

Exercise: Preventing Your Worst Nightmare

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION: If you have heard or read leaders' reflections on a lapse of values or ethical leadership, they will undoubtedly recall that never in their wildest dreams did they think they would find themselves in this situation. They thought they could 'handle' or had 'under control' the areas of their life that present vulnerabilities in the domain of values and ethics.

As these stories illustrate, it can often be the case that an area of your life that you have never had difficulty in, becomes a challenge when you enter a new level of leadership. As the power inherent in higher-level positions increases, Army leaders have more opportunities to turn that entrusted power into means for self-gratification. Thus, even if you do not feel you currently exhibit any weaknesses in character, challenge yourself with this exercise to explore your area of greatest vulnerability.

EXAMPLE: General David Petraeus, a man who built a remarkable military career and outwardly displayed moral conduct, found himself vulnerable to an unprecedented blunder: an affair with his biographer.

INSTRUCTIONS: Identify your greatest vulnerability for a lapse in values or ethical leadership. Avoid the temptation to assume that you are impervious to lapses. Regardless of severity, everyone has a potential vulnerable to lapses in values and ethical leadership (e.g., dishonesty, improper gifting from/to others, inappropriate sexual relations, personal/public financial matters). Failure to identify a vulnerability can indicate a lack of self-awareness.

Answer the following questions to proactively prevent such an incident from occurring to you:

Picture a situation in which you might be tempted or otherwise influenced to do something that would be considered a lapse in personal values or ethical leadership. Describe the situation in your own words.

What are the proactive 'red flags' that should alert you that the situation you are in is one in which you could be tempted or otherwise experience a lapse in personal values or ethical leadership?

What would be the major public and private life consequences of you giving in to this temptation or experiencing a lack of personal values and/or ethical leadership?

Consequence #1:

Consequence #2:

Consequence #3: