

ETHICAL QUESTIONS

Individual responsibility, everyone's business!

In the last few years, the media have been covering professional liability lawsuits extensively and, by the same token, have raised several ethical questions. Journalists, the media and the public are all interested in these cases, but what about professionals? What about you?

Ethics... is it such an abstract notion? Are we in a wave of "unaccountability" when it comes to professionals and, more specifically, engineers? Have we lost some of our reference points or do we tend to overestimate our capacity to assess the values that guide our choices and justify our actions?

At first glance, this form of questioning can appear mundane but it is not the case as it relates to the day to day practice of engineering, given that violating the rules of ethics and professional conduct can jeopardize the public's safety and undermine society's confidence towards the profession. Consequently, we must ensure that all engineers are aware of the importance of acting in accordance with the values that define the profession and question themselves as to the way they do things.

BEYOND THE EMPLOYER'S REQUIREMENTS

It is clear that all engineers are responsible, as professionals, for the acts they carry out throughout their career, regardless of the company in which they practise.

A change of attitude is required: too often, during a syndic's inquiry, a professional inspection or even over the phone on the ethical consultation hotline, we hear comments such as "I understand, but I have no choice, my boss demands that I..."

Even though the engineering profession has greatly evolved over the years, it is crucial to always remember that engineers must comply with the ethical requirements of their profession and maintain their professional independence, regardless of their employers' requirements or demands!

A FEW LEADS TO FOLLOW

The Ordre des ingénieurs du Québec's mission is to ensure the public's protection; but is it not a responsibility it shares with all its members? Engineers hold themselves to very high professional standards. The profession's inherent values are proof of it:

- competence;
- a sense of ethics;
- responsibility;
- social commitment.

Engineers must comply with the ethical requirements of their profession regardless of their employers' demands!

Now, how can engineers accomplish this on a daily basis? Here are a few possible solutions to consider.

- A. Implement procedures within the company in order to:
 - better pinpoint and solve ethical dilemmas;
 - better identify and manage conflicts of interests.
- B. Value management based on integrity.
- C. Learn to implement ethical thinking in order to make decisions which are acceptable to society as a whole, by referring to the Guidelines to Professional Practice (gpp.oiq.qc.ca) or by calling the ethical hotline (1 877 ÉTHIQUE or 1 877 384-4783).
- D. Call upon other members of the Ordre in order to validate one's ethical reflection.
- E. Participate in various training programmes.

The Ordre takes ethical problems within the profession very seriously and wants to be proactive in this matter, for example by turning to professional training. During the course of surveys carried out by the Ordre, members identified recurring challenges they are called upon to solve with respect to ethical dilemmas they face or questions of professional conduct, as well as questionable practices adopted by certain engineers. It is in this context that the Ordre will launch, as of September 2012, its first course on professionalism, which engineers will be required to take. This course should be relevant and shed light on various questions.

The above-mentioned solutions can really help engineers build their accountability, individually as well as collectively. Now, it's up to everyone to apply them!