



Scenario: Sick of the Sick

Group Size: 4-15

This scenario may contain explicit language and references to harmful situations which may be emotionally activating for some people. If you need support, services are available through the [CAF Member Assistance Program \(CFMAP\)](#) and the [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#).

“Did you happen to catch the hockey game last night?” Hani, a public servant, asks his military colleague Ezra, who is entering their workplace kitchen area where Hani has just poured himself a cup of freshly brewed coffee.

“I did—and what a game it was!” Ezra replies.

While they share highlights of the game, their colleague Sonia enters, coughing and sneezing. She fills her water glass, listens to just enough of the conversation to catch the subject, then promptly returns to her desk.

Ezra lowers his voice and says to Hani, “She should really be at home getting better. I don’t know why she doesn’t just take a couple days off and get rid of that cold. She’s had it on and off for about a month.

“Well, Ezra, I’ve often heard her say that she can hold her own with you military types. She’s in the camp of people whose mantra is a little cold shouldn’t stop you from getting the job done,” Hani tries to explain.

Ezra answers back, annoyed, “Yeah, I know. She even made a little joke about it recently. She told me that she does take time off sick, but it always just happens to be evenings and weekends. Then she tells me, proudly, that unless she’s on her deathbed, she’ll be here at work.”

“Tell me about it,” Hani says. “I was home sick with a cold last week, and I bet I caught it from Sonia. I’m not the only one complaining.” “Let’s go talk to the Major about it,” Ezra suggests.

In his office, the Major, who supervises the team, listens reflectively as the self-appointed delegation describes the problem and offers their suggestions on what should be done in their opinion, for the good of the section.

Categories

Principles:	Respect the Dignity of all Persons
Values:	Integrity, Excellence
Cultural Themes:	Leadership, Teamwork
Misconduct Types:	Not Specific
GBA Plus Themes:	Culture
Audience:	Defence Team

Facilitator's Guide

Learning Objectives:

- Discuss the ethical principle of “Respect the Dignity of all Persons” in this setting.
- Discuss the ethical values of integrity and excellence in this scenario.

Facilitation Questions:

1. What is the problem in this scenario?
 - Open group discussion.
2. What considerations are at play with respect to Defence Ethics and the military ethos?
 - Open group discussion.
 - Discuss the ethical obligation of “Respect the Dignity of all Persons” in this setting.
 - Discuss the ethical values of integrity and excellence in this scenario.
3. In the workplace, is it acceptable, as a leader, to allow members of your team to neglect their physical or mental health to get the job done? Why or why not?
 - This scenario raises relevant questions about attitudes toward illness in the workplace. A strong work ethic is an admirable trait, but if not balanced with care for your physical and mental health, it can easily lead us to neglect our personal welfare as a cost of getting the job done, as well as poorer professional performance.
 - Does your answer differ if the sick person worked remote full time? i.e., not affecting others' health.
 - Does your answer differ again if Sonia has a chronic illness (ie an autoimmune disorder), or had an injury earlier in the year and used up all her sick days? How do our assumptions and bias about people impact the way in which we treat them?
4. What action(s) should the Major take in this scenario?
 - Open group discussion.
 - Option 1: Send Sonia home. Supervisors should advise their personnel to stay home if they don't feel well and to consult a physician if symptoms persist. For Department of National Defence (DND) employees, collective agreements contain provisions for sick time, for the well-being of all personnel. However, it is important to consider that sick days are earned, and individuals with chronic illness or unexpected injury can use all their sick days for the year quite quickly. For military personnel, a Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) supervisor, within the military chain of command, is within their authority to direct a military subordinate to report to sick parade or go home to recuperate.
 - Option 2: Ignore the situation. This would be unethical thinking. Ethical leaders do not ignore health risks, they manage them. They rightfully treat these kinds of risk like any other risk. That's what makes these leaders effective. Whether they do so consciously or not, they act in a manner fully consistent with CAF Health Promotion policy: “The success of military operations requires a CAF that is healthy – physically, mentally, spiritually and socially.” Similar applies to DND employees within all DND workplaces.
 - This is not only a leadership responsibility, however. In the end, it is the responsibility of every CAF member and DND employee to respect the right to a workplace where health risks are reduced, as much as possible and within reason.
 - Think about the situation from Sonia's perspective: Why do we think Sonia believes she has to keep up with the military culture? How does the culture at DND/CAF contribute to folks not feeling comfortable taking time off? How does coming to work sick impact Sonia?