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ETHICS

Ethics can seem so esoteric! We all have heard the word tossed around, but is ethics really important to each of us individually? Ethics is defined as “the principles of honor and morality.” Is the burden of professional ethics reduced as society’s morality is reduced? I say no. In fact, I would suggest that our responsibility for professional ethics is greater today than it ever has been.

All ITE members are governed by the ITE Canons of Ethics. They can be found on the ITE Web site under “About ITE.” If you have not read the Canons of Ethics lately (or at all), please take this opportunity to do so.

I have had the opportunity to make several presentations on professional ethics to student chapters, sections and districts. Much to my surprise, the presentations always have been well received, inviting thoughtful questions and examples and promoting an enthusiasm for learning. If you have not taken part in an ethics presentation at a technical conference, it is a timely subject. The presentations also are important because many licensing and certification programs require a one-hour course on ethics for renewal.

Ethics is defined by what is moral. Morality means doing the right thing within the context of society. There are a couple of litmus tests: If your actions end up on the front page of the newspaper the next day, will they cause you embarrassment, or will you be comfortable with your decision? If you had to explain your decision to your spouse, your kids, or your mother, would it set a good example?

There is an important hierarchy to ethics. The safety, health and welfare of the public are at the top. Second is our ethical responsibility to the profession. Third is our responsibility to

the client. Last is our responsibility to our personal interests. The safety, health and welfare of the public come before any other interests.

Ethics requires deliberate and thoughtful decisions. Will we be successful in every endeavor if we approach them ethically? No. Will we make every client happy and satisfied with our recommendations? No. Will there be difficult decisions to make if we act ethically? You can bet on it! So, what is our reward for acting ethically?

First, we are bound by our membership in ITE and by our certifications as professional engineers, certified planners and others. More important, ethical actions are linked directly to our personal honor, integrity and reputation. Without our integrity and reputation, we have very little to offer. We lead by example. Acting ethically creates an environment for the ethical success of those who follow us, including our peers, employees and family.

ITE continually emphasizes ethics. The Task Force on Ethics works tirelessly to monitor, improve and provide member services in the area of professional ethics. In addition, the ethics e-library can be found under “Technical Information” on the ITE Web site. This e-library contains a link to www.onlineethics.org, an engineering and science based Web site maintained by Case Western Reserve University.

The good news is that we have chosen a profession that truly makes a difference in peoples’ lives everyday. We have an awesome responsibility to the public. Transportation is a time-honored profession that continues to gain respectability. It is important that we act with principles of honor and high morality. Our morality should be defined as doing the right thing.

Educate yourself on our ethical responsibilities. Use ITE’s resources to help in your endeavors. If we all work together in an ethical manner, we can continue to make a difference!

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