



Ethical Decisions and Actions: Choosing “The Harder Right” Seminar/Discussion

Curriculum Summary/Workbook Contents

Abstract

This seminar is part of the Hack Sain Leadership in Engineering Program sponsored by Dyson Institute. It provides a strategic context for approaching “ethical fitness,” using selected ethics codes, case studies, and law. It gives engineer business professionals perspective to positively impact themselves and the culture of their organizations in a lasting way. They are provided a set of portable assessments and tools to take action to internalize a strong ethical foundation in their own lives and those they serve.

Goals/Benefits

- Raise awareness of ethical dilemmas
- Strengthen personal will power toward exemplary conduct under stress
- Learn concepts that lead to better “right vs. wrong” and “right vs. right” choices
- Develop skills in moral reasoning
- Learn more about professional standards and navigating through Codes of Ethical Conduct
- Test your reasoning against Board of Ethical Review decisions
- Gain awareness of tools to assess your ethical foundation, evaluate the level of trust in an organization, and imbed ethical considerations in performance evaluations
- Fulfill all or a portion of continuing education requirement for engineering ethics education

Course Segments

Overview: The session will begin with an *overview* of ethics to set a context for discussion. Several lessons from *Professionalism Under Stress* by Dunn and Dyson are used to illustrate the relationship between being a professional and a strong ethical foundation.

Part One—Technical: Begins with a discussion of the NSPE Creed and Code, followed by a series of Board of Ethical Review case studies. The facts for each case are followed by questions and class discussion, then a review of the board’s decision. Board of Ethical Review cases are studied to enhance the students’ ability to understand the spirit of the code and navigate through it. A brief look at the ASCE code and selected state codes will illustrate the varied ways professional associations and states address ethical conduct to meet their respective needs. Two case studies are provided to illustrate appropriate ethical behavior under stress—William LeMessurier, the distinguished structural engineer who designed the innovative Citicorp tower in New York, and Roger Biosjoly, the engineer who courageously recommended and defended a no-launch decision on the Challenger space shuttle mission. An NIEE Case study, *Incident at Morales*, is recommended as a study in how engineers are immersed in high pressure ethical dilemmas.

Part Two—Individual/Leader: Addresses ethics in the other areas or roles of an attendee’s life—personal, when in a leadership position, with family, etc. The hypothesis is that one must build a strong ethical foundation in every setting in order to “do the harder right” in stressful situations. The Dyson Institute 7 step LEAD model for ethical decision-making is introduced as a tool for honing ethical reasoning.

Part Three—Implementation: Use of the LEAD Model is illustrated in Randy and Sarah case studies. Portable tools to assess one’s own ethical foundation, evaluate the level of trust in an organization, and imbed ethical considerations in performance evaluations are provided. The main provisions of the 1991 Federal Sentencing Guidelines and 2002 Sarbanes-Oxley Act set the stage for a description of “the Ethical Engineering Company.”

Appendices—Provide added useful references and a tool to stimulate discussion.