

SAFETY WHISTLE

To the Editor: I'm a "six-time prevailing" whistleblower (and safety engineer, what else?) in the Department of Energy. My Web site, www.carsonversusdoe.com, tells the story in numbing and dismal detail.

I'm now the plaintiff in a First Amendment "freedom of speech" lawsuit in Federal Court. My case reduces to the issue, "Does a federally employed P.E. have freedom of speech in the federal workplace when the rules of professional conduct of the State Engineering Board require him to speak out?"

What sayeth ASME to that question?

I, as almost everyone reading this, will spend the greatest portion of my conscious hours in life preparing for or pursuing my career in my chosen profession of engineering. I believe one's work matters to God and that equates to a professional being trustworthy, ethical, competent, and accountable. My being a P.E. (as well as being an active member of ASME) logically follows.

*Joseph P. Carson, P.E.
Knoxville, Tenn.*

REGISTERED POSITIONS

To the Editor: I took the Fundamentals of Engineering exam seven years out of engineering school and passed it. Starting six months later, I took the Professional Engineering exam four times and failed with scores of 66, 65, and 65, before finally passing the exam on the fourth attempt. I took the exam because I wanted to prove to myself that I could do it, not because my employer would reward me for it. As an engineer for an investor-owned utility for 15 years, I was not required to have a P.E. license.

Licensing is an important part of any true profession. It shows that the person can put forth the effort and achieve a defined goal.

I also happen to be a licensed attorney in two states (and very grateful I passed the bar exam in each state on the first attempt), but no longer practice law. Now, I work as a manage-

ment consultant, and my engineering and legal licensing opens doors and establishes immediate credibility. While I still have to prove myself to new clients, my status as a licensed P.E. has provided me with this opportunity.

*George R. Powers, P.E.
Falls Church, Va.*

To the Editor: When I arrived in the United States in November 1986, about four years after graduating from college in Canada, I immediately registered to take the E.I.T. exam, which I passed in the spring of '87. I then registered for the P.E. exam and passed it in the spring of '88.

I had very little knowledge, at the time, of the engineering profession's level of prestige in the United States. Coming from a traditional French perspective, I had assumed with a certain naiveté that the prestige of the profession was high.

In France, engineers share equal prestige with doctors and lawyers, and they carry titles: "Ingénieur John Doe, Docteur John Doe, Maître John Doe."

I believe the reason for the high prestige in France is that it is extremely hard to get into an engineering school. The system is, therefore, exclusive and elitist, and it is human nature that anything elitist and exclusive acquires prestige.

By contrast, in the United States, it

is relatively easy to gain admission to an engineering school, and it should be no surprise that prestige suffers. The flip side of this is that France (and countries with similar systems) cheats itself out of a lot of talent, whereas the U.S. has a more democratic approach that allows people with a broad range of talents to enter the profession. What we lose in prestige, we gain in dynamism and creativity.

*Jacques Liautaud, P.E.
Alexandria, Va.*

To the Editor: Registration is a public commitment to professional standards, not a rite of passage or an award for passing a test. Furthermore, registration isn't group differentiation or a social accomplishment; it simply means that the registrant will be held personally accountable for practicing the profession in the public interest.

Registration isn't about status or exclusivity; it's about obligation. Anyone with doubts about this should read the registration law. There's nothing about technical wizardry, minimum salaries, or vanity license plates, but plenty about standards of conduct and consequences of negligent practice.

Engineering registrants are held to high standards of professional conduct governing public statements, business dealings, and fitness to practice. Among such standards is the duty to report breaches of professional conduct by others, an action normally considered unprofessional by corporate management. Moreover, the rules have teeth. Disciplinary actions taken against registrants are published in newsletters and on Web pages for all to see.

Engineering professionalism goes well beyond employability or the skills needed to cobble up "something that works." Equating professional behavior with widget creation is hopelessly shortsighted. Registration shows individual concern for the business of engineering and the associated societal obligations, not just mastery of a narrow range of technical crafts.

*Christopher Wright, P.E.
Minnetonka, Minn.*

Letters to the Editor

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