Report on a Case by the Board of Ethical Review

Case No. 61-6

Subject:
Recognition of Co-authors
Canon 20-Canons of Ethics; Rule 31- Rules of Professional Conduct; Rule 32-Rules of Professional Conduct.

Facts:
A technical paper based upon extensive research was selected as the best in its field by an engineering society. Awards were made to two of the three co-authors of the paper at a national meeting of the engineering society, but the senior author was not given an award under a rule of the society which restricts its awards to those who are members at the time a paper is submitted. The nonmember co-author was not given credit at the award presentation.

Questions:
1. Was it unethical for the society not to give an award to one of the co-authors?

2. What was the obligation of the society officers and award recipients to give credit to the nonmember co-author?

References:
Canons of Ethics-Canon 20- "He will take care that credit for engineering work is given to those to whom credit is properly due." Rules of Professional Conduct-Rule 31- "Whenever possible, he will name the person or persons who may be individually responsible for designs, inventions, writings, or other accomplishments." Rule 32-"He will not accept by voice or silence, credit rightfully due another engineer."

Discussion:
The Canons of Ethics and Rules of Professional Conduct apply only to individual engineers, not to organizations, as noted in previous opinions of this Board (Case No. 60-4). Organizations operate only through individuals, however, and we must consider whether the individuals who made the decision in this situation were in violation of the Canons or Rules. Apparently the awards were made under the prescribed policies of the society which limited the receipt of an award to its members as of the date of submission of a paper. It is outside the purview of this Board to consider whether such a policy is sound or desirable. The facts do not indicate that the name of the nonmember co-author was omitted from the paper, as published, or read at the meeting. If his name was omitted from the paper because of his non-membership in the society it would constitute a direct violation of Canon 20 and Rule 31. Such action would also constitute a violation of Rule 32, because the thrust of that Rule is that an engineer may not deny credit rightfully belonging to another engineer. We believe it would also be incumbent upon the co-authors receiving the award to make it clear in any published or oral

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statements regarding it that the other engineer was a co-author and entitled to recognition for his contribution.

Conclusions:

1. Except as their actions are determined by individual engineers, the Canons and Rules are not applicable to societies.

2. The engineers representing the society making the award, and the co-authors who received the award, were ethically obligated to publicly recognize that another engineer was a co-author of the paper and entitled to recognition as such.

Board of Ethical Review L. R. DURKEE, P. E. PHIL T. ELLIOTT, P. E. A. C. KIRKWOOD, P. E. MARVIN C. NICHOLS, P. E. EZRA K. NICHOLSON, P. E. PIERCE G. ELLIS, P. E., Chairman

Note: Member W. S. Nelson did not participate in the consideration or decision of this opinion.

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