Report on a Case by the Board of Ethical Review

Case No. 62-17

Name of Firm

Facts:
An engineer establishes an office for private practice and rather than using his own name to identify the firm gives it a generic name, "Build That Bridge Engineering Company."

Question:
Is the choice of a firm name subject to any limitations under the Canons of Ethics?

References:
Canons of Ethics-Canon 2- "He will not advertise his work or merit in a self-laudatory manner and he will avoid all conduct or practice likely to discredit or do injury to the dignity and honor of his profession."

Canon 19- "The engineer will endeavor to protect the engineering profession collectively and individually from misrepresentation and misunderstanding."

Discussion:
The use of generic names for engineering firms is well-established and in and of itself is not prohibited by the Canons. An engineer has wide latitude in selecting such a name, but he may not exceed the limits of propriety and dignity. This line may be difficult to draw in some cases, but we have no difficulty in finding that the engineer has exceeded the limits in this case. The name selected has a ring of sensationalism and commercialism.

It is not in keeping with either dignity or honor for a professional practice and it thereby exposes the entire profession to misunderstanding, or even ridicule. It would be profitless to attempt to stipulate the exact limit on the choice of a generic name for an engineering practice, but a studied reference to the Canons will indicate that the name must not be "slangy" or play upon words in such a fashion that it constitutes an inference that the firm has some "magic" quality in a particular branch or field of engineering. The choice of a name should be approached conservatively and with the thought that it must be dignified.

Conclusion:
A generic name for an engineering firm is limited by the Canons of Ethics to one which is dignified and does not have a quality of sensationalism or commercialism. The name, "Build That Bridge Engineering Company" is offensive to the Canons.

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