

Key Note Lecture 2



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Proactive Steps to Effective Conduct of an Ethical Engineer

Since our childhood we have been exposed to philosophical or ethical cultures. As a student we had our school motto. Later as an engineer of a company or an organization, or as a member of a professional society, we have learned about the company motto or corporate philosophy. We thought we could act morally as a professional based on this motto or philosophy. However, we often encounter situations in which moral judgments are called for based on more concrete rules. Two engineers act similarly in professional technical routine works, often supported by written manuals, but not necessarily so in situations requiring moral judgments.

In terms of professional ethics, this motto is referred to as fundamental principles, or canons, which can be deduced from more general golden rules such as "Treat others only in ways that you're willing to be treated in the same situation." Interpretations of principles may differ from a person to another and a professional tends to act according to his own interpretation. Thus a unified standard is needed to guide a professional ethically.

For this purpose professional societies often adopt rules of practice, or guidelines, to the canons or principles. Some guidelines may contradict one another. Or chosen priorities may be disagreeable to some members of the group. To overcome these difficulties, a society or its members should exchange their views often and look for a better solution if not the best; sometimes discussions on cases of illustrative professional conduct may be helpful to this process.

Canons or codes should provide a positive stimulus for an ethical conduct. They also present a positive image to the public of an ethically committed profession. Often an ethics code is written in a negative tone, such as *'Thou shalt not...'*, but these negative rules do not produce positive effects. To provide positive motivations, active or 'proactive' approaches are recommended. A proactive action may be defined as controlling a situation by causing something to happen rather than waiting to respond to it after it happens. Examples of proactive ethical approaches needed in engineering profession are discussed in the lecture, and an exercise problem is given to the student attendees.

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