

Conflict Resolution



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One of the most difficult decisions we have to make in the engineering/surveying workplace is how to resolve conflicts with fellow licensees if we discover potential problems with their work. Dealing with conflict is such a common occurrence that policies regarding conflict resolution should be openly discussed in the workplace and even taught at the university level.

The Golden Rule of Conflict Resolution

To follow the “Golden Rule” of conflict resolution generally means that you are willing to treat your fellow licensees as you would want to be treated. Since most people would rather be given the opportunity to correct an error before it became a danger to the public’s welfare or your reputation, that means you reach out to the other person. That can be a daunting task; but when you realize that the original licensee might have information that maybe you didn’t have, but actually need, the benefits of trying to contact the other individual as a first step far outweigh other options.

The Board does realize that the previous engineer/surveyor might not be receptive to such attempts at contact and may not respond as a professional or even at all. In those cases it might be necessary to file a complaint with the Board.

Licensees are usually the most knowledgeable about problems with engineering or surveying issues. In fact, most of the serious public protection complaints that this board has had to adjudicate have come from licensees following their professional responsibility of reporting. Board Rule 245: 15-9-3 (5) requires licensees having knowledge of a violation to provide the information to the Board. Even if that

complaint is anonymous (which this board does accept but does not encourage), the substance of a complaint does need to be brought to the Board’s attention.

A Cautionary Tale

I’ll bring this article to a close with a sad but true story that illustrates the importance of dealing with grossly negligent or incompetent practice. Several years ago, a remark was made to me by a fellow licensee in regards to the Board formally revoking a PE/LS license. For years, the revoked PE/LS had practiced subdivision design and surveying which unfortunately turned out to be areas outside of his competence. The work of this PE/LS was finally brought to the attention of this Board by a new licensee. A complaint was properly filed, due process of law was followed, and the board revoked the license. The remark that was made to me was from another longtime licensee practicing in the same geographical area of the state and was to the effect that “Wow, I was glad to see that that Board finally took action against that guy. He has been screwing subdivisions up for 30 years!”

This is 30 years of grossly incompetent work that seriously damaged the public that might have been avoided or at least mitigated, if the licensee(s) who discovered problems with this licensee’s work would have contacted the individual first and then taken whatever steps were necessary to ensure that incompetent practice was not allowed to continue.

If we are going to fulfill our professional obligation to the public welfare, we must make an effort to resolve conflicts that inevitably arise between professionals. The public needs licensees who are aware of a serious health, safety or property problems to speak up and do the right thing.