

Leadership and Loyalty: The Dynamics of People, Policy, Relationships and Rules

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Introduction

Soon after Master Sergeant Wilson arrived in his office on Monday morning one of his troops, Senior Airman Hester, burst in and started explaining the predicament he was in. Hester just returned to duty from a week of leave and was selected for a random drug test by the military personnel team. Typically, Hester would not have been concerned but that was not the case in this situation. Hester told Wilson that while out with a group of friends during his leave, one of them spiked his drink with a hallucinogenic drug. Hester was concerned that if he took a drug test that morning, he would surely fail, which could result in severe consequences including immediate discharge from the Air Force.

Wilson had empathy for Hester. If someone unknowingly spiked his drink, Hester did not do anything wrong. However, Wilson also understood that it was not his duty to decide who participated in the drug testing program and he was well aware of the potential consequences of a positive test. He was not sure what to do. Should he order Hester to take the drug test today or allow him to be excused? He had to decide quickly, Hester was due to report to the test site within the hour.

Master Sergeant Wilson

Wilson had been in the military for more than twenty years. He was a no-nonsense leader who spent the first fourteen years of his career as a military police officer prior to transitioning to logistics. He loved his job, held his subordinates to a high standard, and valued teamwork and camaraderie. He dedicated his entire adult life to the Air Force and was committed to serving honorably and supporting the mission.

Wilson was also a family man. He had been married to his wife for eighteen years and had three beautiful children. He adored his family more than anything else in the world and would do whatever he could to show them he loved them. Even when deployed to hostile areas, he stayed in touch through emails, letters, and phone calls.

Altogether, this made Wilson a uniquely gifted senior leader. He was a hard-charging manager who always took care of his responsibilities in the Air Force, yet he also had a soft spot for his family and would do whatever he could to make their lives better. This made him a great leader and someone you could count on.

Senior Airman Hester

Hester had been in the Air Force for five years and for the most part, served dutifully. He understood his job and typically put forth a quality effort. He believed in himself and his ability

to be successful. He was confident he could thrive in any environment, regardless of the circumstances.

However, while Hester was a hard worker, he was not without controversy. He could be difficult to get along with, was an outspoken member of the team, and seemed to have an opinion on everything. He could also be disrespectful, condescending, and unreliable. He had been disciplined several times for disrespect to leadership and habitually being late for duty. His record with the law was also less than stellar. Since joining the Air Force, he had two DUIs and multiple confrontations with law enforcement.

Hester was a single father of two young children. He enjoyed taking his kids out for adventures any chance he could. However, he also openly expressed his frustration of not being able to go out with friends whenever he wanted. He enjoyed nightlife and was known for partying until the early morning.

Altogether, Hester was an enigma. No one could ever really anticipate what to expect from him or what he might do. This raised questions about what might have happened while he was on leave.

The Wilson-Hester Relationship

Wilson and Hester had a unique relationship. Wilson was Hester's direct supervisor. While both were proud to wear the United States Air Force uniform, the way they carried themselves was quite different. Wilson always did the right thing, followed orders, and worked hard, regardless of the circumstances. Conversely, Hester liked doing his own thing. While he was not against working hard, he did not like being told what to do. He sometimes disobeyed orders because he thought he knew a better course of action.

Despite the stress Hester brought to his life, Wilson still attempted to help Hester as best he could. This was primarily because Wilson understood the fragility of Hester's situation. As a single father of two kids Hester's family counted on the steady paycheck and quality benefits the Air Force provided. Wilson knew Hester's family could not survive if he was discharged from the Air Force.

Wilson's Constraints

Air Force members are governed by strict drug use and testing policies (Department of the Air Force, 2023). The Air Force prohibits the knowing use of any intoxicating substance introduced into the body to alter mood or function. Exceptions to this prohibition are limited, including the lawful use of alcohol or tobacco products or otherwise excepted substances such as prescription cannabinoid formulations.

To deter the use of prohibited substances, the Air Force implements a robust drug testing program, anchored by frequent, unannounced urine collections. The testing procedure is prescriptive. All Air Force personnel are randomly tested at least once annually. Once an Air Force member is notified that they are selected, the member must report within two hours for testing. Trusted Air Force personnel maintain confidential rosters of members selected for

urinalysis testing and directly observe the urine leave the member's body and enter the specimen collection. Installation/Wing Commanders can allow a supervisor's discretion to postpone or bypass a requested screening.

If a prohibited substance is detected, the Air Force member is in breach of discipline and the member's continued service is in jeopardy. Criminal and administrative prosecution can follow, with consequences ranging from letters of admonishment, counseling, pay reduction, denial of re-enlistment, removal from duties, and a court-martial proceeding (Department of the Air Force, 2023)

Wilson was familiar with these policies and the potential ramifications that Hester could face if he tested positive for a prohibited hallucinogenic. Hester claimed that a friend had spiked his drink with a hallucinogenic drug. Innocent ingestion is a defense to positive drug tests, as the policy requires "knowing use". However, it would be up to Hester to prove innocent ingestion. For example, if Hester took the test and tested positive, Hester could show that the amount of metabolite detected in the system was minimal so that it is scientifically plausible that it was ingested without knowledge. Hester could also present witnesses willing to testify under oath that they caused the innocent ingestion. Wilson has no knowledge as to whether any such evidence existed, but did know that Hester's military character would not offer any substantive support during any such proceeding.

The Moment of Truth

Wilson was faced with the decision to excuse Hester from the test or resting his future on the results of appealing a positive test. Hester's career in the Air Force as well as his personal life hinged on Wilson's decision. Was Wilson responsible for helping his subordinate or following the Air Force's strict policy on drug testing? What should Wilson do?

References

Department of the Air Force. (2023, September 5). *Military drug demand reduction program* (Department of the Air Force Manual 44-197) https://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/af_sg/publication/dafman44-197/dafman44-197.pdf

Teaching Note

Learning Outcomes

In completing this assignment, students should be able to:

1. Identify factors that could influence managerial decision-making.
2. Analyze a workplace compliance dispute to determine potential response options.
3. Evaluate the impact of an employment compliance decision.

Discussion Questions

1. Which stakeholders are impacted by Wilson's decision? (LO 1)
2. Which organizational characteristics of the United States Air Force impact Wilson's decision? How might the distinction between a military employer as opposed to a private employer influence Wilson's decision? (LO 1)
3. How could Wilson's individual characteristics impact his decision? (LO 1)
4. How could Wilson's relationship with Hester influence his decision? How does Hester's position as a current employee as opposed to a prospective employee strengthen or weaken the influence on Wilson's decision? (LO 1)
5. What are Wilson's options? (LO 2)
6. What are the professional implications of Wilson's decision on Wilson, himself, and Hester? How might Wilson mitigate any resulting professional harm? (LO 3)
7. How could the United States Air Force be impacted by Wilson's decision? (LO 3)