

Ethics for Geomatics Professionals

Scott Reeser, P.L.S.
PSLS 2025 Conference

1

WARNING:

This presentation is not intended to be a lecture. My intent is to present the attendees with information I have gathered thru various sources and stimulate discussion on these topics. Participation from the attendees is essential to the success of the session. Everyone in attendance is asked to provide input and ask questions. By gathering input from those present, we may all learn something by the end of the day.

2

DISCLAIMER:

I am not an attorney; therefore I am not giving legal advice.

The opinions expressed in this presentation are my own and not those of any organization or business entity. This session contains work from other people (see credits),.

3

Course Objectives:

- Define key terms related to Ethics
- Review various codes of ethics and/or professional conduct
- Stimulate thought of the attendees to make them aware of ethical considerations
- Discuss the enforcement of ethical behavior

4

Definitions:

Ethics:

- What you should do
- How you behave
- Your morals in action
- Situational
- *"A discipline dealing with good and evil and with moral duty." – Webster's*

5

Definitions (continued):

"Ethics is doing the right thing at the right time. Ethics are values that are converted into action. Values define who you are, actions get you what you want."

Knud Hermansen, PLS, PE, PhD, Esq



6

Definitions (continued):

Morals:

- What you should aspire to do
- Generally, the basis for our ethics
- They dictate how we behave
- "1. Of or relating to principles of right and wrong / 2. Conforming to a standard of right behavior" -Webster's

7

Definitions (continued):

"The surveyor does have moral obligations to the public and among them is duty to never subtract from the rights of adjoining. Every boundary survey for a client establishes the boundary of an adjoiner"

Curtis Brown

8

Definitions (continued):

Code of Conduct:

- What you are required to do
- A set of rules established by ourselves, our employer, our profession and/or legislation
- A list of guidelines which supports the concept of public trust

9

Definitions (continued):

Accountability:

- From Black’s Law: Responsible; answerable
- From Webster’s: Answerable, responsible

Competency:

- “The mental ability to understand problems and make decisions” – Black’s Law

10

Definitions (continued):

Negligence:

- “1. The failure to exercise the standard of care that a reasonably prudent person would have exercised in a similar situation; any conduct that falls below the legal standard established to protect others against unreasonable risk of harm, except for conduct that is intentionally, wantonly, or willfully disregarding of others’ rights ...”
From Black’s Law:

11

Definitions (continued):

Shall/Should Not/May/Should:

- Shall / Shall Not
Definitive action is required
- May
Optional action / permission
- Should
Suggestive

12

Definitions (continued):

White Lie:

- "A lie about a small or unimportant matter that someone tells to avoid hurting another person." – Webster's

Integrity

- A firm adherence to a code or set of principles; an unimpaired condition

13

Definitions (continued):

Professional

- Criteria includes: higher education, credential from recognized entity, license to practice
- Someone else needs to determine if you are a professional, the title cannot be gained by yourself or be self-appointed

14

Definitions (continued):

"To be a successful professional surveyor, one must have more than a narrow technical education. Technical education has to do with things. Employees at a lower professional scale deal with things, professionals deal with people, situations and ideas."

Evidence and Procedures for Boundary Location,
5th Edition; Robilard, Wilson & Brown

15

Definitions (continued):

“A professional is distinguished by certain characteristics including: Mastery of a particular intellectual skill, acquired by education and training; Acceptance of duties to society in addition to duties to clients and employers; An outlook that is essentially objective; and The rendering of personal service to a high standard of conduct and performance.” FIG

16

Codes of Ethics:

- How are they developed?
 - Personal Belief
 - Society Influence
 - Regulated
 - Adopted

17

Code of Ethics (continued):

- How are ethics learned?
- Our upbringing
 - Experiences in life, ie. “Life’s Lessons”
 - Observations of others
 - Formal education

18

Code of Ethics (continued):

- Why do we need ethics in our profession?
 - Good business, or is it?
 - Levels the playing field
 - Right thing to do
 - Supports our role in the public eye as a respected profession
 - Makes us feel good

19

Regulatory Codes and Adopted Ethics:

- What is the purpose of a code of professional conduct?
 - Protect the public
 - Protect our peers
 - Protect ourselves
 - Make business fair

20

Code of Ethics in Pennsylvania:

- Per the Act, it shall be unprofessional to:
- Act in a manner that is unprofessional for our client
 - What is acting unprofessionally?
 - Who gets to decide?

21

Code of Ethics in Pennsylvania:

- Per the Act, it shall be unprofessional to:
- Accept remuneration other than agreed upon with the client
 - Use a written contract
 - No hidden fees

22

Code of Ethics in Pennsylvania:

- Per the Act, it shall be unprofessional to:
- Falsely injure the reputation or business of another
 - Do not speak poorly of the work of others
 - Be honest and truthful

23

Code of Ethics in Pennsylvania:

- Per the Act, it shall be unprofessional to:
- Supplant another professional in obtaining work
 - Fair business practice
 - Stalk clients of others

24

Code of Ethics in Pennsylvania *(continued)*:

Per the Act, it shall be unprofessional to:

- Complete with another professional using unethical practices
 - Charge a reasonable fee
 - Undercut fees or 'low ball'
 - Use insider knowledge
 - Collusion with partners or sub-consultants

25

Code of Ethics in Pennsylvania *(continued)*:

Per the Act, it shall be unprofessional to:

- Review the work of another without their knowledge
 - Why did the client sever the relationship?
 - Did the client sever the relationship?
 - Call the other consultant
 - Do you want to be the next 'ex'?

26

Code of Ethics in Pennsylvania *(continued)*:

Per the Act, it shall be unprofessional to:

- Provide services without fair and just compensation
 - Charge an appropriate fee
 - Know the value of your work
 - Are you providing a service or a product?

27

Code of Ethics in Pennsylvania *(continued)*:

Per the Act, it shall be unprofessional to:

- Advertise in a self laudatory manner
 - “I am the best!”
 - “Nobody does it better than me”
 - “Best in the business”
- Let your work and reputation stand for themselves

28

Code of Ethics in Pennsylvania *(continued)*:

Per the Act, it shall be unprofessional to:

- Practice in any field with proficiency
 - Know what you are good at doing
 - It is OK to say, that is in not my area of expertise
 - Seek proper training and find a good mentor
 - Try new things, under someone’s guidance

29

Code of Ethics in Pennsylvania *(continued)*:

Per the Act, it shall be unprofessional to:

- Seal work that is not your own
 - If you were not in responsible charge, you should not seal the work
 - Can you defend all aspects of the work
 - Do you trust the work performed by others with feeding your family?

30

Code of Ethics in Pennsylvania *(continued)*:

Per the Act, it shall be unprofessional to:

- Allow your seal to be used by another without supervising the work
 - Your seal is your name and thereby your reputation
 - People under your responsible charge
 - Pre-sealed drawing files?

31

Code of Ethics in Pennsylvania *(continued)*:

Per the Act, it shall be unprofessional to:

- Assist someone else in violating the Act
 - You become just as unethical as the person performing the wrongful act
 - Maybe they do not know they are acting incorrectly
 - Professionals should 'police' their own ranks

32

NSPS Creed & Canons:

Per the Creed, members pledge to:

- Give the utmost in performance
- Participate in honest enterprises only
- Live and work to the highest standard of conduct
- Place service before profit

33

NSPS Creed & Canons (continued):

The Canons instruct surveyors to:

- 1) Refrain from conduct detrimental to the public
- 2) Abide by the rules of the jurisdiction
- 3) Accept work that they are competent in only
- 4) Work and communicate without bias

34

NSPS Creed & Canons (continued):

The Canons instruct surveyors to:

- 5) Maintain confidentiality
- 6) Advertise in a proper manner
- 7) Maintain professional integrity when dealing with other professionals

35

Regulatory Codes and Adopted Ethics:

– Other Examples:

- National Council of Engineering Exam (NCEES)
- National Society of Professional Engineers (NSPE)
- Others - Better Business Bureau, GIS Certification Institute, local Chamber of Commerce, civic organizations, etc...

36

Regulatory Codes and Adopted Ethics *(continued)*:

– Common themes of the sample codes

- Protect the safety, health and welfare of the public
- Act in a professional manner
- Do right by our clients
- Do not harm the rights of others
- Be a good example to others

37

Decision Making and Self Evaluation:

From Dr. Knud Hermansen, PLS, PE, PhD, Esq:

“Hermansen’s Tips for Ethical Behavior”

38

Decision Making and Self Evaluation – Hermansen’s Tips
(continued):

Don’t take on too much work

Don’t handle matters that are beyond your experience, skill, education, or training.

Communicate clearly and frequently with your employer and client.

39

Decision Making and Self Evaluation – Hermansen's Tips
(continued):

Establish a clear working arrangement with the terms evidenced in writing.

Always use caution in withdrawing or terminating services before contract completion.

When in doubt, ask.

40

Decision Making and Self Evaluation – Hermansen's Tips
(continued):

Know your client and the reason for the services sought.

Listen to your client and what they are saying.

Write down all relevant or important information as soon as possible to avoid mistaking, misunderstanding, or forgetting the message or information.

41

Decision Making and Self Evaluation – Hermansen's Tips
(continued):

Continue your education.

Only do business with good people.

Be consistently ethical, not just in church or at home.

42

Decision Making and Self Evaluation:

- If something is illegal, it is almost certainly unethical, but is something that is considered unethical always illegal?
- Would the decision you make your mother proud?
- Are you setting a good example for your children?
- Would your decision sound acceptable in the media?

43

Enforcement

- Who enforces ethics related complaints?
 - Pennsylvania Ethics Commission
 - Registration Board
- Who polices ethics related complaints?
 - Professional Society / Peers

44

Enforcement

- Most ethics cases never reach the court system, they are typically handled by licensing boards

45

Situational Ethics



46

References & Credits:

I cannot take full credit for the technical information in this presentation, it is a collection or research I have collected from a host of sources that include:

- [Black's Law](#) – Abridged 7th Edition
- *Workplace Ethics* - Developing Professionals, NYSAPLS Conference 2017
- *Ethics in Practice* – Knud Hermansen, PLS, PE, PhD, Esq.
- *Ethics for Land Surveyors* – Jeffery Lucas, PLS
- *Ethical Practices for Surveyors* – presentation by Lori Miller of Developing Professionals
- *7 Steps to Improve your Decision Making Process* – article by Dr. Katie Carpen, Southern New Hampshire University, March 28, 2019

47

References & Credits (cont.):

- *The Code of Ethics and the Law* – David Widmer, PLS
- *Comparative Ethics* – David Ingram, PLS
- *Making the Most of a reputation for ethical behavior* – Mark Zweig; CENews December 2011
- *Professional Ethics for the Surveyor* - John Matonich, PS
- [The Merriam Webster Dictionary](#)
- New York Association of Professional Land Surveyors' website

48



49



50
