



Human Performance Office, TECOM  
Quantico, VA

## **Character Development Education**

**Objective:** To provide information to design training and education that optimizes a Marine's character in order to exercise good moral/ethical judgment in ambiguous situations.

**Summary:** General Charles Krulak, the 31<sup>st</sup> Commandant of the Marine Corps, famously wrote: "integrity is woven into the fabric of your soul. It becomes the armor that protects your essence, your greatness within. Integrity is revealed in the character you display during your moments of choice."<sup>i</sup> The strength of the Marine Corps is its culture of integrity, which is emphasized and retaught every day. Leaders are teachers, and character development is the most important attribute to impart to subordinates. In this information sheet are two case studies for character development training sessions.

Dr. Joseph Thomas, in his paper "The Four Stages of Moral Development in Military Leaders" posits that the development of the moral element of leadership is often ignored in the education of military leaders, and that it is the most difficult to develop (as opposed to physical or intellectual dimensions of leadership). Moreover, he points to four stages of moral development: compliance, moral understanding, moral maturity, and moral ambition.

- Compliance is more about simple behavior modification than it is about some deeper, existential understanding of the role of the leader and the meaning of life (think boot camp). Obedience guarantees order, but as an end-state is dangerous.
- Moral understanding is the ability to make numerous and complex value judgments about the principles that underly rules and standards (though it does not imply ethical decisions).
- Moral maturity grounds leaders in their sense of duty. Leaders constantly assess their own beliefs and how they are manifest in their actions, and how they are aligned with the expectations of the service and the nation.
- Moral ambition is the final stage, the active pursuit of virtuous behavior of not just the individual, but also people within a leader's sphere of influence.

**Suggested Application:** Character development never stops. Moral leaders are the core of the Marine Corps, and it is only when our moral compass points true north that we succeed. This information sheet is intended to provide leaders with the material to conduct character development training, but also to serve as grist for thought for ways in which leaders can personalize their own training sessions on character development.

**Suggestions for delivery:** Standard training methods apply. This topic is appropriate for either a lecture or a small group discussion. Character development should be revisited and frequently



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discussed. It lies at the heart of the Marine Corps ethos. The intent of this information sheet is to provide an overview for potential 30-60 minute periods of instruction for leaders. Attached as appendices are two case studies, and leaders are encouraged to use personal experiences or other researched case studies for other periods of instruction.

Information for Presentation/Training: Case studies are among the most effective methods for teaching, especially in the area of ethics. In general, a case describes a situation in which a decision must be made by a leader. An ethical question lies at the center of the controversy. The Harvard Kennedy School has many case studies they have written, and their publication "Teaching Ethics by the Case Method" is a helpful tool to develop case studies.<sup>ii</sup>

It is important that the case have practical relevance to the Marines. The goal is to teach judgment and sound practical reasoning. Also, the role of the leader/teacher in these discussions is not that of an expert or source of complete knowledge, but rather that of facilitator, assisting his or her Marines in their collaborative efforts to handle ethical conflicts and decisions effectively.

For further reading:

- Stockdale Center for Ethical Leadership Resources:  
<https://www.usna.edu/Ethics/Research/Resources/index.php>
- Lucas, George, *Military Ethics: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford University Press, 2016)
- Skerker, Michael, Whethan, David, Carrick, Don, ed. *Military Virtues* (Howgate, 2019)
- Thomas, Joseph J. "The Four Stages of Moral Development in Military Leaders" (paper)  
<https://www.usna.edu/Ethics/files/documents/Four%20Stages%20of%20Moral%20Development%20Thomas.pdf>
- Wrage, Stephen "Captain Lawrence Rockwood in Haiti" (case study)  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/150275702753457415>



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### **Appendix A – Moral Decision-Making Model**

Researchers from the Stockdale Center for Ethical Leadership at the US Naval Academy developed this ethical leadership decision model. While there are other models for making moral and ethical decisions, this model forms the foundation for moral and ethical skills necessary for character development in future Navy and Marine Corps officers coming out of the Naval Academy. This decision-making model is a useful tool for character development training and education, specifically utilizing a case study format. This model has four stages, outlined below. They are presented logically but not necessarily in a linear order.

1. Moral Awareness (or sensitivity): An individual's ability to recognize that a situation contains a moral/ethical issue. *Is there something wrong here?*
2. Moral Judgment: Formulating and evaluating which possible solutions to the moral issue have moral justification. *What are my options, and are they ethically sound?*
3. Moral Intention (or motivation): The intention to choose the moral decision over another solution representing a different value. *Does my decision represent the right virtues and values?*
4. Moral action (or courage): Carrying out the action or behavior. *I will do this because it is the right thing to do, and I accept the consequences, positive and negative (even if that means personal risk to my career/reputation/well-being).*

Finally, the moral decision-making process is influenced by moral intensity, or the characteristics of and factors that affect the moral issue. There are six dimensions affecting the moral intensity of a situation, and therefore influence an ethical decision.

- Magnitude of consequences: the degree to which an individual may be harmed or benefit from the decision maker's action.
- Temporal Immediacy: the length of time between the action and its consequences.
- Social Consensus: the degree of agreement among a group that an action is good or bad.
- Proximity: the nearness of the decision maker to the individuals affected by its consequences.
- Probability of Effect: the likelihood that the predicted consequences and expected level of harm/benefit will occur.
- Concentration of Effort: the relationship between the number of people affected and the magnitude of harm.



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### **Appendix B – The Case of Hugh Thompson**

Hugh Thompson was an Army warrant officer and helicopter pilot. On the morning of March 16, 1968, he and his gunner, Larry Colburn, and his crew chief, Glenn Andreotta, were flying a Hiller OH-23 Raven in support of search and destroy operations in Son My village. During their mission:

*they spotted the bodies of men, women and children strewn over the landscape. Thompson landed twice in an effort to determine what was happening, finally coming to the realization that a massacre was taking place. The second time, he touched down near a bunker in which a group of about 10 civilians were being menaced by American troops. Using hand signals, Mr. Thompson persuaded the Vietnamese to come out while ordering his gunner and his crew chief to shoot any American soldiers who opened fire on the civilians.<sup>iii</sup>*

When Thompson returned from his mission, he reported the massacre to his superiors. The massacre would become known as the My Lai massacre, and for many Americans it would become a metaphor for Vietnam.

Many can also recall the story of the platoon commander at My Lai, Lieutenant William Calley, who in March 1971 was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment and hard labor, only to have President Nixon a day later order him removed from prison and placed on house arrest.

Hugh Thompson, however, found himself the object of severe criticism. In late 1969 he was summoned to appear at a closed hearing of the House Armed Services Committee, and was sharply criticized by members of Congress, among them Chairman L. Mendel Rivers (D-SC), who stated that Thompson was the only soldier at My Lai who should be punished (for threatening US soldiers when he protected the civilians). Rivers also attempted unsuccessfully to have Thompson court-martialed.

It is an ironic turn of history that Congressman Rivers had a submarine named after him, the *USS L. Mendel Rivers* (SSN-686), and that Hugh Thompson's actions went unrecognized until 1996, when he was awarded the Soldier's Medal (the highest award for valor not involving combat).

Questions for discussion:

1. Would you have had the courage to do what Hugh Thompson did? Would you have done anything differently?
2. Should we view Hugh Thompson as a model to emulate?



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### **Appendix C: The Case of Raheel Siddiqui**

On March 18, 2016, recruit Raheel Siddiqui died after falling three stories from his barracks at Parris Island following an altercation with his drill instructor, Gunnery Sergeant Joseph Felix.

The altercation? Gunny Felix made Siddiqui – who was reportedly suffering from an extremely sore throat and had recently coughed up blood – to run back and forth across the squad bay. Siddiqui collapsed, clutching his throat. Gunny Felix shouted at Siddiqui that he was faking, and slapped him across the face. Siddiqui jumped up, sprinted out of the open door of the squad bay and jumped off the third floor balcony. Four hours later he was pronounced dead at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston.<sup>iv</sup>

Only six months before this incident Gunny Felix had been investigated for hazing a Muslim recruit, including forcing him into an industrial clothes dryer and running it for half a minute, trying to cure him of being a Muslim. He also wrapped a web belt around the recruit's neck and accused him of being a terrorist. That investigation concluded without any action taken.

After the Siddiqui incident Gunny Felix was tried at a court martial, found guilty of three counts of maltreatment for terrorizing three Muslim recruits, eight of nine counts of violating general orders, drunk and disorderly conduct and making false statements. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison and a dishonorable discharge.<sup>v</sup>

Questions for discussion:

1. What if you were a peer of Gunny Felix, perhaps a fellow drill instructor? What actions would you have taken?

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.raisingahitter.com/blog/general-krulak-the-armor-of-integrity>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://case.hks.harvard.edu/content/Teaching%20Ethics%20by%20the%20Case%20Method.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/07/us/hugh-thompson-62-who-saved-civilians-at-my-lai-dies.html?mtrref=en.wikipedia.org>.

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/06/magazine/how-the-death-of-a-muslim-recruit-revealed-a-culture-of-brutality-in-the-marines.html>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/11/09/military-jury-convicts-marine-drill-instructor-who-targeted-muslims/>