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Median household income (in current dollars) is \$23,618.

March 16

Reporter Terry Anderson is taken hostage in Beirut. He is not released until Dec. 4, 1991.

July 13

Top-name musicians and bands perform at Live Aid concerts in Philadelphia and London to benefit African famine victims.

March 4

Food and Drug Administration approves the first HIV antibody test, which is used to screen the nation's blood supply.

March 11

Soviet leader Konstantin Ustinovich Cherenkov dies at 73. He is replaced by Mikhail Gorbachev.

May 11

Fire engulfs a wooden stand in the Valley Parade stadium in Bradford, England, during a soccer match, killing 56.

August 2

Delta Air Lines Flight 191 crashes in Dallas, TX, killing 136 people. Ten days later, Japan Airlines Flight 123 en route to Osaka crashes, killing 520.

The Moral Component of Our Professional Challenge

By William English

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ALTHOUGH ASSE LEADERS have made great progress toward "professionalizing" the safety-related occupations, and our increasingly litigious and protectionist society is creating greater demand for our services, the same pressures are raising the requirements for prudent safety engineering practice. There is a need to feature the moral or ethical component of our role if we are to realize full professional recognition.

Over the past 2 decades, ASSE has represented the safety-related occupations well in the course of

its three-phase Professional Development Project (POP). The phases were: 1) to outline the "scope and functions" of the safety position; 2) to develop and recommend to academia appropriate curricula for preparation of practitioners; and 3) to develop criteria for certification of the "professional" practitioner.

Some effects of the POP have been to increase the visibility of the safety function, improve educational opportunities for would-be practitioners and develop the certified safety professional program as administered by the Board of Certified Safety Professionals, as a separate corporation. All of this has been done with generally noble motives, and the result has been beneficial to both occupational practitioners and their clients.

What Is Professionalism?

One failure of the POP task group, as well as others constituted to perform the three phases of activity, is that the terms professionalism, profession and professional have not been clearly defined. (I do not mean to be critical of the outstanding people who gave of themselves far beyond the call of duty for the benefit of future generations of practitioners. In retrospect,

August 9

Retired naval officer Arthur Walker is convicted of espionage for participating in Soviet spy ring operated by his brother John.

September 19

8.1 Richter scale earthquake strikes Mexico City, killing thousands.

November 18

The Calvin and Hobbes comic strip debuts in a handful of newspapers.

November 20

Microsoft Corp. releases the first version of Windows.

Rock Hudson dies of AIDS at age 59. He's the first major star to fall victim to the disease.

September 1

A joint American-French expedition locates the wreck of the RMS Titanic.

October 7

PLO terrorists hijack the Achille Lauro, an Italian cruise ship, with 80 passengers, plus crew.

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their vision and insights are amazing.) As a keen observer of the process who has had an opportunity to know and serve with some of these pioneers, after deliberate consideration I think there should be a fourth phase. We need to have a program extending beyond academic preparation and technical experience leading to development and implementation of a strong ethical base for all our activities. Until we have done that, we will not be a profession, nor will we have the respect of society we seem to crave.

There have been good articles in ASSE literature and elsewhere outlining the historical emergence of such professions as medicine, law and civil engineering. Various "steps" in the professionalization process have been proposed with analytical virtuosity. But I submit that the recognition of a professional group hinges primarily upon society's acceptance and respect for the ethical standards the practitioners embrace in the rendering of a vital service.

Political and propagandistic activities are less important than the substance of what the practitioners offer their clients.

I do agree with several analysts that the essential elements of a profession include: 1) an elaborate body of knowledge (requiring extensive education); 2) great social importance of the work done by practitioners; 3) a high degree of responsibility for professional actions; and 4) a very high "service ideal."

Because of the nature of professions, there is an inherent requirement for colleague control of standards of conduct among the practicing group. So long as a finance manager or a manufacturing supervisor can step into a safety position and perform reasonably well—or more important, so long as management thinks that is possible—we will not be a profession.

There is a body of technical knowledge that has been recognized as foundational to success in safety work, and we are progressing well toward defining our technical function and prescribing our areas of responsibility. However, we have done precious little toward establishing an ethical base for our activities. Committees have been appointed (I have even

been appointed) to worry about the ethics issue, but there has been no substantial progress toward standards of applied ethical conduct.

Perceived Social Need

One reason our star has been rising has been the trend toward a more litigious society and a distinct rise in consumerism or a mood of consumer protectionism. It is becoming increasingly clear to the American justice system, as well as the general population, that safety is not to be disregarded or treated lightly, and business managers are having this brought to their attention forcibly. Consider the following:

- The Pinto fire death case resulted in a dramatic punitive settlement against the manufacturer.
- The MGM Grand Hotel fire and the John Manville asbestos-related suits have challenged the very survival of the companies involved.
- The Hyatt Hotel platform collapse and the American Airlines DC-10 crash have resulted in very complex legal battles and sensational publicity for the agents involved.
- In at least one state, safety engineers are being sued by employees injured on the job.
- Some states now require legal registration or certification of safety engineering practitioners.
- Workers' compensation is about finished as the sole remedy for occupational injuries in cases where negligence can be proved to a jury.

The point is that the stage is set for us if we are able to accept the challenge and are ready to perform responsibly to meet society's perceived need. Liability promotes safety, and even in cases where codes and regulations have not been able to enforce safe performance, punitive decisions in the courts are driving out the bad products and are threatening the survival of irresponsible operations. Safety is no longer everybody's business. Society is now affixing accountability for failures upon the management decision makers involved, and they will need our professional diagnosis and prescription in order to realize their business objectives.

ASSE began publishing a journal in 1956.

To celebrate 50 years of keeping SH&E professionals current in this dynamic field, each issue of Professional Safety in 2006 will feature an article from a past issue of the journal.

“Defensive Practice” Is Ineffective

The group that has been most successful at professionalization is the medical occupation. In the early part of the last century, the American Medical Association had led physicians to an amazing acceptance by American society as ethical, competent practitioners who were thought generally to subordinate personal considerations for the good of individuals who were ill or injured, and they were literally entrusted with the lives of people in need of their services. Everything worked fine for the medical fraternity until society began to suspect that many physicians were enriching themselves by rendering irresponsible services at exorbitant prices. Once their halo tarnished and their service ethic was questioned, it became evident that many timeworn medical practices constituted imprudent care, and the malpractice suits became an avalanche.

The physicians' response was to seek affordable malpractice insurance rather than learn to practice more responsible medicine. Despite their trade association's cries to the contrary, there have been few frivolous suits against physicians. Their ultimate salvation will not be in cheaper insurance or stepped-up propaganda drives but rather will be found in a widespread return to an ethical foundation for their activities. Patients do not characteristically sue physicians who practice responsible medicine, and the legal system does not penalize practitioners who exercise reasonable care. The point is that their professional standing hinges on society's perception of their ethical role.

What Is Professional Conduct?

It is becoming widely accepted that safety is not just common sense. Between the increasing complexity of systems in our high-tech society and the social pressures for protectionism, corporations are going to have to use our services. For those of us now in the field, that means we must conquer the large body of knowledge we are responsible for understanding, and we must be thorough, scholarly and logical in the application of our expertise to problem hazards. The colleges and universities are doing a pretty good job in presenting the technical issues, but both the entry-level practitioner and the veteran need to ponder the ethical issues if we are to realize social respect as a profession.

Ethical conduct involves first of all being always honest with those with whom we deal. Ninety percent honesty is still dishonesty.

Ethical conduct also involves loyalty to our clients. But who are our clients? It goes without saying that so long as one is paid by a corporation, then one should be thoroughly loyal to that employer. But the ultimate client is not the employer but the person whose safety we are paid to guard, whether that is an employee of the company or a customer who buys the product or uses the service provided. Happily, there is no conflict between loyalty to the company and loyalty to the employee or customer. If you have not protected this client, you have not served him or the company well.

Perhaps it would be superfluous to mention that the professional function discussed in this article applies not only to the employer/employee relationship of practitioners, but the principles of ethical conduct would be equally binding for those employed in government and insurance, as well as those in private consultation practice. The ethical principles are the same in any enterprise.

I say, therefore, that ethical conduct is a combination of honesty and loyalty. Competence plus ethical conduct earns the respect of society, including the management community. There are several established elements of professional conduct that should characterize our work:

- Always do the right thing. Just because there is no law against something does not make it right. There are certain absolutes such as do not lie, do not steal and do not kill, among others. If you can rationalize wrongdoing because you think good will somehow result, you will never be an ethical practitioner. It is not right to cover up your employer's wrongdoing or injury to others in the conduct of business. The fact that the employer pays your salary does not affect the moral issue.

- Stick to your area of expertise and do not attempt to work beyond your competence. You can be respected for knowing your limitations, but doing incompetent work is unethical. How hard you try is less important than whether you succeed when you are protecting people's lives.

- Keep up with change. Study the literature, attend professional development programs and courses, and cultivate professional contacts. Work at developing and maintaining competence.

- Be a beacon in the dark for your management. Not only should you advise your clients of the issues at stake, you should also give emphasis to the ethical considerations in every problem and proposed course of action. That may involve a resounding insistence in a serious case, and if your employer is willing to disregard your advice at the expense of the safety and health of others, the only ethical course may be resignation. Anything else is prostitution, regardless of the stakes.

- Appeal to management's nobler motives and show how doing the right thing promotes the long-term health of the business. That makes you a player on management's team rather than an adversary.

- Avoid conflicts of interest. If you accept favors from suppliers or people whose work you review, you are compromising your integrity and will be unable to make effective judgments. If you want to be a professional, avoid even the appearance of wrongdoing.

- Do not cover up your mistakes. If you never make any mistakes, you are not even trying to do your job, and you are not learning much that is worthwhile. And if you attempt to conceal your mistakes, your management will certainly find out about some of them, and they will distrust you for your deceptive actions. Credibility is a requisite.

- Do not be discouraged by failure. The most important breakthroughs come from persistence in trying until a successful way is found. Persistence is the most effective quality besides integrity, and the professional practitioner will not succeed without it.

- Consider the social desirability of the enterprise you serve. If it is not a benefit to humankind, ethical behavior is impossible for you because you have accepted an unethical job.

- Know that what you are doing is important. If you are not rendering a useful service in a desirable enterprise, you should find a job you can respect yourself for doing. If you do not respect yourself, nobody else will.

- Be very careful about criticism of others. Do not criticize without strong justification and only after all efforts to help the other person have failed.

•Be patient when progress is slow. Rome was not built in a day.

Ethical issues run deep and are often complicated by subtleties, but that is what makes them important. In fact, that is one of the things that makes for a profession.

Limitations of Codes of Conduct

ASSE, as well as other professional groups, has adopted a fairly standard code of conduct that makes a lot of good general statements. I think it compares favorably with other ethical codes I have seen, and we should attempt to abide by its stipulations. But I must add that no code of conduct, regardless of the number of words, can foresee every possible issue and spell out every ethical and unethical act. A code can be a good guide to general categories of behavior, but if we do not have that inner service ethic and moral compass, we will be relatively ineffective in our drive toward professional recognition.

Conflict Resolution

There is much impassioned rhetoric these days both for and against "whistle-blowing," a very important ethical issue; and some codes spell out how to go about it. By nature of our occupation, we are apt to find ourselves facing a decision as to whether or not to blow the whistle, but if we are skillful in our advisory role, confrontation can usually be avoided.

A review of literature on engineering ethics suggests that at times we may need to distinguish between the engineering function and the management function. In presenting a system safety analysis setting forth hazards and recommended courses of action, it is the professional practitioner's job to make an appeal to management for what is thought to be the more prudent conduct. It is management's function to decide which alternative to pursue, perhaps also considering factors that may be outside the scope of the engineering study.

If the professional feels that a management decision does violence to his conscience, the first effort should be to reason with management, pointing out the ethical issues and offering creative alternatives, appealing to management's nobler motives. Usually a satisfactory resolution can be obtained without taking an adversarial stance, and the practitioner can derive increased respect from management while also finding professional fulfillment in protecting the ultimate client population. However, if after attempting an amicable resolution to a moral conflict with management to no avail and the practitioner's conscience is violated, the only acceptable course would be to resign the unethical position.

Whistle-Blowing

If the consequences of unethical management action would be so dire as to place the client population at great risk of injury or result in major economic loss, then in addition to resigning the position, the professional practitioner may feel compelled to "go public" with an expose of the antisocial action contemplated by the employer. Because whistle-blowing is radical adversarial behavior, a decision to do so is a decision to resign. There have been celebrated cases where whistle-blowers have successfully sued for reinstatement into their employer organizations, but in every case I know of, the bitterness lingers and a position of bilateral loyalty is never regained.

In professional forums on engineering ethics there is considerable talk about the David and Goliath conflict, implying that the lowly engineer has no chance against the giant corporation or government agency. But it should be remembered that David prevailed over Goliath, and each of us needs to be prepared to take the same risk for the same reasons, if we pretend to ethical behavior. Ethical behavior does not cling to the truth only to the point where one's employment security is threatened. We must not be among those who will do anything for money.

Conclusion

The Society should take an active role in defining ethical behavior and educating our membership to its importance as an ingredient in professional conduct. Individual practitioners should seek opportunities for dialogue to keep the ethical issue in prominence so their management will not be surprised by a showdown with them on matters of right and wrong.

Professional practitioners should also engage in dialogue concerning the whole issue of business ethics in whatever forum can be found. I was surprised to find that the vast majority of participants in a symposium I attended were professors of philosophy, and most of them had never even had a job in a profit-making enterprise. We should not let the spectators make the rules for our game. All that is needed for the wrong side to prevail is for good people to do nothing. ■

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