

Ethical Decision Problem #5

The problem below involves a situation that a Marine, Active or Reserve, encountered sometime during his or her military service—a situation that raised troubling ethical considerations. Readers are urged to reflect on the situation and decide what action they would have taken had they been involved. They can then compare their approach to those proposed by two other Marines and published elsewhere in the magazine. The published approaches are not “school solutions,” officially recommended nor approved positions; they are simply the reactions of other Marines who were confronted with the EDP in the same manner as the reader.

The Gazette welcomes brief letters commenting on EDPs and on what readers consider to be the notable strengths or weaknesses of the alternate approaches. These will be considered for possible publication in the Letters Section of the Gazette, 3 months after the EDP appears.

Insensitive (or Worse?) Behavior

Situation

You are the executive officer (major) of a battalion within the Marine Corps training establishment. You have been with this unit for a few months. Your battalion commander is an animated and at times flamboyant officer who has been with the battalion only a month longer than you have. You know that he is recently divorced and understand from remarks that he has made that he is enjoying an extremely active nightlife in the area.

One day the battalion adjutant, a woman Marine, stops by your office to discuss “something seriously disturbing” to her. 1stLt Kramer states that the battalion commander has a tendency to leave his door half open when he is changing for physical fitness training and also when he is “cooling down” after going on a run. On at least five occasions, she has noticed the battalion commander walking around his office in his Skivvies or with nothing on at all. The battalion commander doesn’t seem to care about being noticed. Furthermore, on several occasions he has stopped by her doorway following a work-

out with only a pair of green nylon gym shorts on. Lt Kramer goes on to say that “the boss” doesn’t wear an athletic supporter and makes the situation more uncomfortable for her by “scratching the front of his shorts.”

After talking to Lt Kramer and reflecting on what you have seen in the office, you feel she has a valid concern. You tell her that you will handle the situation, but will do so without using names or making the matter sound serious. You approach the colonel on this, only to find him unreceptive and almost hostile toward your inference. Two days later Lt Kramer comes in again and reports a scenario similar to the ones she described during your previous talk. This time the colonel was wearing a “Speedo” swimsuit and apparently was suffering from an “itch” acquired at the swimming pool. What do you do, Major?

Special Considerations

1. Apart from the battalion commander’s behavior, what is the ethical issue involved here?
2. Is this something that Lt Kramer should be able to handle herself?

Once you have your solution in mind, you can compare it to the alternative approaches on page 80.