



angle points

A Question of Ethics

Society places great demands on folks, especially in today's hectic world. There are far too many situations that tempt one's sense of right or wrong. As challenging as this may seem, conscious decisions to do the wrong thing does not make it acceptable, especially "when everyone else does it."

I have spent a lot of time travelling over the last few months and I have had the good fortune to have met a lot of young surveyors who are anxious, not only to learn more about land surveying, but they are also anxious to learn about morality and ethics from older experienced surveyors. The burden imposed on seasoned surveyors goes far beyond training our successors how to retrace a boundary line. It includes teaching them how to act and, react when faced with an ethical dilemma.

I recently met a young surveyor in Indiana, anxious to talk to me, seeking some advice on a problem that made him sleepless. His question had to do with error admission. In this case, his firm had made a mistake on a project and it resulted in a potential costly back charge. When he became aware of the problem, he looked into it and determined that his firm had, in fact, made the error and furthermore, that his company was responsible for it. When he presented the facts to his employer, he was instructed to never mention his conclusions and, as a basic tenet of business, to never admit to making any mistakes. Never. Under his employer's standards of practice, it was better to lie and obfuscate than to do the right thing. The conflict for this young man arose because the Indiana Society of Professional Land Surveyors (ISPLS) is guided by a mandate that we should all embrace.



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Our primary mission is to provide our membership a professional identity, professional guidelines and direction, educational services and to promote the interests of the profession. The philosophy of ISPLS is to encourage all who are in the surveying profession to value professional ethics in thought and deed, to maintain competency in performance of duties, to insure trustworthiness, to provide quality in work, and to constantly protect the public interest.

I was impressed. This young surveyor believed in the mission of his state association as I do. He is an honest and ethical person and he was troubled. I explained to him that not everyone runs their business this way and that some of the finest surveyors in this country reside in Indiana.

With regards to the goals and directives of our state associations, they are supposed to provide direction to its members and they are the ones who are looked upon to set the standards for your organization. It is sort of like parenting; to neglect our obligations to other surveyors and our profession is not only bad business, it is wrong at many levels.

As we continue to move through this brave new world, we must place as much value on our ethical duties as we do in learning how GPS works. That can be best accomplished if those in a position of leadership and responsibility—the officers and directors of our state

organizations embrace these important ideals and simply do the right thing.

Robin S. Sharmer, a motivational speaker from Canada does a great job of summarizing this topic wherein he says:

Basically, to lead without a title is to derive your power within the organization not from your position but from your competence, effectiveness, relationships, excellence, innovation and ethics.

What guides you in your decisions? ■

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