

Areas of Ethical Obligation For Land Surveyors

An Article By Landon Blake

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The right course of action in a question of professional ethics isn't always clear. One, a factor that clouds the right course of action is the obligations a professional land surveyor has to multiple parties. These parties include the surveyor's client, employer, employees, business partners, the general public, the surveyor licensing board, and profession. These parties have different priorities and concerns, which often conflict.

For example, The surveyor's employer may be concerned about controlling the labor cost on a project for a client, while the client is concerned about the quality of the survey work product delivered on the project, and the surveyor licensing board is concerned about requirements to file maps in the public record. The surveyor must find a way to properly balance these competing obligations.

Obligations To Your Client

Perhaps the most important obligation of a land surveyor is the one they owe to their client. This obligation is important for at least three reasons. The first is that this obligation can be legally enforced through the contract for services between the land surveyor and the client. The second is the clear duties society at large easily recognizes the land surveyor owes to the client. (This clear recognition of duties a surveyor owes to his client is one of the justifications for surveying

Article Summary

In this article on professional ethics for lands surveyors we consider different areas of ethical obligation for land surveyors. These include the following 6 areas of obligation:

- 1) Obligations To Your Client
- 2) Obligations To Your Employer
- 3) Obligations To Your Employees
- 4) Obligations To Your Business Partners
- 5) Obligations To Your Profession
- 6) Obligations To The Public.

licensing boards.)

The ethical obligations a land surveyor owes to his client includes the following:

- 1) Creation and delivery of a quality survey work product.
- 2) A good faith effort to deliver the survey work products on time.
- 3) A good faith effort to deliver the survey work products for the agreed price.
- 4) A good faith effort to fully execute the agreed upon scope-of-services.
- 5) Clear and regular communication with the client. (This is especially important when encountering unexpected problems that may impact the ability of the surveyor to complete the four items listed above.)
- 6) The application of the land surveyor's expertise to accurately communicate risk when the client is making decisions based on the surveyor's work or advice.

Obligations to Your Employer

The second most easily recognized obligation a land surveyor has is the one owed to his employer. (Although this obligation to an employer is easily recognized, it isn't as important as the land surveyor's obligation to the

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public. This obligation to the public is harder for the common person to understand. We talk more about the land surveyor's obligation to the public below.)

Although most surveyors don't have a contract or other legal document outlining their duties to their employer, the legal system in the United States recognizes obligations of employees to their employer. Also, land surveyors may owe additional duties to their employers because of their status as licensed professionals.

The ethical obligations a land surveyor owes to his employer includes the following:

- 1) The performance of diligent and thorough work.
- 2) Attention to detail.
- 3) Honesty about her skills and competence. (This is especially important when the employer is deciding how to assign tasks or is making decisions about what type of work to pursue.)
- 4) Making a good faith effort to bring assigned projects in on budget and on schedule.
- 5) Communicating potential risks in a project (for the employer and for the client).
- 6) Explaining the requirements of the law (as it relates to land surveying) to a non-surveyor employer.

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7) Making reasonable efforts to protect the organization's interests. (For example: Not sharing confidential information about the organization's strategy, resources, methods or employees that would result in harm to the organization.)

Obligations to Your Employees

Land surveyors often supervise some technical employees. This can include land surveyors in training, drafters, and field crews. A land surveyor that supervises other employees has an extra set of ethical obligations. These obligations primarily deal with the land surveyor's treatment of the people working under her direction and care. These obligations are especially important for land surveyors that own or control business.

The ethical obligations a land surveyor owes to his employees include the following:

- 1) Only asking an employee to perform work in an area of competence, and for which they have been adequately trained.
- 2) Providing an appropriate amount of supervision as tasks are performed.
- 3) Providing an appropriate amount of review for survey work products prepared by her team.
- 4) Providing fair compensation. (This includes paying

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prevailing wages and overtime when required. It also includes not abusing salaried team members by asking them to work a large number of hours for which they are not compensated.)

- 5) Making sure team members (especially field crews) have the equipment and training to work safely.
- 6) Making sure team members aren't asked by anyone to be dishonest or perform tasks that are illegal.
- 7) Providing team members with honest assessments about workload, professional development, and opportunities for advancement.
- 8) Providing training and mentoring when requested.

Obligations To Your Business Partners

Land surveyors in both public and private practice regularly engage with business partners. These partners could be fellow surveyors, or they could be other professionals like land attorneys or land title specialists. The land surveyor must consider a special set of ethical obligations when dealing with his business partners.

The ethical obligations a land surveyor owes to his business partners includes the following:

- 1) The provision of a fair contract with reasonable terms. (The land surveyor shouldn't ask a business partner to sign a contract she wouldn't sign herself.)

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- 2) An honest assessment of the obligations, risks, and rewards of any business opportunities.
- 3) Fair and appropriate sharing of work to all members of a business team or joint venture.
- 4) Honest ownership of responsibility for problems on a project.
- 5) Prompt payment for work performed.

Obligations To Your Profession

The land surveyor should feel ethical obligations to the profession she claims. The fulfillment of these obligations strengthens the profession from which she benefits, and from which, future land surveyors will benefit.

The ethical obligations a land surveyor owes to her profession include the following:

- 1) Avoiding actions or behavior, both inside of the business and outside, that would damage the reputation of the profession or destroy the public's trust in the profession.
- 2) Not condoning the illegal or unethical behavior of fellow land surveyors.
- 3) Mentoring and training of future land surveyors.

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- 4) Participation in and support of professional associations that often tackle problems impacting land surveyors. (For example: Encouraging preservation of monuments during construction projects.)
- 5) Providing help and support to fellow professionals and their families in a time of hardship or crises.

Obligations to the Public

A land surveyor's obligations to the public are the most important obligations he has. This is especially true because of the special trust our society, our legal system, and other professionals give to land surveyors. It is critical that the land surveyor not puts the selfish interests of himself or his employer above the welfare and safety of the public.

The ethical obligations a land surveyor owes to the public include the following:

- 1) A good faith effort to perform his tasks in a diligent and careful manner, by the principles and methods she believes are the current best practice. (This requires an effort to be familiar with new technology, new methods of land surveying, and new laws or regulations that impact the profession.
- 2) A good faith effort to mark property boundaries in a manner that treats all owners that share those boundaries in a fair way.

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3) A good faith effort to make sure his role in construction projects doesn't compromise safety.