Engineers Australia's Stage 2 Competencies

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DEAL WITH ETHICAL ISSUES

Checklist

1. Everybody has a moral compass that helps them distinguish right from wrong. Engineer's compasses should be more finely calibrated than most. Use it. Daily.

2. Do it by the book! Engineers Australia has a Code of Ethics, which is downloadable. Keep it handy, in Apple Books or equivalent or in hard copy in your desk or briefcase. Study it, become familiar with it and constantly refer back to it. Check in with other more experienced engineers and leaders and learn how they apply the Code day-to-day and in specific project contexts.

3. There is one-sure fire way to test whether the behaviours you are exhibiting, contemplating or observing are ethical. It's called the "front-page-of-the-paper test." Would you be happy for that behaviour or conduct to be broadcast on your city newspaper's front page – print and online – for your colleagues, family, the public, regulators, law enforcement agencies and social media platforms to see? Unless the answer is yes, you might have crossed the line.

4. In ethical matters it has been said often by senior law enforcement officers "Sunlight is the best disinfectant." It applies equally to engineers. If you have concerns, reservations, suspicions or even a feeling of misconduct, report it to your leader or supervisors. Immediately. Once exposed, action can be taken to remedy the situation or systemic failures. You will be helping yourself and others.

5. Speak up and don't be complicit in unethical matters. You stand to lose your reputation and a whole lot more if try and keep it a secret. As in all walks of life, you will be judged by the company you keep. Make sure you hold yourself and your colleagues and team members to the highest level of professional and ethical conduct. If you can't, tell your leaders and remove yourself.

6. Most organisations, especially large ones, have a gift or gratuity register. If you are offered gifts or gratuities or invitations to events, check with your leaders and supervisors about company policies on accepting them. And if you can and do, record them in the register. You may not get into trouble by accepting or attending but you will if you don't declare it.

7. There are many examples in the business and sporting worlds where unethical behaviour and practices have been normalised. Because others are doing it, it's deemed to be acceptable. People often try - and succeed - in convincing themselves that acting unethically is OK. It isn't. Ever. Don't try and kid yourself that bad behaviour is normal. It's not career limiting, it's career ending.

8. Never practice or condone unethical behaviour to try and gain acceptance or "fit in" with a team or company. If that's what's required to gain entry, it's a club you definitely don't want to be a member of.

9. In any profession, your reputation is everything. Unethical dealings are the quickest way to torpedo a promising professional engineering career. All professions and industries are close-knit; word travels at the speed of light and any indiscretions and misconduct will eventually become public.

10. Every decision and action you make and take as a professional engineer will have consequences. Intended and unintended. In matters concerning ethics, before you act, consider what will and could happen. This is classic risk assessment. How will your actions be seen and judged? What will the "optics" be? Decisions that professional engineers take not only need to be right ones, they need to be seen to be the right ones. Integrity is everything. It's no good just convincing yourself, you'll need to convince others. Always take advice from more experienced colleagues and leaders.

STILL HAVE MORE QUESTIONS?

Just email us at tellus@myengineerexchange.com and we'll get right back to you.

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