

# DISCRIMINATION

As a senior cadet, you have the most influence and power of all the cadets in the wing. The fourth, third, and second class cadets look up to you as a role model. There is a high probability they are observing your leadership style, your decision making process, and your interpersonal relationships with peers and subordinates. You are in the spotlight. If there was ever a time for you to set the example, to be the leader to emulate, and to leave a great impression behind, now is the time.

**“You have much more power when you are working for the right thing than when you are working against the wrong thing.”**

*Peace Pilgrim: Her Life and Work in Her Own Words, 1982*

## OBJECTIVES

1. Differentiate prejudgment from prejudice.
2. Define and explain the concept of unlawful discrimination.
3. List three rules of engagement concerning equal opportunity and treatment.
4. In your own words, describe the benefits of practicing equal opportunity and treatment.
5. Describe the strategies you can do to create a professional working environment.

How can you positively influence your peers and subordinates? What can you do to encourage your subordinates to reach their highest level of potential? Soon, you will face the real challenge--directing your focus to mission accomplishment. As a second lieutenant, you can expect to be in-charge of your own section, division, flying aircraft, and for those of you who are extremely lucky an organization. To effectively accomplish the mission, your subordinates must work together as one cohesive team. Understanding the nature of prejudice and discrimination will help you recognize and address human relations and equal opportunity issues before they hamper your job as a leader and prevent your squadron from accomplishing the mission.

To many people the term “prejudice” has such an unfavorable connotation they are quick to disassociate themselves from it. Let’s take a closer look at prejudice.

## PREJUDGMENT vs PREJUDICE

Webster's Dictionary defines **prejudgment** as "to judge beforehand without sufficient evidence." Additionally, it defines **prejudice** as "an adverse opinion or judgment formed beforehand or without full knowledge or complete examination of the facts." Given these definitions, it is easy to understand the belief they are one and the same. Prejudice is often believed to mean a simple "pre-judgement" about a person or group without taking the time to examine the merits of the judgment. But, there is more to prejudice. Dr. Gordon W. Allport in *The Nature of Prejudice*, explained "Prejudgments become prejudice only if they are not reversible when exposed to new knowledge." For example: Let's say you believe all Asian-Americans are smart, so when you needed help in Geometry, you asked an Asian-American cadet for help. The cadet told you he is having a hard time getting a passing grade in Geometry. A person who is not prejudiced would more likely change the prejudgment to "Some people are smarter than others." A prejudiced person may hold on to the prejudgment "All Asian-Americans are smart except for that cadet." The prejudiced person is simply making exceptions to the prejudgment.

**Prejudices it is well known, are most difficult to eradicate from the heart whose soil has never been loosened or fertilized by education; they grow there, firm as weeds among stones.**

**Charlotte Bronte**

*Prejudice* is a state of mind involving attitudes and feelings. These attitudes and feelings may or may not be correlated with actual behavior. Most people will agree that all of us learned or caught prejudicial attitudes while we were growing up. Also, most will agree that these learned and caught prejudicial attitudes can be unlearned. Most of all, individuals can learn to recognize and prevent these attitudes from becoming an action. The action can be discrimination.

Discrimination embodies an overt or covert (blatant or subtle) action or behavior and involves the actual response or series of responses from an individual.

## DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination is not always bad. We discriminate based on performances, qualifications, whether a person is a volunteer or not, and a lot more, and rightfully so. You would want an individual who is qualified to do the job and recognize subordinates or cadets with outstanding performances. This is a supervisor's job. Discrimination takes a different meaning, when make decisions against a person because of the

individual's race, color, religion, national origin, or sex. These actions and decisions are called unlawful discrimination.

**Unlawful discrimination** includes discrimination on the basis of color, race, national origin, religion, or sex that is not otherwise authorized by law or regulation (Department of Defense and Air Force definition). You can apply the following test questions to see if the specific action is unlawful discrimination.

a. **Is there an action or behavior?** You need to identify the specific behavior that was displayed. Is it a racial, sexist, or religious slur? Is it denial of promotion, training, etc? Is it down grading of the performance report?

b. **Did the action result in unequal treatment?** You need to find out if the action resulted in different treatment. For example: Let us say that you denied a cadet or subordinate a critical training. The question you should ask is "Does the denial of training puts the cadet or subordinate at a disadvantage when it comes to job selection, promotion, acquiring a job specialty?"

c. **Is the action based on race, color, religion, national origin, or sex?** It's easy to answer no to this question. However, you must compare the individuals involved with their peers or someone of equal status/rank. For example: A cadet was denied a critical training. You must review probable reasons for denying the cadet the training. Your review indicates the cadet is qualified for the training, ask the next question, Is it possible that denial was based on the cadet's race, sex, religion, national origin, or color?

d. **Is there a legal or rational consideration for the action?** This is the most critical question. Is there a law that supports your action? Do you have rationale for the action? If your answer is no, you need to relook at the action because you just unlawfully discriminated. Let us use the policy that prohibits military men from wearing earrings in uniform and in civilian clothes while on base. (Note: Some bases, especially overseas, prohibit men from wearing earrings on and off base.) The action is denying military men the opportunity to wear earrings. There is a difference of treatment. Women are allowed to wear earrings and men are not. The action is based on sex (men). The final question, What is the rationale for the decision? Most commanders and members understand that military personnel must uphold the military image.

As a supervisor and a leader in the Cadet Wing or in the Air Force, your primary focus must be on your subordinates behavior. The behavior must be consistent with the standards. Here are some of the required standards of behavior that you need to know.

## **RULES OF ENGAGEMENT**

The *Department of Defense* policy reads:

“Promote an environment free from personal, social, or institutional barriers that prevent Service members from rising to the highest level of responsibility possible. Members shall be evaluated only on individual merit, fitness, and capability. Unlawful discrimination against persons or groups based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin is contrary to good order and discipline and is counterproductive to combat readiness and mission.”

The *Air Force* policy states:

“The Air Force will conduct its affairs free from unlawful discrimination and sexual harassment. It provides equal opportunity and treatment for all members irrespective of their race, color, religion, national origin, sex, or in the case of civilian employees, age or handicapping condition except as prescribed by statute or policy. When unlawful discrimination is found, the Air Force immediately eliminates and neutralizes the effect. Commanders or supervisors who are aware of unlawful discrimination by subordinates, but fail to take action, may be disciplined.”

The *Commandant of Cadets*’ policy states:

“Two elements essential to maintaining the highest degree of mission readiness are the development and use of our people in the most effective manner possible, and the presence of harmonious human relations among them. When there are shortcomings in either of these areas, our ability to complete the mission effectively and efficiently is diminished. Unlawful discrimination and sexual harassment are shortcomings that undermine morale and discipline, and hinder our ability to produce outstanding future Air Force leaders.”

All our policies are very clear--discrimination and sexual harassment will not be tolerated. Additionally, commanders and supervisors are accountable for ensuring their working environment is free of sexual harassment and unlawful discrimination. Let us look at the benefits of practicing equal opportunity and treatment.

### **BENEFITS OF PRACTICING EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND TREATMENT**

Perhaps the best way to describe the spirit and intent of the phrase “equal opportunity” is to clearly identify what equal opportunity really means. Equal opportunity simply means that all people, regardless of their race, color, religion, national origin, or sex, are provided similar opportunities to succeed in our military. In simpler terms, supervisors and leaders must provide their subordinates the training, skills, and opportunity to help their subordinates reach their highest level of potential and responsibilities as individuals. Here are the benefits of equal opportunity and treatment.

1. It’s the right thing to do and it’s the “law of the land.” It is the right thing to treat our people fairly and equitably in terms of training, promotion, recognition, responsibility, assignment, etc. Your subordinates must be fully trained if you are to get the job done.

In order to get them motivated, you must give them responsibilities and recognize their hard work.

2. Subordinates who are fully trained, motivated, and responsible are the best individuals to do the job. They are dependable and trustworthy. They will make your job as a supervisor easier because you do not have to check up on them all the time. This extra time gives you opportunity to focus your attention to other mission related things.

3. Subordinates who take pride in the squadron tend to share that pride with people who works with them and for them. As a result, their energy, skills, and commitment toward the organizational goals are passed on to the rest of your troops. As a supervisor, you can count on your team working together to get the job done.

So, let us look at strategies you can do as an individual and as a leader to create a professional working environment.

### **STRATEGIES FOR CREATING A PROFESSIONAL WORKING ENVIRONMENT**

#### ***As an individual:***

1. Know the policies on equal opportunity and treatment. Read the current policy directives and instructions. They are constantly updated, and you must keep up with the changes.
2. Abide by the policies and expected standards of behavior. "Walk the Talk." Expect others to do the same.
3. Keep current on human relations and equal opportunity issues on the base, community, and the Air Force.
4. Get involved with the on and off base activities that celebrates cultural awareness. Contact your base Social Actions office for information.

#### ***As a leader and a commander.***

1. Ensure your subordinates know your equal opportunity and human relations policy. A regular briefing to reemphasize your policy is a good idea.
2. Encourage your people to address equal opportunity and human relations issues at their level, whenever possible. Tell them they are empowered to address the issue with

the individual. Remind them to do it tactfully. If the issue is not resolved, recommend they use the chain of command.

3. Facilitate an environment where people can express their cultural norms and traditions, within our specified regulations. Encourage your subordinates to host a cultural program for your squadron or section.
4. Encourage your subordinates to become involved with the base special observances and cultural programs. Send a representative to the meetings and ask the individual to brief the section or squadron on upcoming events. Show your support by attending the programs.
5. Set the example for your subordinates to follow. Remember, they are watching you. Maintain an open communication with your peers and address inappropriate behavior fairly, firmly, and consistently.
6. Become familiar with the base helping agencies that can help you resolve human relations and equal opportunity issues. Ask the Social Actions Office to regularly brief you on the base human relations climate.

The responsibilities and challenges that you face as a supervisor and a leader will be extensive in nature. Your squadron's ability to accomplish the mission must come first. However, astute supervisors and leaders know that good teamwork, a well trained and motivated team members, and a healthy working environment gets the job done. As the saying goes, "Take care of your people and they will take care of you."

### **REVIEW QUESTIONS:**

1. In your own words, define prejudice.
2. Give an example of unlawful discrimination and explain why it is considered unlawful.
3. In your own words, describe the benefits of practicing equal opportunity and treatment.

4. List two strategies you can do as an individual and as a leader to create a professional working relationships.