

Engineering Ethics:

A view from ASCE

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Region 5 Director



- **Ethics** - The attempt to follow societal or professional norms, about how people should act, based on ideal human character and morals. (Bonate 2011)
- **Moral** – making right decisions by distinguishing between right or wrong in accordance with the principles of right or wrong. (Webster's Dictionary)



- **Values** - are personal judgments that determine how a person behaves and may have nothing to do with ethics. (Bonate 2011)

E.g., Honesty is a value and not stealing is a principle based on that value. Not publishing someone else's research is an ethical guideline based on the principle of not stealing. (Bonate 2011)

- **Code of Ethics** - A code of conduct to which a person voluntarily adheres because it reflects his or her values and is believed to be beneficial to society. A guide that, with rare exceptions, does not provide specific instruction.

You ask...

Is it the **right** thing to do?

CANON 1: Engineers shall hold paramount the **safety, health and welfare of the public** and shall strive to comply with the principles of **sustainable development** in the performance of their professional duties.

CANON 2: Engineers shall perform services only in areas of their **competence**.

CANON 3: Engineers shall issue **public statements** only in an **objective and truthful** manner.

CANON 4: Engineers shall act in professional matters for each employer or client as faithful **agents or trustees**, and shall avoid **conflicts of interest**.

CANON 5: Engineers shall build their professional reputation on the **merit** of their services and shall not **compete unfairly** with others.

CANON 6: Engineers shall act in such a manner as to uphold and enhance the **honor, integrity, and dignity** of the engineering profession and shall act with zero tolerance for **bribery, fraud, and corruption**.

CANON 7: Engineers shall continue their **professional development** throughout their careers, and shall provide opportunities for the professional development of those engineers under their **supervision**.

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Engineers shall, in all matters related to their profession, treat all persons fairly and encourage equitable participation without regard to gender or gender identity, race, national origin, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, disability, political affiliation, or family, material or economic status.

Suggested Tests for Evaluating Actions:

(M. Davis [1997], C. Skooglund, J. Smith, & P. Harper)

Harms test	Do the benefits outweigh the harms, both short-term and long-term?
Reversibility test	Would I think this was a good choice if I traded places?
Colleague test	What would my professional colleague say?
Legality test	Would my choice violate a law, or a policy of my employer?
Publicity test	How would my choice look on the front page of tomorrow's newspaper?
Common practice	What if everyone behaved this way?
Wise relative test	What would my grandmother say? Would I want her to know what I'm doing?
Hiding test	Do I want people to know what I'm doing?
Self-respect test	How will I feel about myself after I make this choice?

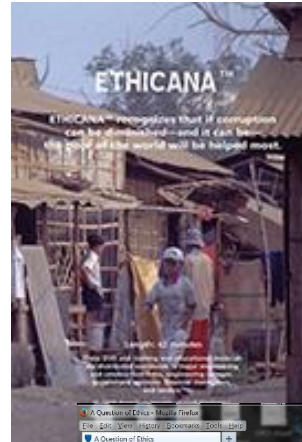
Make good decisions...

- Policies = review applicable codes of ethics, policies
- Law = understand the law and your legal obligations
- Universal = what is generally understood to be the right thing to do; talk to others whose opinions you respect
- Self = what do you think; do you feel good about decision you make

...and help others do the same

- Create a corporate culture that promotes ethics
- Define your organization's values
- Communicate those values
- Demand compliance
- Reward compliance and penalize noncompliance

1. **Training (seminars, webinars, video, DVD)**
2. **Policies**
3. **Publications (journals, Question of Ethics)**
4. **ASCE Ethics Hotline: 1-800-548-2723 x 6151**



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Ethics: The Road All Engineers Must Follow

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PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Engineering is a commitment made by the general public in the U.S. as one of the top five ethical professions - have we risked the public's trust in this honor we have truly earned? When you joined ASCE you made a commitment to subscribe to the ASCE Code of Ethics and even agreed to report any observed violations of the Code. Do you have a copy of and understand this Code? Do you consider ethics only during the hour your team is meeting? Should you require "ethics training"? Are you aware that ASCE is looking for the ethics to develop global ethical standards? We have no reason to believe that the public because we who ethics actually and insist that others do.

INTENDED AUDIENCE:

Ethics transcends all engineering disciplines and specialties as well as all organizational levels. This seminar is designed to benefit all of these areas and consequently is applicable to engineers at any stage of their careers.

SEMINAR OUTLINE

- Exactly what are the "Ethics?"
- How did the ASCE Code of Ethics come about?
- What does the Code say and can I possibly live by it?
- When can I get help in making ethical decisions?
- How does ASCE enforce the code?
- What does the ASCE General Counsel have to say?
- What is ASCE's involvement in Global Ethics?

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In April 2005, ASCE introduced a new column, titled "A Question of Ethics." Published in ASCE News from 2005 to 2010, and in each issue of Civil Engineering magazine since 2011, this column presents and discusses ethical cases considered by the ASCE Committee on Professional Conduct or ethical issues affecting the profession.

This page provides links to the full archive of past columns, listed in chronological order as well as by the featured subject matter and ethical cases.

Current Question

In June ASCE presented an ethics seminar for engineering students at California Polytechnic State University at San Luis Obispo. Sponsored by a grant from the United Engineering Foundation and benefiting from a generous contribution and support from the university's College of Engineering, the seminar featured presentations by parents who were involved in some of engineering's most notable ethics cases. One parent, Alan J. McDonald, was the program manager of the solid rocket motor project for Martin Marietta, Inc. at the time of the Challenger accident. His experiences in the decision to launch Challenger on January 28, 1986—a decision that resulted in the loss of the spacecraft and its seven-person

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Search within Ethics

*There is no such thing as **business ethics** –
there's only **ethics**. (Maxwell 2003)*