Misuse of Computers

Beginning with this issue, the Gazette *will publish a series of Ethical Decision Problems (EDPs). Each problem is an actual situation that a Marine, Active or Reserve, encountered sometime during his or her military service—a situation involving ethical considerations. Readers are urged to analyze the situation and decide what actions they would have taken had they been involved. They can then compare their approach to those in the back of the magazine that were written by two other Marines. The published approaches are not "school solutions" or officially recommended positions. They are simply the reaction of other Marines who were previously asked to respond to the EDP.*

The Gazette *welcomes brief letter comments on EDPs—on what readers believe are the notable strengths or weaknesses of the alternative approaches. Comments will be considered for publication in future issues.*

Situation

You have recently been transferred from your platoon to duty in the battalion S-3 shop. You're not real happy about leaving your platoon, but the worst part is that your job will depend upon a computer—something you know very little about. You are now getting settled in your new job, and Sgt Reynolds (the best computer operator in the battalion) has spent more than a week bringing you up to speed on computers. Several times you notice some of your Marines crowded around Sgt Reynolds' computer during a lunch break, but figure they're playing some of those newly authorized computer games.

After two weeks on the job, you're working Saturday as the battalion duty officer. With nothing going on, you sit down at Sgt Reynolds' desk to see if you can get one of those games to work. For the first time you open the window called Games. There are three items in this window: Game 1, Game 2, and Game 3. You select Game 3 and the screen goes blank and asks for a password to continue. You escape and try Game 1. This begins the game "Doom." You play for a while and after dying 29 times you quit. Later on, you go back to the computer and decide to figure out what Game 3 is. You check "Properties" and see that it goes to c:\pb\lust.exe. You remember reading somewhere that there are only three computer games authorized for Marine Corps computers, and you're pretty sure "Lust" isn't one of them! You also know that personal passwords are not allowed on office computers.

On Monday, you confront Sgt Reynolds about your discovery. After making a comment about teaching the lieutenant too much, he says that they never play this game during working hours, and "since there aren't any WMs in the office, there's nobody to offend by a little male entertainment."

How do you handle this situation? Explain the rationale for your actions.

Special Considerations

1. Is there a decision you need to make based on ethics?
2. How do you justify your actions to your Marines?
3. Do you tell your counterparts in the other sections about this?
4. Do you notify any senior officers about this?

Once you have your solution in mind, you can compare it to the alternative approaches on page 77.

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Alternative A

Issues involving sexual discrimination, sexual harassment, and even sexually explicit material have become vastly more important within today's Marine Corps. Here, the ethical issue involves sexually explicit material that has been inappropriately loaded on a Marine Corps computer. While Sgt Reynolds' actions involve what is clearly offensive and inappropriate material, I believe the lieutenant can handle it easily and effectively at his level by unofficially counseling the sergeant, demanding that the program be erased, and then warning him that any future conduct of a similar nature will involve a harsher penalty to include possible pg. 11 entries or office hours.

I would mention it to my counterparts in other sections and alert them to the possibility that the game had circulated and might have been loaded on some of their computers.

Alternative B

1. The question is not so much about ethics as it is about leadership. The sergeant is violating battalion policy and battalion directives; that's the essence of the offense. In doing so he is setting a poor example for his subordinates and undermining his own authority.

I am particularly concerned about the operations chief in the section and the fact that he was either involved in the violation or oblivious to what was going on.

I would take three simple actions. First, I would tell Reynolds to get it, and any other unauthorized material, out of his computer and keep it out. Repeat violations would result in formal disciplinary action. Second, I'd tell the operations chief what I had done and that I considered it a reflection on him. My message to him: "Get your act together, starting today." Third, I'd tell the battalion sergeant major about it and suggest that he might want to deal with other section chiefs.

2. There is no need to justify anything. If anybody asks, refer them to the battalion order.

3&4. I believe it is best to let the sergeant major handle this issue at this stage. There is no need to mention it to counterparts or seniors. There is, of course, a possibility that officers senior to me—the S-3 himself, assistant S-3, or air liaison officer—are aware of the game and have given at least tacit approval of it. If that's the case, I face a much more complex, challenging situation.

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