IntegratedEthics® (IE) Journal Activity

PARTICIPANT GUIDE


Overview
This journal activity provides a venue for reflection, discussion, and inquiry about the concept of ethical fading and its antidote, leading truthfully. The article “Lying to Ourselves: Dishonesty in the Army Profession” was published by the United States Army War College. It examines how the bureaucratic culture of the Army is at odds with its values. While reading the article by Leonard Wong, PhD, and Stephan Gerras, PhD, you should reflect on the aspects of organizational culture and climate that leads Army officers to compromise their integrity, and consider whether you see similar trends in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). At the journal club meeting, these ideas will be used as a basis for a collegial discussion about your experience with the ethical environment and culture in your facility.

Objectives for the Journal Activity
• Foster a collaborative discussion among colleagues to improve the ethical environment and culture in your facility.
• Familiarize staff with the concept of ethical fading.
• Discuss behavior in your facility that might contribute to ethical fading.
• Provide staff with an opportunity to reflect on their own ability to lead truthfully in VA.
• Brainstorm mechanisms to promote ethical practices and behavior at your facility that support leading truthfully.

Preparation
• Read the article critically and consider how the authors’ observations fit with your own observations and opinions about how organizational culture can cause individuals to rationalize unethical behavior.
• Reflect on the key questions, below. At the journal activity meeting, those questions will be used as the basis for collegial discussion about your experiences with the ethical environment and culture in your facility.

Publication Date: 03/2015
Key Questions
1. The article discusses the concept of ethical fading (Page 17).
   a. What is ethical fading?
   b. What behaviors do the authors point to that contribute to ethical fading in the Army?
2. Reflect on the potential for ethical fading in VA and at your facility.
   a. What processes or aspects of VA culture do you observe that might contribute to ethical fading in your environment?
   b. Give examples of the behaviors or practices in VA, your facility or your unit that could result in ethical fading.
3. The article suggests that leading truthfully, at all levels of an organization, brings integrity back into decision making and reverses the impact of ethical fading (Page 32).
   a. What conditions within an organization support leading truthfully?
   b. Does your supervisor or manager have opportunities to lead truthfully? Describe what those opportunities are and what leading truthfully would look like in those circumstances.
   c. Describe two actions that you can take to lead truthfully in your position. Describe each action and how it could reduce ethical fading.

Supplemental Questions
4. The authors claim that excessive requirements, such as training, reporting or policy imperatives, lead to ethical fading because leaders are unable to meet all of the requirements and must “pencil whip” or “game the numbers” to comply. Another contributing factor identified in the article is the Army practice of certifying 100 percent compliance with training and policy requirements. This practice asks leaders to put their integrity on the line when they know that they have not fully met the requirement but are not permitted to report otherwise.
   a. If faced with such circumstances, what could a VA leader do to remain true to I CARE values?
5. The article theorizes that a first step to correcting the Army culture is for leaders at all levels to recognize and acknowledge their own contributing behavior.
   a. Do you think the current environment allows leaders at all levels in VA to acknowledge and discuss when their unit falls short of established goals and metrics? Why or why not?
   b. What would need to change to allow such open and honest discussions?
   c. If you were the facility director, network director, VA central office executive or the Under Secretary for Health, what initial steps would you take to build an environment and culture that supports honest and open discussions?