

PERSPECTIVE

Schizophrenia, Part Two: a Short Note

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In my last foray into ethical brain teasers (The Environmental Professional in Public Office: Putting Schizophrenia to Work for You, Issue 4(1) of *Environmental Practice*), I painted a picture of rampant schizophrenia within the ranks of the government regulatory corps, at one point in the day being expected to uphold the ethics of blind justice enforcing legislation over which the Environmental Professional had no control, and then minutes later being expected to be the consummate scientist.

Let me now introduce you to the multiple personalities of the consulting Environmental Professional. This person is typically well educated. The individual is typically a scientist within one of several possible disciplines. He may have an advanced degree which reflects an innate curiosity and passion for the chosen field of study. Then he gets a job. Worse, perhaps he opens his own business.

This person, who may have never had a course in business in his life, is now spending a significant portion of time marketing, advertising, billing, balancing books, managing employees and subcontractors, hiring, firing, dealing with federal and state employment regulations, purchasing equipment and office supplies, providing insurance and benefits to employees, planning office Christmas parties, making his clients feel good about the service, and negotiating with government agents. Maybe, if he's lucky, he gets to spend an hour or two a week dabbling

in his chosen field. Maybe it is significant that most consulting companies are run by people who don't have business degrees but that's another story.

And so the schizophrenia arises. The driving force in most businesses is profit. The ethics of profit (yes, business ethics do exist) tend to be interminably in conflict with the other ethical tracks which exist in the office. When marketing your consulting service you are often put in a position of competing with other consultants. The client may or may not be able to distinguish subtle levels of quality, but can easily discern differences in cost. The conflict is most common when firms promote or clients demand lump sum proposals. Within these confines, the proposal may have been prepared totally unrealistically just to win the contract. Staff are then required to work 55 hours a week in order to provide the service promised. There may even be times when staff are assigned tasks outside their area of expertise, just to get it done.

I must at this point publicly declare that I do not make these things up. I constantly get notes from people who complain of such things as the summer intern writing the Environmental Impact Statement while the professional was away at a conference. Conversely, engineering seals are known to be placed on documents prepared by others and never seen by the engineer. Perhaps the best one (I have a copy) is an environmental business document that declared that the project needed to be overseen by a board of dentists. Obviously, the document copied from was not properly edited.

The ethical challenge is not to the intern or the professional, but to the business manager. When promising a client a product, is it not ethical to make certain that the appropriate resources are

available in order to fulfill that promise? Where does the ethic of client promises conflict with the demands placed on employees? Where is the responsibility of making certain that engineers engineer, planners plan, and biologists evaluate ecological responses?

While we would like to think that the answer to the above question is that it is the responsibility of the boss, it is each professional's responsibility to monitor the ethical conduct within his own profession. When ethics are violated, it is often a third party who suffers. The office still runs, the deposits are still made, but the taxpayer or the client bears the burden of correcting bad service wrought by ethical blunders.

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