

## **What I Have Learned About Trainee Abuse**

During almost two years as the Battalion Commander of an Advanced Individual Training battalion, I have had 17 trainee abuse incidents. These cases have run the gamut and range from trainee-on-trainee, drill sergeant-on-trainee, instructor (civilian and military)-on-trainee, and cadre-on-trainee abuse. An overview of the types of trainee abuses follows:

Trainee-on-Trainee Abuse (3 incidents). One incident involved a male sexually assaulting (fondling) a female; another involved a male choking a male; and the other involved a MOS reclassified male (phase V+/prior service) transporting a female in his POV on a date, which included a two-hour stay in a local motel. I also experienced several incidences of male trainees, who attended BCT at my installation, making disparaging remarks to the female trainees (displaying male chauvinistic attitudes), calling them derogatory names, and not cooperating with the females when the females were in leadership positions.

Drill Sergeant-on-Trainee Abuse (8 incidents). One incident involved a male drill sergeant attempting to establish an improper relationship with a female trainee, assigned to his platoon; another involved a male drill sergeant confiscating a male trainee's PlayStation game console and borrowing DVDs from trainees; and six involved male and female drill sergeants mass punishing trainees during smoke sessions.

Instructor-on-Trainee Abuse (5 incidents). One incident involved a male civilian-contracted instructor physically grabbing and poking a male trainee with his pointer stick; one involved a male military instructor verbally abusing, with profanity, a male trainee during physical training; one involved two male military instructors, in the training department, humiliating an entire class of trainees by forcing them to conduct a smoke session while another class of trainees watched; and two involved male military instructors attempting to establish improper relationships with female trainees.

Cadre-on-Trainee Abuse (1 incident). This incident involved a male operations sergeant from an AIT line company putting three male trainees through an extensive smoke session because he caught them eating pizza in the barracks.

The trainee on trainee abuse did not surprise me, because I realize some of our newest soldiers enlist into the Army and do not yet possess the values that the Army expects them to adopt and live by. During my weekly welcome briefing to my new arrivals, I tell them that sometimes a soldier's set of values is not consistent with the seven Army Core Values and that I do not expect them to change over night, but hope that over time in AIT they will evolve to willingly accept and live the Army values. I also tell them that I expect them to show discipline in this area too and not display any behavior that violates the Army's set of values; for if they do, we will correct them through corrective training or punishment, which the unit leadership has done effectively.

The three cases of improper relationships by the drill sergeant and the two instructors surprised and disappointed me. I thought all leadership in the IET environment was sufficiently

hypersensitive to the improper relationship issue, that cadre would not take the risk. I learned I was wrong. For whatever reason, some people cannot help themselves – even when they know the potential consequences. In each case, the male NCO created opportunities to separate the female trainee from her battle buddy – even if it was only keeping the battle buddy out of hearing range. These NCOs also telephoned the trainees in their barracks and gave them their home telephone numbers!

The nine cases of mass punishment smoke sessions, physical contact and verbal abuse occurred due to drill sergeant and instructor impatience and/or stress. The most common causes of this stress are based on number of minor infractions; such as: barracks not to standard, lack of discipline in formation and in the training department, and major infractions leading to nonjudicial punishment (sometimes over 30 in a unit in one month, compared to an average of 3 to 7 in a normal month). My NCOs, especially drill sergeants and instructors, need help managing stress and my CSM works this effectively through his DS Wellness Program and his DS-Instructor luncheon program. I also attempt to help them through an alternating monthly sensing session with me; one month is with DS and the next month is with instructors. In these sessions, we discuss my assessment of their collective performance, they inform me of their challenges, and we discuss possible solutions. Units have also scheduled stress management classes for them with the chaplain and the chaplain conducts a DS-Spouse Wellness seminar each quarter. I also found it useful having my legal counsel periodically conduct refresher training for NCO and officer leadership on the subject of corrective training versus punishment, which has corrected much of this behavior.

In summary, what I have learned about trainee abuse is that regardless of how much I advised, warned, threatened, counseled, and reprimanded my company command teams, drill sergeants, and instructors against abusing trainees, it still happens to some extent. I believe that in the cases of improper relationships, these leaders were not disciplined enough to avoid temptation. They knew they were wrong in attempting to establish personal relationships and they knew the chain of command was actively looking for this type of infraction, however, they attempted to conceal their actions and do it anyway - in every case, as the female trainee was approaching her graduation date or going into phase V+ status for ASI training. Administering the field grade article 15 helped reduce these incidents. Perhaps, my most effective system of preventing trainee abuse was by actively looking for it, investigating it when I discovered it, and punishing the offender. Effective tools for my system of checks and balances include: encouraging new trainees to immediately report cases of abuse, talking with them during PT and in the DFAC, and while observing technical training; conducting unannounced, off normal duty hours barracks checks; following up with them during my mid-course sensing session; personally reviewing each class' course after action report; and by using my battalion chaplain and the IG as additional sets of eyes and ears.