



# Are Your Ethics For Sale?

Maintaining a culture of integrity in good times and bad

BY BRAD YARBROUGH

In 1965, a musical group called The Byrds released the hit song, "Turn, Turn, Turn," and its lyrics underscored the reality of a time and season for everything. An oft quoted passage states, "For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to harvest." Today, this idea is applicable even within our own industry.

If news stories are accurate, we are headed into prosperous times. With a marked increase in infrastructure development, this will surely result in financial gains. In agrarian terms, it's harvest time! However, it seems seasons of economic abundance often present moral challenges.

Randy Pennington, an accomplished business consultant, highlighted this in an article titled, "Are Your Ethics for Sale Now That Times Are Good?" In it, he summarizes a published report by The Ethics Resource Center. Pennington

states, "Here's the part that caught my attention. The report suggests that individuals and organizations are more willing to commit ethical indiscretions as they feel more secure and the quest for profits outweighs the desire to do what's right. In essence, the willingness to do stupid, greedy stuff increases with increased profits, and the desire to do what's right increases when the economy makes it more difficult to succeed."

## The Quest for Profits

Our industry, like others, is subject to cyclical dynamics. We've struggled through certain seasons and enjoyed others. Sadly, I've witnessed unscrupulous conduct during the good times. One example comes to mind from many years ago. My company was growing and there were ample, diverse right of way projects nationwide. I discovered that on multiple occasions, an associate had billed three clients, each for eight hours on the same workday. Of

course, double or triple billing is unethical and I quickly refunded the excess payments my company had received. The dishonesty of this individual was perplexing. After all, the company revenues were healthy and it was exciting to be blessed with a good harvest of work.

Interestingly, this individual had a favorite saying: "Make hay while the sun shines." It originally alluded to the changing circumstances that farmers face. Today, it means taking advantage of the opportunity to do something while the conditions are favorable. But, it is critically important for companies and individuals to make hay the right way.

## Getting It Right

This is precisely why New Mexico State University conducted a training event for its employees last month labeled *Practicing Ethics at the Workplace: Good Times or Bad, We All Need to Practice It!*



Brad Yarbrough is the Owner and CEO of Pilgrim Land Services, a right of way services company in Oklahoma City. With over 35 years experience in oil and gas, he has clients nationwide and an extensive network of landmen and agents.

The emphasis was on the need, especially in changing times, to create and maintain an organizational culture of integrity, cooperation and care of others.

The practice of good ethics can be achieved even while pursuing corporate profitability. Individuals can succeed—even attain more success—while still behaving in the most ethical manner possible. It is critically important that we not put our ethics “up for sale” during times of abundance. In fact, with the prospects of plentiful projects, every member of our association ought to redouble efforts to define and apply the highest ethical standards.

Lawrence Kohlberg, an American psychologist who wrote about the stages of moral development, is renowned for his

contribution to the subject of ethics. He helped prove that there is a valuable and measurable result for establishing codes of ethics. Moreover, he proved that ethics can be taught. Perhaps this is an opportune time for companies across our industry to give priority to the subject of ethics. The benefits of conducting an ethics training event could be enormous.

Kohlberg said, “Professional societies can also play a role in ethics training and discussion.” I know this is true, and I am grateful that the IRWA takes its role seriously...whether times are good or bad. And as the Association unveils its new “Elevating Your Ethical Awareness” course this year, I am proud to belong to an organization that firmly believes that ethics is the anchor of our profession. ★

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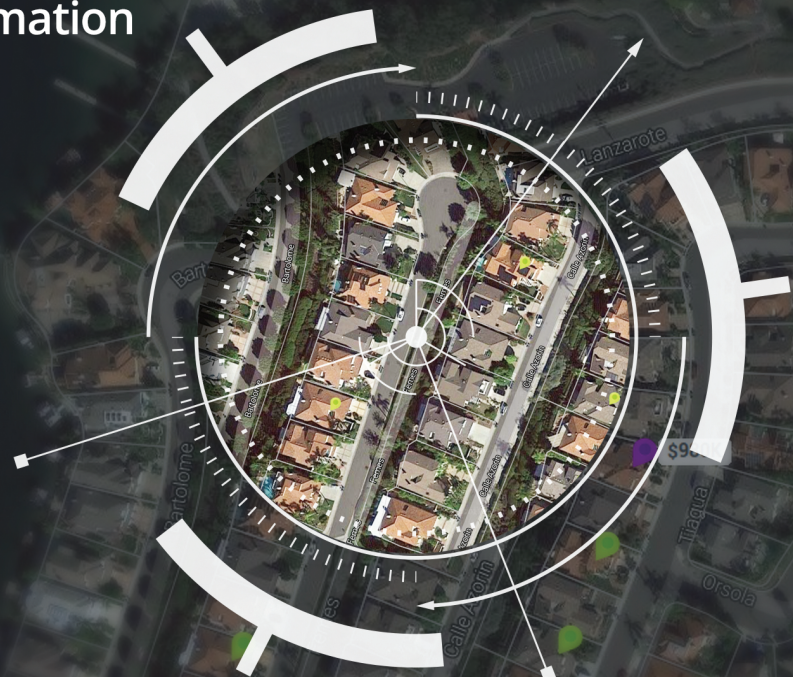
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