

**Ethical Decision Problem #15**

## Performance Evaluation

**Situation**

You are the unit executive officer (XO). Your commanding officer (CO) hands you the fitness reports of four junior officers. You notice the CO's rankings. They do not make any sense to you. They are certainly not in line with what the CO has been saying about the officers for the past 9 months and not at all in line with your evaluations. You make the following observations:

Capt A, a black officer who had been struggling at first, but perhaps has shown recent improvement, was rated number 1.

Capt B, an Hispanic officer, a proverbial "water walker," was rated number 3.

Capt C, a white officer, very capable and the only regular officer, is rated number 4.

Capt D, a white officer who is the least capable but works hard without producing real results, is rated number 2. His father-in-law was recently selected for general.

The reviewing officer is an officer who has been through the ranks and is well-respected, heavily decorated, and in-zone for general. He is black.

You are disturbed by the reports and strongly believe that the CO's rankings are unfair to the officers and do a disservice to the Marine Corps.

What now XO?

EDPs involve real-world leadership challenges that usually have a significant ethical/values component. They are typical of challenges that have confronted Marines in the past and could easily be encountered in the future. Readers should analyze the problem carefully and decide what action they would take.

**Turn to page 56 to see how others say they would have handled this problem.**

## Performance Evaluation

### Alternative A

As the XO for the unit, I am the commanding officer's principal advisor in regard to the performance of the officers of the unit. As these rankings appear to be contrary to our previous discussions and his previous statements regarding their relative performance, it would be my duty to discuss the evaluations with him.

Prior to discussing this matter with him, I would prepare a revised ranking of the officers. The revised ranking would be supported by the CO's past comments, my personal observations, and any other relevant, quantitative results attributed to the respective officers (i.e., inspections, readiness ratings, training evaluations, education initiatives, etc.). I would privately and tactfully present my case to the CO. Of course, the sensitive nature of

the research would require discretion in its collection and preparation. I would also advise the CO that his ratings would certainly cause wonder and dissension among the officers. My proposed rankings (unless counterindicated during research) are as follows: Capts B-C-A-D. I would point out that trying to "outsmart" the evaluation system or use it for purposes other than evaluation is a very bad approach from the point of view of the command and the Corps as a whole. He needs to identify what is motivating these ratings and ask himself if that is the right, proper, and ethical thing to do.

Having outlined the problem and highlighted it for the CO, I would consider my duty done. Fitness report marking is the reporting senior's responsibility.

### Alternative B

I would speak with the CO and ask him why he has chosen these rankings that do not reflect his previous comments. I think that ranking should be based solely on performance, not ethnic group, not Regular or Reserve status, not promotion zone status, not diversity considerations, and certainly not the race of the review officer. If this conversation didn't produce changes, I would seek to speak to the reviewing officer, tell him about the debate we had within the unit, and ask that he give special attention to his comments. I would also voice

my opinion that ranking should be exclusive of ethnic background, and be based on ability, service, and what the Marine brings to the Corps. I know this might be ending my career, but I simply do not want to be a part of an organization that is scared to offend or that falsely praises a Marine because of his color. I have to go through life feeling good about what I have done, and I would do the same if the black officer had been ranked low if he was the outstanding Marine and should be ranked higher.

These approaches represent the immediate reactions of individual Marines and should not be construed as official solutions. Comments are welcomed.