

UCS 1704 – Management and Ethical Practices – Case Study

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Date: **23 August 2021**

Excerpt:

You're an aircraft maintenance officer who supervises the sheet metal shop in a maintenance squadron. You have 15 enlisted people assigned to your shop to perform sheet metal repair for three tactical fighter squadrons. Your NCOIC, TSgt Allen, a "fast burner," has been promoted with minimum time in grade each time she became eligible for promotion. She was recently notified she has been selected for promotion to master sergeant. TSgt Allen is single with no family responsibilities; consequently, she spends a great deal of time working overtime and on weekends. She seems to have no other interests outside of her job. It's recently come to your attention that TSgt Allen spends a great deal of her overtime rechecking the work of her subordinates. When she finds an error in someone's work, she frequently calls the worker at home and berates him/her over the telephone for what she describes as "gross negligence in the performance duty." Additionally, she has called several back to the shop after normal duty hours to re-accomplish work which she considers to be substandard. When she discovers errors in their work during normal duty hours, she makes an issue of the most minor discrepancy. The other day she brought a staff sergeant into your office, described the man's shortcomings, and asked you to recommend that the squadron commander give him an Article 15. Since TSgt Allen's assignment to the shop 6 months ago, you've noticed the morale of the enlisted force has steadily grown worse. Requests for leave have become more frequent, and four of the NCOs have asked for transfers to other units on base. You've talked to the squadron commander twice during the last month about the effect TSgt Allen is having on the unit members. The commander told you that you should consider yourself lucky to have an aggressive, hard-driving NCO like TSgt Allen, and you could probably learn something from her. The commander told you to think about the situation for a couple of days, and if you still felt there was a problem, to have a talk with TSgt Allen.

Question:

Your couple of days are up—what will you do?

Answer:

As the supervisor for the maintenance squadron, it would be my responsibility to make sure that my squad workers feel appreciated and motivated in their work environment.

Looking at the NCOIC TSgt Allen's past work record, there is no doubt that she is extremely talented and a passionate worker who works tirelessly to achieve the best outcomes.

But since she's an NCOIC (meaning she has limited authority over others in the unit), it is my responsibility to talk with her regarding her management style and decisions, as she expects military-grade work ethic from her subordinates.

I would talk to her by first starting off with an appreciation for all that she's done till now and commend her for her blazingly quick rise through the ranks. As a supervisor who has had more experience with my squad, I would explain to her about my style of leadership and management towards my squad.

It would be critical to make her understand that her aggressive micromanagement of employees and her usage of harsh tones would send across the wrong message to her subordinates, and that it would demoralize their confidence and motivation towards their job. If for every small mistake an employee is berated and asked to redo his work to the utmost perfection, we would lag behind in our deadlines and the workforce would be drained out soon.

It is important to make her aware of the bigger picture at stake and how every sub-task is interlinked, and thus if one staff sergeant falls behind due to overwhelming pressure, every subordinate under him and other squads he works with will also fall behind.

But, instead of this being a one-way conversation, it is also necessary for me, as a supervisor to understand her points of view and understand if there is any actual credibility to her complaints, so that her concerns are also heard and taken care of.

Since her previous roles were more oriented towards her individualistic performance rather than her team's performance, it is likely possible that she's expecting her subordinates to mimic her own work-ethic and be as devoted to the job as her.

While that maybe a good cause, it is practically impossible since each employee is different and has their own strengths and pitfalls. It is also high time that she learnt about the importance of work-life balance, the fact that other employees might have families to tend to, and how it is beneficial to take a break from work when required. It is also essential to inform her that calling an employee on his/her off-hours and berating them about their work isn't appropriate, and neither is making unwilling employees work during their off-time.

Working overtime rechecking her subordinates' work shows that she's untrustworthy of their work product and the fact that she flies off the handle for even the slightest of mistakes shows that she isn't flexible and compassionate.

As an NCOIC, she should be more approachable and trusting of her subordinates, and giving them the chance to fix their mistakes, before pulling rank on them immediately.

Her shortcomings need to be addressed to her politely and patiently so that she can be a good leader in the future, who is held in high regard and is accepted as a competent manager among her subordinates.

If she fails to listen to the voice of reason and take time to reflect upon her actions/behavior, I should consider reporting her to the senior officers for reconsideration for her promotion to master sergeant, as she is rigid and unwilling to fix her own shortcomings – thus unfit to be a capable leader.

To have a proper conclusion and ensure goodwill and cooperation amongst her and the rest of the workforce, it would be my job to conduct conflict-resolution sessions involving her and any disgruntled employee, like the staff sergeant that she brought into my office a couple of days ago. This will help make both sides understand each other and appreciate the value of both of them.

It is important to also demonstrate to the workforce that TSgt Allen is an exceptional, high-caliber worker and her standards of work are very appreciated. It is imperative to drive the point home that she's someone that the other officers can follow and learn from, while also making sure that nobody is afraid/resentful of her.
