these groups, each member of the group brings to the situation his or her own values and ways of determining right and wrong. It is helpful, especially as a manager of others, to be aware that people may be at different stages with regards to their ethical thinking.

Lawrence Kohlberg, in his 1984 book, *The Psychology of Moral Development*, defined six stages of ethical thinking:

Stage 1 – obeys a rule as a way to avoid punishment

Stage 2 – obeys a rule to gain approval for being obedient

Stage 3 – acts ethically to maintain membership in a group

Stage 4 – behaves to be consistent with the rules and established practices of a group

Stage 5 – thinking “the greatest good for the greatest number”

Stage 6 – a sense of justice for all, drawing on universal principles

There are many factors that may intervene, however, among them:

- Rebellion against authority
- Group pressures
- Group policy
- Gambling or risk taking
- Competition
- Culture of the organization

Since you may have employees, peers, or bosses who approach ethics from different viewpoint, it is imperative that a common standard be held, as with the Government Ethics Code above.

What is “Social Responsibility?”

Part of being ethical is being socially responsible. By definition, *social responsibility* is the obligation of an organization’s management to make decisions and take actions that will enhance the welfare and interests of society as a whole. Because of their visibility on

government-owned installations, because of the often large diverse number of employees they employ, and because of the huge amount of resources they control, MWR/Services activities have a special commitment to social responsibility.

Advantages to Social Responsibility

- ✓ MWR/Services is part of the community it serves, which is a part of society as a whole. As a result, if an activity is not working for social responsibility, it may be perceived as working against it.
- ✓ MWR/Services brings technical, financial, and managerial resources to tackle today's myriad problems.
- ✓ An improved community and society is actually good for business! Investments in social responsibility today pay off in revenues tomorrow.
- ✓ Proactive action to cure problems can avert investigations and more regulations.
- ✓ Social actions can be profitable; consumers will reward socially-proactive organizations with increased business.
- ✓ It is ethical and moral to behave in a socially responsible manner.
- ✓ Social responsibility programs improve the organization's image.
- ✓ Societal norms today require managers to "get involved."
- ✓ It is cheaper to prevent problems than to cure them.

Disadvantages of Social Responsibility

- ✓ Profit maximization/cost containment is often seen as a primary responsibility of an activity, and managers are judged by the bottom line.
- ✓ The time managers spend on social responsibility issues reduces the amount of time they can spend improving daily service to customers.
- ✓ Allowing managers to engage in social actions might give them too much power.
- ✓ MWR/Services managers are accountable to a chain of command, not directly to the customers.
- ✓ Social action is difficult to measure.
- ✓ The cost of social responsibility can be high, and it may be difficult to adjust pricing to cover it.
- ✓ There are too many different issues espoused by too many special interest groups for managers to respond to all of them.

You may be thinking, what does this have to do with me? This is all way above my pay grade! Not so...let's put it in terms you can understand. Below are the tenets of Social Responsibility...followed by an example specific to a typical MWR activity manager.

Key Tenets of Social Responsibility

- ✓ **Take corrective action before it is required.** Address communication problems between two employees rather than turning a blind eye and hoping it will work out.
- ✓ **Work with affected stakeholders to resolve mutual problems.** As outlined in the Customer Service chapter, view your customers as valued partners and work with them to resolve complaints or issues.
- ✓ **Work to establish industry-wide standards for self-regulation.** Share good management ideas with your leadership; contribute to command cross-feed reports.
- ✓ **Publicly admit your mistakes...and make appropriate corrections.** This is hard to do! Let your employees know you are human and admit mistakes; do not prevaricate to “save face”.
- ✓ **Get involved in appropriate social programs.** Brainstorm how your activity can participate...everything from recycling to deployment support for families!
- ✓ **Establish and enforce an organizational code of conduct.** Set the standard for your subordinates and your peers...be honest, open, and fair in all dealings.

Summary of Chapter 18

If you actively practice being socially responsible, your influence will be felt...by your employees, by your customers, and by your leadership! As we stated in the beginning of this chapter, MWR units are highly visible, employ a large diverse workforce, and control huge resources. YOU are the face of that unit and have a special responsibility to represent it well. IMCEA developed an Ethical Code of Conduct because the founders recognized the critical impact MWR organizations have as part of the defense system. As an IMCEA member, you are charged to adhere to the code and set the example for others.

See next page and on the website at <https://imcea.org/about-us/code-of-ethics>

IMCEA Code of Ethics

We believe that professional management of Morale, Welfare and Recreation facilities in the military is essential and that the International Military Community Executives Association represents these interests, and as members thereof, subscribe to the following code of ethics:



We will maintain high personal standards of conduct and moral character in our relationship with MWR facilities, its patrons, and with industry in a manner to bring credit and honor to the MWR profession.

We will support the Association's goals and objectives.

We will promote public interest by acceptance of the basic responsibilities delegated to our position by directives and preserve sound business practices in the operation of our MWR activities through the best possible and efficient use of facilities, personnel, resources, and services, and try to make them and the local community a better one in which to live by personal involvement.

We will consistently promote the MWR profession as a vocation and strive to elevate the MWR personnel image through our actions and our integrity by refraining from participating in any activity with private industry which would result in becoming obligated to that industry.

We will strive to further the knowledge, education, competence, and training of ourselves and those whom we manage, and share our experience with other MWR professionals.

We will sponsor meaningful, understanding and impartial cooperation between the military MWR professional and industry beneficial to the association and public interests.

We will further the welfare and advancement of our profession by participation in the activities of our professional association, encourage the development of those who enter the profession, and encourage coordination of operations with other MWR professionals.

We will be loyal to our military organization by providing the full benefit of an objective professional opinion unaffected by other commitments and place the well being and satisfaction of our MWR patrons on the highest priorities.