

What I Have Learned About Trainee Abuse

In two years of battalion command, the only instances of trainee abuse that have occurred in my organization have been of a sexual nature. The three cases involved either sexual harassment, fraternization, or both. These cases were very disturbing, in violation of Army policy, and disruptive to the effective training of America's newest soldiers, and while there were only three, that's three too many. There are trends that are obvious in each of these three cases, so for each specific trend, it is appropriate to address a potential remedy.

All of the perpetrators were instructors. They were not drill sergeants or other cadre. They were AIT instructors. Several subtexts should be considered.

Screening. On the one hand, this may say a great deal about our detailed screening process for drills. There clearly is goodness in the careful screening we require for our drill sergeants. The obvious question is should there be a similarly rigorous screening for instructors.

Atmosphere. The other take away from the instructor dynamic is that while in the company area, with drill sergeants thick as fleas, there is a certain strict, disciplined tone in the surroundings. The 1SG is nearby, the commander is around the corner and there is an ethos among the drills regarding how to interact with the trainees. This rigorous, disciplined environment unfortunately does not always transfer when the drills march the soldiers to the training departments for their technical MOS training. We must diligently focus on our instructors and ensure that 350-6 compliance is just as pervasive within the technical phase of the POI as it is in the barracks.

All of the perpetrators were men in bad marriages. They were all mid to late 30s and had children at home. The only take away from this observation is that we have our trail break process for drills and our drill sergeant life cycle program for drills that address certain needs. One of the components of these programs is a seminar that involves the drill sergeant's spouse. Nothing elaborate, just an azimuth check on the relationship, giving the drill and spouse some tools to get over the rough spots. Perhaps some more emphasis should be allocated to the marriage health of our instructors.

In every case of trainee abuse the battle buddy rule was violated. In none of the cases did the trainee say, "Wait, sergeant. Let me get my battle buddy." In none of the cases did the perpetrator say, "Hold on. Before I begin this harassment, go get your battle buddy." The perpetrators know the battle buddy rule is key to foiling their attempt at improper relationships/harassment. The soldiers are told this too but for a host of reasons, do not raise the flag. A two-fold approach is appropriate to solve the problem. We must hammer, hammer, and hammer the battle-buddy rule and application of 350-6 in general in the academic training department areas of our schools. Secondly, we must train our soldiers that if someone, anyone, who is not a trainee attempts contact without a battle-buddy present...raise the flag...high. A caveat I might add is the idea of incorporating a toleration clause into our approach to training the battle buddy rule. Many have heard the idea of "do not lie, cheat, steal, nor tolerate those who do." We might want to approach some of the 350-6 concepts in the same light. That is, if you see the battle buddy rule being violated and do nothing, you are just as guilty of violating it yourself.

As we consider trainee abuse in a macro sense, it is important to emphasize that most of the instructors, drill sergeants, and other cadre do the right thing. We must not overreact and devise draconian policies that inhibit the soldierization process rather than facilitate it. At the same time, we must vigorously enforce and reinforce our standards. This, in addition to the application of some of the innovations alluded to here, might help to even further reduce instances of trainee abuse within TRADOC.