

## President's Pen

by

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Last month, I got a call from a client who wanted me to inflate our site services cost estimate to, help get additional government financing for a project. The process would be for us to write a letter to him (with the phony cost estimate), and then write him another letter with the real cost estimate for "his files".

While it is uncommon to receive such a blatant immoral request, we are all faced with moral decisions daily. Our responses will by and large depend on our integrity. The word "integrity" is defined as a firm adherence to a moral code. If you had to take calculus, you may recall that "integration" was the act of forming a unified whole. A person of integrity lives within a moral framework, which can be identified by others by adding up their actions.

In our current ethos, integrity has lost its bite. This is, I believe, largely due to the moral trend towards relativism. People's views of the world are moving from black and white to multiple shades of gray. Truth, as many see it, will mean different things to different people. The dividing line between moral and immoral actions has become a moving goal post.

The problem of relativism manifests itself within the business world all the time. Miscellaneous office supplies end up in homes, yet those responsible seldom recognize this as stealing. Instead, it's a company benefit that is more than offset by the extra time and effort a person gives to the company. Some suppliers will "sneak" inferior products into a job because a particular consultant is known to not enforce their specifications.

The path to integrity will be obscure as long as we are unwilling to adhere to an absolute moral code. While we accept all cheating as wrong, all stealing as wrong ... we cannot be people of integrity. Such absolutes are hard for many of us, as it is far easier to justify our actions. Of course, the problem with justifying our actions is that we find our moral goal posts always moving away from the direction we know to be right.

A life of integrity is ultimately easier than its seductive alternative. Integrity frees us from a conflict between our inner selves and our outer selves. We no longer have to justify our actions, but rather accept responsibility for them.

The Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists, has, as part of its requirements, a code of ethics, which every professional engineer is required to adhere to. It is a fundamental component of being a professional engineer. I believe each one of us can be a "professional" if our experience is married with integrity.