Report on a Case by the Board of Ethical Review

Case No. 75-11

Plagiarism

Facts:
Engineer A performed certain research and then prepared a paper on an engineering subject based on that research which was duly published in an engineering magazine under his byline. Subsequently, an article on the same subject under the name of Engineer B appeared in another engineering magazine. A substantial portion of the text of Engineer B's article was identical word-for-word with the article authored by Engineer A. Engineer A contacted Engineer B and requested an explanation. Engineer B replied that he had submitted with his article a list of six references, one of which identified the article by Engineer A, but that the list of references had been inadvertently omitted by the editor. He offered his apology to Engineer A for the mishap because his reference credit was not published as intended.

Question:
Did Engineer B act ethically in his procedure as described?

References:
Code of Ethics–Section 14 – "The Engineer will give credit for engineering work to those to whom credit is due, and will recognize the proprietary interests of others."

Section 14(a) – "Whenever possible, he will name the person or persons who may be individually responsible for designs, inventions, writings, or other accomplishments."

Discussion:
We normally do not take on cases in which the issue resolves itself by terms of the code language. The case before us is one in which the answer is beyond doubt under the clear mandate of §14 of the code, but1 we have made an exception in accepting the case because we have not previously had the opportunity to discuss the rights and ethical duties of engineers in preparing articles based on the work of others.

It has been observed that quotation from many sources is research and quotation from a single or limited number of sources is plagiarism. But in either event it is contemplated that the author will identify and give credit to his sources single or many. In the facts before us there is no question but that Engineer B used extensive portions of the work and writing of Engineer A without permission and without proper credit. This is a clear case of plagiarism and directly offensive to §14 and §14(a) of the code.

The more important educational point in this case, however, is the apparent belief of Engineer B that he would have been without fault if the list of references had been published at the end of his article. This belief represents a lack of understanding of the

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requirements of the code. Merely listing the work of Engineer A in a list of references to various articles only tells the reader that Engineer B had consulted and read those cited articles of other authors. It in no way tells the reader that a large portion of his text is copied from the work of another.

As a general educational comment for the guidance of others in preparing articles, it is normal procedure to use relatively brief portions of the works of others, with appropriate credit in the text itself or by footnote. If extensive portions of the work of others are to be utilized it is ethically required that permission be obtained from the original author (and copyright holder if the work is copyrighted) as well as citing the original source. Under the terms of §§14 and 14(a) writings are no less "proprietary interests" than physical items, such as drawings or specifications. The apology offered by Engineer B is a welcome and desirable indication of his regret, but does not adequately excuse his apparent ignorance of the requirements of the code.

Conclusion:*
Engineer B did not act ethically in the procedure as described.

***Note**–This opinion is based on data submitted to the Board of Ethical Review and does not necessarily represent all of the pertinent facts when applied to a specific case. This opinion is for educational purposes only and should not be construed as expressing any opinion on the ethics of specific individuals. This opinion may be reprinted without further permission, provided that this statement is included before or after the text of the case.

Board of Ethical Review: William J. Deevy, P.E.; William R. Gibbs, P.E.; Joseph N. Littlefield, P.E.; Donald C. Peters, P.E.; James F. Shivler, Jr.; Louis W. Sprandel, P.E.; Robert E. Stiemke, P.E., chairman

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