

Ethics and Professionalism

Snake Oilers and Ethics

Roger R. "Sky" Chamard, Consultant
445 Palomino Drive, Eugene, OR 97401

INTRODUCTION

WHEN I WAS ASKED to prepare a paper on ETHICS in the Surveying, Photogrammetry, and Mapping Sciences, I replied in the affirmative without giving it much thought. We all have ethics and we must all live with ourselves, so what is the problem? Ethics is the problem.

Webster's New World Dictionary defines ethics as "1. The study of standards of conduct and moral judgement; moral philosophy. 2. a treatise on this study; book about morals. 3. the system or code of morals of a particular philosopher, religion, group, profession, etc." Moral can be related to dealing with and being capable of making a distinction between right and wrong in conduct. Then there is the word integrity which can be described as the quality or state of being of sound moral principle, uprightness, honesty, and sincerity. This all relates to how we treat our co-professional in the professional and non-professional relations that occur in our contacts. Be a "square shooter" and everything will be OK. Wrong! Interpretations of the description of the terms are so varied that each profession has tried to be more definitive regarding their professional activity. That is why the American Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing has it's own Code of Ethics as do other Societies.

EXAMPLES

The following are descriptions of non-ethical practices that I've observed in the past 25 years plus of dealing with various characters in the survey and mapping sciences. All events have happened and many are still happening. The characteristic groups are all inclusive of many in the group; only the names have been left out to protect the guilty.

These examples are not discussed in order of severity, or importance; you be the judge from your own experiences.

WHAT A DEAL!

The greatest "what a deal" examples occur in the sales of photogrammetric, surveying, and mapping equipment and software. Exaggeration of equipment performance, be it in accuracy or production capability, is a most common calling of many over anxious sales persons. "My instrument is the best" is not as bad as saying that the competition is terrible or a piece of junk. "Their equipment can't do what ours can." These statements are often downright lies. The smart operator phrases bad talk to start rumors, i.e., "their equipment is hard to maintain we've heard." Any slamming of the opposition equipment is not ethical. Overstating equipment's capability and dependability is lying, and that doesn't fall in the category of ethical. Not all sales people use these techniques, but some do and they have been doing so for years. How do we weed these unethical folks out? You don't! Indirectly, they weed themselves out, but, like weeds, a new crop is waiting to do the oversell job. We have been talking about the difference between a sound technical representative and a "gung ho" salesperson who does not care about our mapping sciences professions.

LOW BID-OVER RIDE

The person who bids professional work is not ethical in my book. Let's look at the cases of the intentional under priced bid where the bidder full knows the real cost, but the intent is to still make a profit by other means, and winning the contract is the first priority. The main ways of getting more money from the contract is to pick

on the contract administration's performance with the idea to question every item supplied to the contractor and to find some form of irregular activity not contemplated when the bid was made. I've known contractors, some still active, who used that type of technique regularly. Another means is to claim misunderstanding of the specifications and to negotiate price changes to perform as the contract intended. This game playing, needless to say, is totally unethical, and it is difficult to prove that it is being done in a planned way. This problem with ethics is much more serious than others. This contract game playing is a practice that makes many who would like to contract work shy away from doing so, or place so many safeguards in a contract that it can not be performed except at unusually high costs. I've known contracting officers who won't contract certain types of work because of their experience with these types of unethical persons.

254/255 OR BUST

Any person who has been required to evaluate the 254 or 255 Forms required in Professional Services contracts has experienced the frustration over the data in these forms. The Society Code of Ethics Item 3a states "Not compete unfairly with anyone who is engaged in the photogrammetry profession by: a. Advertising in a self-laudatory manner." Many who fill these forms out are certainly not shy in building their credentials to the highest level possible. A one-month assignment on a project is made to sound like a lifetime experience, or ten years as a technician is made to appear as "in charge of project" assignment. Most reviewers can cope with the laudatory statements, so little harm is done. Many times projects shown as completed are depicted as much more complex than they were in actuality. This often requires research by the evaluators to verify the actual project parameters. Forms 254 and 255 are forms to be filled for professional contract award consideration and they should be treated professionally with ethics.

CONCLUSION

These three examples of non ethical practices are only a smattering of non ethical behavior, but they may be the most easily identified as major areas of concern. There is a bit of rogue in all of us, but again, the effect of rogue behavior varies in response to the action. We don't get by most of the time without a little bit of "I am great" or such feelings that may border on unethical action. Except for bragging, a habit that humans like to exercise, the mix of disciplines involved in the Mapping Sciences do, as a whole group, practice a fair degree of ethics. Most of the group take pride in their ethical behavior and practice it under most circumstances. Most ethical are the technicians that do the actual mapping, digitizing, drafting, etc. They are those responsible for work that can be quantified by peers and supervisors. Their sole responsibility is for doing a job and they don't have to play the game of organization survival. Survival is the most important issue that can determine the degree of ethics which will be practiced by our professionals and technicians, be they in private or government practice.

The Certified Photogrammetrists are the only group in the American Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing who have agreed to abide by the Society's Code of Ethics. We should expect the highest standards from them. Please read the American Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing's Code of Ethics and use it as a Model in your professional practice.

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