

Ethical Decision Problem #4

This is the fourth in the Gazette's new series of Ethical Decision Problems (EDPs). Each problem 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" or officially recommended or 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.

Fiscal Matters

Situation

As a captain, you were recently assigned to a training command where you run a section of 12 staff noncommissioned officers (SNCO) instructors conducting high-risk field training. During your turnover, you learned that your small section has been operating on a \$100,000 annual budget. In the weeks that follow, as you review the section's fiscal paperwork, you find that budget requirements are poorly documented and tracking of expenditures is virtually nonexistent. You realize that the entire command has a rather loose approach to fiscal issues. Training/instructional equipment items within the command are treated as consumables (used and discarded). As a result, accountability appears to be virtually nonexistent. As items of equipment are lost, broken, or misappropriated, they are simply replaced by submitting a purchase request to the supply section. In addition, new instructors are permanently issued all manner of expensive equipment including custom-made wetsuits, Gortex parkas and trousers, Oakley sunglasses, and specialized field gear.

You conduct a detailed review of your section's training requirements and discover that

annual section expenditures for training account for, at the very most, only \$60,000 of your \$100,000 budget. The remainder of the money seems to have been spent frivolously on a variety of high-priced equipment. Your SNCOs have come to relish the "luxury" of a budget that meets their every need/desire.

You set up a meeting with the school director (your reporting senior) to discuss fiscal issues. The school director states that you are too idealistic and that you don't fully understand the budgetary process. Although he feels your concerns regarding equipment accountability are "admirable," he directs your attention to what he considers a more pressing issue—the fiscal year is coming to a close and your section has a \$25,000 budget surplus that must be spent immediately in order to justify the school's budget for the next fiscal year. The school director concludes the meeting by insisting that your excess funds be committed by the end of the week and telling you that your upcoming budget request for the next fiscal year cannot be less than your present budget (\$100,000). Frustrated, you leave his office wondering what to do next. What do you decide? What is the rationale for your decision?

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

Fiscal Matters

Alternative A

Mindful of the Marine Corps traditions of austerity and strict fiscal accountability, you went to the proper authority only to find that your concerns were not shared. In fact, your effort served to elicit specific guidance that will ensure a continuation of what you have concluded is irresponsible waste.

Assuming you have not been convinced by the school director, it seems to me that you ought to exploit all your local options first by going to the inspector general (IG) at base, wing, or division, as appropriate, and make a complete report on the conditions you have

uncovered. If a local IG is not in the chain, you could request mast with the school director's reporting senior. If these approaches are impractical or do not produce a solution you can live with, you can call or write the IG at Headquarters Marine Corps or call the Department of Defense fraud, waste, or abuse hotline, which will refer the problem to Headquarters Marine Corps.

Whatever course you choose, you can expect an unfavorable reaction from the SNCOs in your section and quite possibly a rough road ahead from our reporting senior.

Alternative B

My experience in the Marine Corps leads me to believe that this situation is driven by the fact that "use it or lose it" is a reality in the fiscal world. I feel that discussing the whole issue with the school director was exactly the right thing to do. He sets the stage, the approach on how monies should/should not be spent.

Budgets are getting smaller and smaller. The school director and countless others in all Services operate in fiscal fear. Understanding that fear is key in getting to the heart of the problem. If we could somehow take away the "use or lose" mentality, we could set the stage for better usage of our tax

dollars. I have always felt that if the Marine Corps gets x amount of money per year, that amount should be set and grow at a fixed rate. A reward system should be established for every command operating UNDER budget. Make the rewards so GREAT, such a feather in a unit's hat, that we cannot fail.

Getting back to the question, the school director's guidance is not a problem. No supply account has ever been full; something is always needed. I would spend the money as wisely as I could meeting existing shortfalls and establishing Type II allowances for other items. Use it or lose it defines the way we operate today.

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