

In the context of the practice of engineering, conflict will inevitably arise between engineers, engineers and clients, engineers and contractors, and in relationships with other professionals or parties. Personal and professional conflict is an inevitable result of professional practice.

Most professional society codes of ethics, including the National Society of Professional Engineers (NSPE) Code of Ethics, contain at least one provision relating to this issue. In most cases, conflict can best be minimized by having a clear understanding up front of each party's duties and responsibilities (e.g., good contract documents), a clear scope of work, good communication, and mutual respect. NSPE Code of Ethics Section III.7., which states that "Engineers shall not attempt to injure, maliciously or falsely, directly or indirectly, the professional reputation, prospects, practice or employment of other engineers" is just one general example of how the engineering profession expects professional engineers to

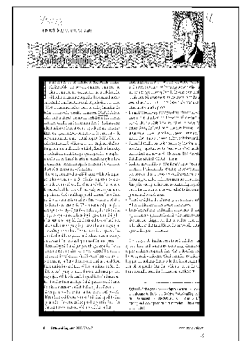
behave when confronted with conflict.

However, conflict will invariably arise. While it is important to know what not to do, it is also important to know how to deal with such conflict affirmatively. In the course of life and work, while there will inevitably be disagreements, the parties involved should engage with one another without resorting to statements or actions that go beyond what is considered to be reasonable. This fundamental principle is based upon a variety of premises, including the notions that each party is presumed to be acting in good faith, doing his or her best to accomplish the duties and task at hand, and that no individual or group is perfect or has a monopoly on all knowledge or wisdom. On that basis, it is expected that each side should be respectful, and at least make an attempt

to understand the views and opinions of the other party.

It seems logical that all groups working on a project have a common interest in making each other successful to increase their own ability to be successful. However, because of a variety of reasons, conflict will often arise, causing a breakdown of communications and trust, which sometimes hinders the ability of each group to move forward and make progress on a project. While it is clearly impossible to eliminate conflict altogether, there are steps that all parties should take to

minimize unnecessary conflict, including the following:



Attempt to resolve conflict at the lowest level possible. If you have a difference with an individual, speak to that person directly at the earliest possible point in time after

the event or circumstance which raised the conflict.

In seeking to resolve conflict, always try to communicate

either in person or by phone since written expressions (e-mail, notes, etc.) can often be ambiguous and relay unintended messages or perceptions. If the issue is not resolved at this step, bring the matter to the attention of the next level of authority within the individual's organization,

either in person or by phone.

E-mail has become a great way to share information with a large number of individuals. The sender of an e-mail message should, if possible, list all e-mail recipients openly. Before hitting the "send" button, be sure that the content of the e-mail is accurate and is not based upon unverified information. If in doubt, seek verification before sending. Successful conflict resolution occurs by listening to and

providing opportunities to meet each side's needs or expectations, and adequately addressing their interests so

that all are satisfied with the outcome.

Look for opportunities to recognize and support each other's efforts. Parties mutually benefit by the perception in the eyes of each other that they are working together toward the same goals and objectives to make a project successful. Recognize and appreciate that no relationship is perfect; and at the same time, make every effort to find common

ground in all possible areas.

Never lose sight of the ultimate goal: a successful project.

When conflicts are not resolved, everyone loses.

It may be possible to avoid conflict without actually resolving the underlying dispute by getting the parties to recognize that they disagree but that no further action needs to be taken at that time. Ideally, the parties will mutually

agree to disagree — reasonably.

Obviously, each situation needs to be handled on a case-by-case basis and sometimes extenuating circumstances require a different approach than what is described above. However, seeking quick and effective conflict resolution will help prevent problems that could lead to loss of a client, loss of a job, or possibly litigation, which is among the worst

forms of conflict resolution because everyone loses.

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