



## Ethics

*'Never let your sense of morals get in the way of doing what's right' – Isaac Asimov*

One of the characteristic features of a professional society is that its members are governed by a code of professional ethics. The term 'ethics' is derived from the Greek word *ethos*, meaning 'character'. Ethics and morals both relate to 'right' and 'wrong' conduct. 'Morals' often refers to an individual's own principles or habits that provide a personal compass regarding right and wrong conduct. 'Ethics' refers to the rules of conduct that are provided by an external source within a particular context, and can be considered a social system or a framework for acceptable behaviour.

An often-quoted example in the field of law illustrates how professional ethics might apparently conflict with personal morals. A lawyer's morals may tell him/her that murder is reprehensible and that murderers should be punished, but professional ethics require a lawyer to defend a client to the best of his/her abilities, even if the client is guilty. There are good reasons for this ethical requirement, as it helps to build a fair society. Ethics is intended to be practical, and is conceived as shared principles promoting fairness in social and business interactions. However, ethical decisions should recognize the context within which they are set, and must recognize that duties can be ranked in a hierarchy (for example, to stop at an accident to render assistance takes precedence over the promise of meeting for lunch).

*'The word "good" has many meanings. For example, if a man were to shoot his grandmother at a range of five hundred yards, I should call him a good shot, but not necessarily a good man.'* – G.K. Chesterton

*'Right is right, and wrong is wrong, and a body ain't got no business doing wrong when he ain't ignorant and knows better.'* – Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

In South African society in 2016, we are acutely aware of the prevalence of dishonesty and corrupt business dealings around us. The need for integrity in business and politics has never been greater. I would like to live in a world where we all work towards the welfare, safety, and health of all people, and care for our environment.

*'Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.'* – Aristotle

*'Ethics are more important than laws.'* – Wynton Marsalis

When people sign up for membership of a professional society such as the SAIMM, it is expected that they will always conduct themselves in a professional manner, and act with integrity and sincerity in all of their work. The SAIMM's Code of Professional Conduct appears as By-law H in the 'Constitution and By-Laws' document in the 'About SAIMM' section of our website, and is worth reading as a reminder about our professional obligations.

In essence, the code of professional conduct requires Members to eschew fraudulent or dishonest practices, not to conceal unethical acts, and to avoid working with others who behave unprofessionally. A professional should work to the highest possible standards, stay up-to-date with their field, and should undertake only work that he or she is trained for. Conflicts of interest should be avoided, and financial dealings should be open and fair, with no bribery. Honesty and confidentiality are expected. Professional behaviour involves no misrepresentation in advertising or unfair criticism of the work of others.

Any transgressions of this code are dealt with in terms of our 'Complaints and Disciplinary Procedure' (also on the website) by the Complaints Committee, which gathers facts, and screens complaints to ensure that they are neither frivolous nor malicious, before assessment by the Ethics Committee. The assessment is handled in a firm, fair, and confidential way, and can result in a warning, a reprimand, a requirement for further training, or even suspension, expulsion, or referral to statutory bodies.

*'Live so that when your children think of fairness and integrity, they think of you.'* – H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

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