ITE Ethics Task Force
Conversation Circle - Anaheim 2008

Facilitators:
Neal Hawkins
Hillary Isebrands
Jeff Arey
Earl Neuman
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Attendance:
There were approximately 45 participants representing a wide range of current and past employment backgrounds (public, private, retired, and university). The majority of participants had worked for both public and private employers. Two participants were under 30 years of age.

Note: As you will see below, the roundtable discussion covered a wide range of subjects at a rapid fire pace. Our intent was to provide just such a forum! The notes below are an attempt to record the essence of what was discussed and yet keep the content anonymous to preserve the openness of group, along with their thoughts and emotions.

Roundtable Discussion Notes:

QUALIFICATIONS - Situation where marketing qualifications greatly exaggerate qualifications...an examples were given regarding roundabout and traffic signal design. Another example was given where the same past projects were highlighted by two different firms due to most of the team no longer working at the previous firm. Message is to be clear and up-front on this. Qualifications of individuals (who will be on my project) were more important to the City than those of the firm in general. What can consulting firms claim as experience/knowledge? Does it come down to the person stamping the plans?

LOW BID - Whose rules are we playing by? State laws often dictate that price will not be used to judge competing firms...however, in lean times, costs based proposals do appear (and are responded to). Sometimes we are our own worst enemies.

DO ATTORNEYS HAVE DIFFERENT RULES? - ITE Cannon of Ethics referenced...do attorney’s have different rules? Example given in working for attorneys...be up front with lawyer in professional witness work...situation not always clear cut from the beginning. Important to both indicate “conclusions are going to be professional” and “ask for a retainer up front”. A different example was given regarding grade crossing safety. All agencies have attorneys - talk to them if there are ever any questions.

LOW OR HIGH ROAD? - Ethics is responsibility and must come well before college...two directions you can head out of college. Trustworthiness takes a long-time to establish and a
short-time to destroy. Do the right thing even when no one is looking. People are taught by demonstration. People are led by example.

**IT'S THE APPEARANCE** - Appearance issue discussed…e.g. working on both the public and private sides etc. Another example where consultant “a” reviews consultant “b” work in town 1 and consultant “b” reviews consultant “a” in town 2. Try to avoid or safeguard against the appearance of un-ethical behavior…can be a significant challenge.

**WORK AFTER RETIREMENT** - Some Cities and agencies have well established rules concerning work after retirement eg. 1-year moratorium.

**BLACK AND WHITE…OR IS IT?** - Three domains noted (policy, managerial, and technical). Example discussed regarding management. Things are not always black and white and a considerable amount of patience is required in these matters. Sometimes it is best to make a change based on political astuteness…not “their all wrong and I’m right”.

**HEY IT’S NOT ILLEGAL** - Laws, Cannon of Ethics provide some "boundaries" for ethics - just because it is not illegal does not make it ethical. Conflicts sometimes occur with former employees that are in different professional roles. Peer review may be our own worst enemy at times - different opinions do not make something wrong or unethical. Working for multiple clients…example given where a traffic signal was removed and a recently located adjacent business was very upset. Consultant recommending removal for one client was doing the site plan for the upset new client…forgetting to disclose or account for impact.

**I'LL BUY THIS TIME** - Gifts…can I buy you lunch, super bowl tickets, political campaign. Should we avoid “pay-to-play situations”. In Canada, professional engineers have to take an ethical exam.

**FAVORITISM** - Favoritism…avoiding favoring those we like and simply judging the work…eg Contractor inspection, Consultant reviews, etc.

**IT’S ALL POLITICAL** - Opinions…technical versus political – be clear that anything we as engineers or planners provide will be strictly done on a technical basis which is easily defendable and repeatable. Once this information goes to policy or political folks it may change.

**THANK YOU!** A special thanks to Hillary, Jeff, Earl, Ray, and those of you in attendance for making this session a great success! As you can see there are a number of themes that could be taken from this session and turned into excellent support materials for our membership!

Respectfully,

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