

accepting responsibility toward the other members of the profession as well as toward the public. We would hope that a new professional reads and accepts a statement of shared beliefs of moral practice.

The Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) is one of the major professional organizations in the field of Computer Science, as is the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE). Could we make the taking of the oath of the code of ethics of the ACM, IEEE, or the American Library Association (ALA) an integral part of becoming a computer and information professional?

The codes are useful on many levels, especially in the computer and information fields. People who belong to an organization or society such as the ALA or the ACM, differentiate themselves from "fly-by-night," possibly less skilled and less responsible people. Each professional wants the profession to be respected and trusted, and in order to gain and keep that respect, each person attempts to abide by the code.

In addition, the well-designed code of ethics will help to educate clients and the community about what can reasonably be expected from information professionals and software and hardware engineers and from their products.³² Of course, the profession would hope that the code of ethics would keep other members of the society from taking shortcuts and being unethical, thus lowering the worth and esteem of the profession.

The Software Engineering Code of Ethics and Professional Practice emerged from years of effort put forth by computer workers and businesses people internationally. The long form is in the appendix, but the short version of the code summarizes the aspirations of the profession, including trainees, and students.

Here is the short form of the Software Engineering Code of Ethics and Professional Practice.³³ The longer version is in the appendices.

3.10.1 Software Engineering Code of Ethics and Professional Practice

Software engineers shall commit themselves to making the analysis, specification, design, development, testing and maintenance of software a beneficial and respected profession. In accordance with their commitment to the health, safety and welfare of the public, software engineers shall adhere to the following Eight Principles:

1. PUBLIC - Software engineers shall act consistently with the public interest.
2. CLIENT AND EMPLOYER - Software engineers shall act in a manner that is in the best interests of their client and employer and that is consistent with the public interest.
3. PRODUCT - Software engineers shall ensure that their products and related modifications meet the highest professional standards possible.

4. JUDGMENT - Software engineers shall maintain integrity and independence in their professional judgment.
5. MANAGEMENT - Software engineering managers and leaders shall subscribe to and promote an ethical approach to the management of software development and maintenance.
6. PROFESSION - Software engineers shall advance the integrity and reputation of the profession consistent with the public interest.
7. COLLEAGUES - Software engineers shall be fair to and supportive of their colleagues.
8. SELF - Software engineers shall participate in lifelong learning regarding the practice of their profession and promote an ethical approach to the practice of the profession.

As information professionals as well as computer specialists, we need to be aware of an information professional's code of ethics, such as this one:

3.10.2 American Library Association Code of Ethics:³⁴

- I. We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests.
- II. We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.
- III. We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted.
- IV. We respect intellectual property rights and advocate balance between the interests of information users and rights holders.
- V. We treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness, and good faith, and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of our institutions.
- VI. We do not advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions.
- VII. We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources.
- VIII. We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.

Later in this book, we will take an in-depth look at computer and information issues, and we can draw on these and other codes as we decide how we should act.

Many firms put their codes online. Go to a company's home page and discover how easy or difficult it is to locate the company's code of ethics.

3.11 Misuse of codes of ethics

The Web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together.

Shakespeare

One is happy as a result of one's own efforts, once one knows the necessary ingredients of happiness: Simple tastes, a certain degree of courage, self-denial to a point, love of work, and above all, a clear conscience.

George Sand

The Enron collapse gave us so much irony that we hardly could choose the juiciest scandal. Irony dripped from each morsel, including the online auction of, yes, the famously ignored Enron *Code of Ethics*. Upon joining the company, each Enron employee received a copy of the 64-page booklet, along with an introductory letter from chairman Kenneth Lay. As the world saw, the document did little to stem the falsification and selfishness that led to financial disaster. The Enron board suspended its code of ethics twice, knowingly ignoring the company standards of conduct.

Violating a code of ethics is not the same as making an honest mistake. Error is an integral part of any enterprise, thus errors should be promptly acknowledged and corrected when they are detected. A code of ethics should not be a "what-can-we-get-away-with" code. It should never be twisted into loopholes and technicalities that would allow a person to be formally correct while ethically wrong. Blindly following a code without thinking is less than ideal, just as following laws without thinking is.

Professional codes of ethics are not complete, consistent and correct for all situations. Such codes are typically voluntary, with little formal monitoring and only slight penalties for violations. Codes of ethics suffer the same fundamental problem as ethical theories, in that goodness cannot be defined through a legalistic enumeration of shalls, do's, and don'ts.³⁵ We can only recommend. In law, violations of codes of ethics can lead to disbarment, but in computer and information science, no formal profession exists to handle such an event.

In order to make a code of ethics work, the code must be a living document, not a booklet stored in drawers. A company dedicated to instilling