



Ready Reference C-8 Engineering Ethics

What are Ethics?

We often hear the word ethics in the corridors of CEAT. Employers want ethical employees, and professors want ethical students; but, what exactly are ethics? Furthermore, why are they so important? Ethics as defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary are “rules of behavior based on ideas about what is morally good and bad”. These rules are defined by a specific body e.g. a university, a company, etc. Ethics give a specific group a common footing from which the people associated with that group can make decisions.

Ethics vs Morals?

Alongside ethics, “morals” are often used as synonymous for ethics. Morals and ethics are very similar and for most individuals they overlap completely. However, the two words can differ greatly. Morals are an individual’s views of what is right and what is wrong. Morals are formed by the individual and can parallel society’s ethics, but don’t always.

Possible Compromising Situations

Situation:

You are working for a major company when there is a major leadership overhaul. The new leadership asks your department to reduce the prices of your products. Your supervisor shares the new reduced design with you, and upon your review you find several flaws that could cause fatalities to users. You share your concerns with your supervisor and they say it will be taken care of. Months later the product is being shipped for consumer consumption and you notice that the design has not changed. What do you do?

Ethical Response:

The number one point on the National Society of Professional Engineer’s Code of Ethics is that engineers should “Hold paramount the safety, health, and welfare of the public.” Therefore, as an engineer you have an obligation to ensure that the design flaw is rectified, even if the product is being shipped for sale.

Situation:

You have just accepted a position with the company you interned with over the summer, but it wasn’t your dream job.

You continue to interview for various positions, and are offered a job with your dream company.

What do you do?

Ethical Response:

As you have already accepted and filled out the paper work for the first job it was unethical of you to continue interviewing. Thus, accepting the second job is also unethical.

Your individual actions reflect on the university. By reneging an offer, you will offend the initial company, and cause that company to view all OSU graduates as having compromised ethics. There is no situation where reneging is acceptable.