

**1 MAY 1999**



**Personnel**

**PROFESSIONAL AND UNPROFESSIONAL  
RELATIONSHIPS**

**COMPLIANCE WITH THIS PUBLICATION IS MANDATORY**

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OPR: HQ USAF/JAG (Mr. Harlan G. Wilder)

Certified by: HQ USAF/JA  
(Maj General William A. Moorman)

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This instruction establishes command, supervisory and personal responsibilities for maintaining professional relationships between Air Force members, between Air Force members and members of other uniformed services, between Air Force members and civilian employees of the Department of Defense, to include Air Force civilian employees, and between Air Force members and government contractor employees. Unprofessional relationships are those interpersonal relationships that erode good order, discipline, respect for authority, unit cohesion and, ultimately, mission accomplishment. It is the responsibility of commanders and supervisors at all levels to ensure compliance with this instruction. The policy set out in this instruction applies to all active duty members and to members of the United States Air Force Reserve (USAFR) and Air National Guard (ANG), except as provided in paragraph 3.8., below. Officers, including Reserve officers on active duty or inactive duty for training and ANG officers in Federal service, who violate the custom of the service against fraternization or the specific prohibitions contained in paragraph 5.1 of this instruction can be prosecuted under either Article 92 or Article 134 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), or both, as well as any other applicable article of the UCMJ, as appropriate. This instruction implements Air Force Policy Directive (AFPD) 36-29, *Military Standards*.

**SUMMARY OF REVISIONS**

**This document is substantially revised and must be completely reviewed.**

This instruction has been revised to include specific prohibitions on the formation of personal relationships in the recruiting and training environments (paragraph 3.5.); to stress the use of a stepped approach to enforcement of the policy, taking into consideration all the surrounding facts and circumstances (paragraph 8.); and, to stress the prevention of unprofessional relationships through training and leadership by example (paragraph 9.).

**1. General.** Professional relationships are essential to the effective operation of all organizations, both military and civilian, but the nature of the military mission requires absolute confidence in command and an unhesitating adherence to orders that may result in inconvenience, hardships or, at times, injury or death. This distinction makes the maintenance of professional relationships in the military more critical than in civilian organizations. While personal relationships between Air Force members are normally matters of individual choice and judgment, they become matters of official concern when they adversely affect or have the reasonable potential to adversely affect the Air Force by eroding morale, good order, discipline, respect for authority, unit cohesion or mission accomplishment. Professional relationships are those interpersonal relationships consistent with Air Force core values: integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do. Military members understand that the needs of the institution will sometimes outweigh personal desires. This guidance focuses on the impact of personal relationships on the interests of the Air Force as an institution. The guidance set forth in this instruction is based, in part, on the custom against fraternization that has been a part of and enforced within the American military for over 200 years.

## **2. Policy.**

**2.1. Professional Relationships.** Professional relationships are those that contribute to the effective operation of the Air Force. The Air Force encourages personnel to communicate freely with their superiors regarding their careers, performance, duties and missions. This type of communication enhances morale and discipline and improves the operational environment while, at the same time, preserving proper respect for authority and focus on the mission. Participation by members of all grades in organizational activities, unit-sponsored events, intramural sports, chapel activities, community welfare projects, youth programs and the like can enhance morale and contribute to unit cohesion.

**2.2. Unprofessional Relationships.** Relationships are unprofessional, whether pursued on or off-duty, when they detract from the authority of superiors or result in, or reasonably create the appearance of, favoritism, misuse of office or position, or the abandonment of organizational goals for personal interests. Unprofessional relationships can exist between officers, between enlisted members, between officers and enlisted members, and between military personnel and civilian employees or contractor personnel. Fraternization is one form of unprofessional relationship and is a recognized offense under Article 134 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ).

**2.2.1. Fraternization.** Fraternization, as defined by the Manual for Courts-Martial, is a personal relationship between an officer and an enlisted member that violates the customary bounds of acceptable behavior in the Air Force and prejudices good order and discipline, discredits the armed services, or operates to the personal disgrace or dishonor of the officer involved. The custom recognizes that officers will not form personal relationships with enlisted members on terms of military equality, whether on or off-duty. Although the custom originated in an all male military, it is gender neutral. Fraternization can occur between males, between females and between males and females. Because of the potential damage fraternization can do to morale, good order, discipline, and unit cohesion, the President specifically provided for the offense of fraternization in the Manual for Courts-Martial. (See Manual for Courts-Martial, 1998 Edition, Part IV, paragraphs 59 and 83 for a discussion of fraternization and the related offense of conduct unbecoming an officer.)

**3. General Guidelines for All Military Personnel for Avoiding Unprofessional Relationships, Including Fraternization.** Military experience has shown that certain kinds of personal relationships present a high risk of becoming unprofessional. Personal relationships that are not initially unprofes-

sional may become unprofessional when facts or circumstances change. For example, a close personal relationship between officers or between enlisted members can easily become unprofessional if one member becomes the commander, supervisor or rater of the other. Air Force members, both officer and enlisted, must be sensitive to the formation of these personal relationships, as well as the possibility that relationships that are not initially unprofessional may become so due to changed circumstances. The rules regarding personal relationships must be somewhat elastic to accommodate differing conditions and operational necessities; however, the underlying standard is that Air Force members are expected to avoid those relationships that negatively affect morale, discipline, respect for authority and unit cohesion. When economic constraints or operational requirements place senior and junior members in close proximity with one another (such as combined ranks or joint use clubs, joint recreational facilities or mixed officer/enlisted housing areas) military members are, nevertheless, expected to maintain professional relationships. The mere fact that maintaining professional relationships may be more difficult under certain circumstances does not relieve a member from the responsibility to maintain Air Force standards.

**3.1. Relationships Within an Organization.** Familiar relationships between members in which one member exercises supervisory or command authority over the other can easily be or become unprofessional. Similarly, differences in grade increase the risk that a relationship will be, or will be perceived to be unprofessional, because senior members in military organizations normally exercise authority or some direct or indirect organizational influence over the duties and careers of more junior members. The danger for abuse of authority is always present. The ability of the senior member to influence, directly or indirectly, assignments, promotion recommendations, duties, awards, and other privileges and benefits, places both the senior member and the junior member in vulnerable positions. Once established, such relationships do not go unnoticed by other members of a unit. Unprofessional relationships, including fraternization, between members of different services, particularly in joint service operations, can have the same impact on morale, discipline, respect for authority and unit cohesion, as if the members were assigned to the same service, and must be avoided.

**3.2. Relationships with Civilian Employees and Government Contractor Personnel.** Civilian employees and contractor personnel are an integral part of the Air Force. They contribute directly to readiness and mission accomplishment. Consequently, military members of all grades must maintain professional relationships with civilian employees and government contractor personnel, particularly those whom they supervise or direct, and must avoid relationships that adversely affect or reasonably can adversely affect morale, discipline and respect for authority or that violate law or regulation.

**3.3. Dating and Close Friendships.** Dating, courtship, and close friendships between men and women are subject to the same policy considerations as are other relationships. Like any personal relationship, they become matters of official concern when they adversely affect morale, discipline, unit cohesion, respect for authority, or mission accomplishment. Members must recognize that these relationships can adversely affect morale and discipline, even when the members are not in the same chain of command or unit. The formation of such relationships between superiors and subordinates within the same chain of command or supervision is prohibited because such relationships invariably raise the perception of favoritism or misuse of position and erode morale, discipline and unit cohesion.

**3.4. Shared Activities.** Sharing living accommodations, vacations, transportation, and off-duty interests on a frequent or recurring basis can be, or can reasonably be perceived to be, unprofessional. These types of arrangements often lead to claims of abuse of position or favoritism. It is often the frequency of these activities or the absence of any official purpose or organizational benefit which causes them to become, or to be perceived to be, unprofessional. While an occasional round of golf, game of

racquetball or similar activity between a supervisor and a subordinate could remain professional, daily or weekly activities could result at a minimum in the perception of an unprofessional relationship. Similarly, while it might be appropriate for a first sergeant to play golf with a different group of officers from his or her organization each weekend, in order to get to know them better, playing with the same officers every weekend might be, or reasonably be perceived to be, unprofessional.

**3.5. Recruiting, Training, Schools and Professional Military Education.** Personal relationships between recruiters and potential recruits during the recruiting process or between students and faculty or staff in training schools or professional military education (PME) settings are generally prohibited. These interpersonal relationships are especially susceptible to abuse of position, partiality or favoritism, or can easily create the appearance of such. This is particularly true during the recruiting process and in basic military training, because the potential recruit or junior military member is often unfamiliar with Air Force standards and dependent on the senior member, and the senior member is in a position to directly affect, positively or negatively, the career of the junior member. Consequently, additional, specially tailored rules are needed in the recruiting and training environments.

**3.5.1. Recruiting.** The first impression of the Air Force that most military men and women form is through their contacts with a recruiter. This experience is a critical step in the development of Air Force members; it establishes expectations and begins the formation of Air Force core values. The relationship between recruiter and applicant must be completely professional. Consequently, recruiters will not form unprofessional personal relationships with applicants. At a minimum, recruiters will not date or carry on a social relationship with an applicant, or seek or engage in sexual activity with, or make sexual advances to, or accept sexual overtures from an applicant. In addition, recruiters will not use grade, position, threats, pressure or promises to attain or attempt to attain any personal benefit of any kind from an applicant. Recruiters will not gamble with, lend money to, borrow money from or become indebted to an applicant, or use personal resources to provide an applicant with lodging or transportation or any other benefit. The same limitations govern relationships between recruiters and an applicant's immediate family members.

**3.5.2. Basic Military Training and Initial Technical Training.** The integrity and leadership of the faculty and staff in basic military training and the initial technical training environment must not be permitted to be compromised by personal relationships with trainees. At a minimum, faculty and staff will not date or carry on a social relationship with a trainee, or seek or engage in sexual activity with, make sexual advances to, or accept sexual overtures from a trainee. In addition, faculty and staff will not use grade, position, threats, pressure or promises to attain or attempt to attain any personal benefit of any kind from a trainee, or share living quarters with, gamble with, lend money to, borrow money from or become indebted to, or solicit donations (other than for Air Force approved campaigns) from a trainee. The same limitations govern personal relationships between faculty and staff and a trainee's immediate family members. Trainees have an independent obligation not to engage in these activities with members of the faculty and staff.

**3.5.3. Other Training and Education Settings .** The integrity and leadership of faculty and staff in all formal training and PME settings must not be compromised by personal relationships with trainees or students. At a minimum, faculty and staff will not date or carry on a social relationship with a trainee or student, or seek or engage in sexual activity with, make sexual advances to, or accept sexual overtures from a trainee or student. In addition, faculty and staff will not use grade, position, threats, pressure or promises to attain or attempt to attain any personal benefit of any kind from a trainee or student or members of a trainee or student's immediate family.

**3.5.4. Supplementation of this Instruction in the Recruiting, Training and Education Environments.** Commands providing recruiting, training and education functions may, consistent with this instruction, publish supplemental directives, to include punitive provisions, to regulate personal relationships in the recruiting, education, training, school and similar environments.

**3.6. Treatment, Care and Counseling.** Persons undergoing medical or psychological treatment or care, or receiving medical, psychological, pastoral, legal or other professional counseling may be dependent on, and therefore vulnerable to, those providing such services. Personnel providing treatment, care and counseling have a duty to refrain from using their position to gain any personal benefit from persons who are receiving their services. In particular, personnel providing such services will not seek or engage in sexual activity with, make sexual advances to, or accept sexual overtures from persons who are receiving their services or the immediate family members of those receiving their services.

**3.7. Other Relationships.** Other relationships, not specifically addressed above, can, depending on the circumstances, lead to actual or perceived favoritism or preferential treatment and, if so, must be avoided. Examples of activities that may result in an adverse impact on morale, discipline and respect for authority are gambling or partying with subordinates, soliciting or making solicited sales to subordinates and entering into business ventures with members who are junior in rank, grade or position. (See DoD Directive 5500-7.R [the Joint Ethics Regulation], subsections 2-205 and 5-409 for guidance on solicitation and commercial activities), (set out in [Attachment 1](#) to this instruction).

**3.8. Air Reserve Component (ARC) Personnel.** In applying the principles set out in this instruction to ARC personnel, when not performing active duty, full-time National Guard duty, or inactive duty training, commanders and supervisors should tailor the application and enforcement of the principles to appropriately address unique situations that may arise from part-time service.

**4. Relationship of Unprofessional Conduct to Other Provisions of the UCMJ.** All military members are subject to lawful orders. When a military member has been lawfully ordered to cease an unprofessional relationship or refrain from certain conduct, the military member is subject to prosecution under the UCMJ for violation of the order. Similarly, all military members are subject to prosecution for criminal offenses committed incidental to an unprofessional relationship (e.g., gambling, adultery, assault). In addition, officers may be prosecuted for violation of the specific prohibitions listed in paragraph [5.1.](#), and its subparagraphs (below); violation of the custom against fraternization; and conduct unbecoming an officer.

**5. Specific Prohibitions Relating to Officers (Fraternization).** Unprofessional relationships between officers and enlisted members have a high potential for damaging morale and discipline and for compromising the standing of officers. Consequently, officers have an ethical and a legal obligation to avoid certain relationships and activities. Officers must not engage in any activity with an enlisted member that reasonably may prejudice good order and discipline, discredit the armed forces or compromise an officer's standing. The custom against fraternization in the Air Force extends beyond organizational and chain of command lines. In short, it extends to all officer/enlisted relationships.

**5.1. Specific Prohibitions.** Conduct that violates the custom of the Air Force against fraternization can be prosecuted under Article 134 of the UCMJ. In addition, with reasonable accommodation for married members and members related by blood or marriage, the following conduct is prohibited and

can be prosecuted under either Article 92 of the UCMJ, Article 134, or both, and any other applicable article of the UCMJ when appropriate:

**5.1.1. Officers Will Not Gamble With Enlisted Members.**

**5.1.2. Officers Will Not Lend Money to, Borrow Money From or Otherwise Become Indebted to Enlisted Members.** exception: Infrequent, non-interest-bearing loans of small amounts to meet exigent circumstances.

**5.1.3. Officers Will Not Engage in Sexual Relations with or Date Enlisted Members.** Dating as set out here includes not only traditional, prearranged, social engagements between two members, but also includes more contemporary social activities that would reasonably be perceived to be a substitute for traditional dating.

**5.1.3.1. Officer/Enlisted Marriages.** When evidence of fraternization exists, the fact that an officer and enlisted member subsequently marry does not preclude appropriate command action based on the prior fraternization. The fact that an officer is married to an enlisted member is not, by itself, evidence of misconduct. For example, some officer-enlisted marriages are created by the commissioning of civilians married to enlisted members, or by the commissioning of enlisted members married to other enlisted members. Other officer-enlisted marriages may result from force reductions and nonselection for promotion of some officers who then reverted to enlisted status. Regardless of how the officer-enlisted marriage came to be, married members are expected to respect all customs and courtesies observed by members of different grades when they are on duty, in uniform in public, or at official social functions.

**5.1.4. Officers Will Not Share Living Accommodations with Enlisted Members Except When Reasonably Required by Military Operations.**

**5.1.5. Officers Will Not Engage, on a Personal Basis, in Business Enterprises with Enlisted Members, or Solicit or Make Solicited Sales to Enlisted Members, Except as Permitted by the Joint Ethics Regulation.** For the application of this rule, members should consult DoD Directive 5500.7-R, the Joint Ethics Regulation, subsections 2-205 and 5-409, (set out in [Attachment 1](#) to this instruction)

**6. Individual Responsibility To Maintain Professional Relationships.** All military members share the responsibility for maintaining professional relationships. However, the senior member (officer or enlisted) in a personal relationship bears primary responsibility for maintaining the professionalism of that relationship. Leadership requires the maturity and judgment to avoid relationships that undermine respect for authority or impact negatively on morale, discipline, respect for authority, or the mission of the Air Force. This is especially true of officers and noncommissioned officers who are expected to exhibit the highest standards of professional conduct and to lead by example. The senior member in a relationship is in the best position to appreciate the effect of that particular relationship on an organization and in the best position to terminate or limit the extent of the relationship. However, all members should expect to be and must be held accountable for the impact of their conduct on the Air Force as an institution.

**7. Command and Supervisory Responsibilities.** Commanders and supervisors at all levels have the authority and the responsibility to maintain good order, discipline and morale within their units. They may be held accountable for failing to act in appropriate cases.

**8. Actions in Response to Unprofessional Relationships.** If a relationship is prohibited by this instruction or is causing (or if good professional judgment and common sense indicate that a relationship may reasonably result in) a degradation of morale, good order, discipline or unit cohesion, a commander or supervisor should take corrective action. Action should normally be the least severe necessary to terminate the unprofessional aspects of the relationship. The full spectrum of administrative actions is available and should be considered. Administrative actions include, but are not limited to, counseling, reprimand, creation of an unfavorable information file (UIF), removal from position, reassignment, demotion, delay of or removal from a promotion list, adverse or referral comments in performance reports and administrative separation. One or more complementary actions can be taken. Experience has shown that counseling is often an effective first step in curtailing unprofessional relationships. More serious cases may warrant administrative action or nonjudicial punishment. Referral of charges to a court-martial is not appropriate except in aggravated cases. An order to terminate a relationship, or the offensive portion of a relationship, can and should be given whenever it is apparent that lesser administrative action may not be effective. Officers or enlisted members who violate such orders are subject to action under the UCMJ for violation of the order. Instances of actual favoritism, partiality, or misuse of grade or position may constitute independent violations of the UCMJ or the punitive provisions of the Joint Ethics Regulation.

**8.1. Responses To Cases Involving Dating or Sexual Relationships.** When unprofessional conduct includes evidence of a sexual relationship, the sexual relationship is but one factor to be considered in determining the adverse impact, if any, on the organization and, hence, an appropriate response. It is the impact or reasonably foreseeable consequences of the conduct on morale, discipline, good order, unit cohesion and mission accomplishment that determines its seriousness, not its characterization, even if the conduct could be characterized as adultery or some other potential offense. No fact, standing alone, necessarily warrants referral of charges to a court-martial. When a relationship has had an adverse impact on the Air Force, unprofessional conduct should not be excused simply because the parties to the unprofessional relationship subsequently marry or one of the parties leaves the service.

**9. Training.** Instruction on the concepts of unprofessional relationships and fraternization shall be made a part of the curricula for basic training, commissioning programs, and professional military education for all military personnel. Commanders, judge advocates and supervisors will familiarize themselves with this instruction (in particular paragraph 8.) and commanders will make certain all personnel are briefed on this policy on an annual basis or more frequently.

**10. Questions Regarding This Instruction.** Military members who have questions as to the application or interpretation of the policy should consult their commander. Commanders are encouraged to consult their staff judge advocates or servicing legal offices for assistance in interpretation.

WILLIAM A. MOORMAN, Maj General, USAF  
The Judge Advocate General

## Attachment 1

### GLOSSARY OF REFERENCES AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

#### *References*

DoD 5500.7-R subsection 2-205, *Limitation on Solicited Sales*. Excerpts from the Joint Ethics Regulation. A DoD employee shall not knowingly solicit or make solicited sales to DoD personnel who are junior in rank, grade or position, or to the family members of such personnel, on or off duty. In the absence of coercion or intimidation, this does not prohibit the sale or lease of a DoD employee's non-commercial personal or real property or commercial sales solicited and made in a retail establishment during off-duty employment. The posting of an advertisement in accordance with Federal Government building management policies does not constitute solicitation for purposes of this section.

DoD 5500.7-R subsection 5-409, *Commercial Dealings Involving DoD Employees*. Excerpts from the Joint Ethics Regulation. A DoD employee shall not knowingly solicit or make solicited sales to DoD personnel who are junior in rank, grade or position, or to the family members of such personnel, on or off duty. In the absence of coercion or intimidation, this does not prohibit the sale or lease of a DoD employee's non-commercial personal or real property or commercial sales solicited and made in a retail establishment during off-duty employment. The posting of an advertisement in accordance with Federal Government building management policies does not constitute solicitation for purposes of this subsection.

- a. This prohibition includes the solicited sale of insurance, stocks, mutual funds, real estate, cosmetics, household supplies, vitamins, and other goods or services.
- b. Both the act of soliciting and the act of selling as a result of soliciting are prohibited. In both cases, however, a solicitation is necessary for a violation to occur. While the standard prohibits a senior from making a solicited sale to a junior or to the junior's family, sales made because a junior approaches the senior and requests the sale to be made are not prohibited, absent coercion or intimidation by the senior.
- c. Personal commercial solicitations by the spouse or other household member of a DoD employee to those who are junior in rank, grade, or position to the DoD employee, may give rise to the appearance that the DoD employee himself is using his public office for personal gain. When a spouse or household member of a DoD employee engages in such activity, the supervisor of the DoD employee must consult an Ethics Counselor, and counsel the DoD employee that such activity should be avoided where it may
  - (1) Cause actual or perceived partiality or unfairness;
  - (2) Involve the actual or apparent use of rank or position for personal gain; or
  - (3) Otherwise undermine discipline, morale, or authority.

#### *Abbreviations and Acronyms*

**AFI**—Air Force Instruction

**ANG**—Air National Guard

**ARC**—Air Reserve Component

**DoD**—Department of Defense

**DoDD**—Department of Defense Directive

**DoDI**—Department of Defense Instruction

**JER**—Joint Ethics Regulation

**UCMJ**—Uniform Code of Military Justice

**USAFR**—United States Air Force Reserve