



By Marc Meybaum

As we raise our right hand, our oath is expected to be, and must be, an honest commitment to serve. Honesty is called forth in the very first act of every military service member in our modern volunteer force. It is our first act of spoken truth as we pledge to support and defend the constitution.

This expectation of honesty nurtures the very trust and confidence that the American people have in military service members. An argument can be made that honesty is the virtue that underpins many others within the context of our military service. Honesty is necessary to embody other virtues vital to military service such as obedience, discipline, courage, integrity and likely others. If trust is the foundation, honesty must be a cornerstone of our profession, and it exists in various forms, in our actions, in our thoughts, as intellectual honesty, and in our words.

Obedience and discipline, two vitally important martial virtues, are physical acts of honesty that embody what it means to live up to the requirements of our profession. Through your obedient and disciplined behaviors, you are communicating your commitment to the team and the mission of the organization. Such behaviors build trust in the subordinates, peers, and superiors on your team, but only if such actions are honest. The person who feigns

discipline will falter under pressure. Those who are duplicitous and not truly obedient will allow mistrust to fester unnoticed and can cripple a team at the worst possible moment.

Obedience involves more than signaling compliance, it is a faithful pursuit of organizational needs and requirements. Maintaining a file folder of completed training records does not, in itself, mean you are ready for battle. It is through your honest actions of discipline and obedience that you help to build the team prepared to face the crucible of combat operations.

Courage, in both moral and physical form, involves an honest assessment of risk and the acknowledgment that loyalty and duty are superior aims in the face of that risk. With the honest recognition of danger, fear, risk, and moral ambiguity we are better able to summon the courage necessary to meet such demands. Misrepresentation of risk is no foundation for acts of personal or collective bravery. Facing the brutal truth of situations allows us to make the best of them regardless of how imperfect our choices may be. An honest evaluation allows us to choose a virtuous path and not rationalize in favor of what might be most convenient. Honesty is a critical component to monitoring cynicism, increasing accountability, and accurately understanding the benefits and harms of our actions within our military units. These engagement strategies can help us avoid [moral disengagement](#) and stay aligned with the legal and ethical requirements of the American armed forces.

Finally, "[integrity](#) can be defined as behaving ethically when no one is watching...". Integrity requires an honest inventory of your organization's values and your alignment with them. You must be honest in your estimation of what values you are willing to stand for because they must withstand the onslaught of conditions that might cause you to abandon them. If you value integrity, you must be willing to speak up about unethical behaviors and enforce standards even when no one is watching or when such actions may inflict a personal cost.

The battle for honesty is waged every day whether we recognize it or not. Each day we have a choice to lie, misrepresent, or omit. In fact, many of our transgressions might go unnoticed as they are lies of omission rather than the more socially reprehensible lies of commission. Have you ever sat down for a performance counseling and couched your constructive criticism to a degree that makes it almost unrecognizable? Have you rationalized inputting selective information in a routine report to avoid questioning by a superior? Have you proclaimed to be trying to fix something you have not had time to address? Are you honest?

The truth is we are all imperfect when it comes to honesty. To be more truthful is a noble

and necessary pursuit for members of the military profession but it requires strength and stamina. We should all make small efforts each day to be more truthful in our reports, words, and actions and support each other when the truth is told no matter how inconvenient it may be. By our example, junior members of our team will learn that honesty is valued, and our organizations will be better for it.

Honesty is a critical requirement to form the bonds of trust we so often rely on in our military profession. Our superiors, subordinates, peers, and the American people expect honesty from a service member. Honesty in our words and deeds signifies the strength of character that our country demands and deserves.

Marc Meybaum is an Armor Officer and current Executive Officer of the Simon Center for the Professional Military Ethic at West Point. He has a Masters of Science in Organizational Leadership and received his commission from the United States Military Academy in 2012.

Share this:

- [Email](#)
- [Tweet](#)
- 
- [Print](#)
- [WhatsApp](#)