

In My Opinion...

Dean Says:

“Pragmatist or Ideologue?”



Charlene Kidder

During a Presidential Election year the media abounds with many very heated discussions about the merits of each candidate. Sometimes the discussion borders on strident. I don't know about you, but I find it quite annoying to have a program host ask a particular guest a question and then interrupt that guest in a loud voice as the guest tries to answer the question. It borders on rude. No, it is rude. And, those who research what draws an American audience to a particular program tell us that this rudeness has become an important part of the “audience draw.”

People like to watch combative programs for the same reason they love so-called professional wrestling and boxing. They like a good fight. They want a good fight. Perhaps they work out the frustration of their own pathetic lives by watching people with opposing views tear each other apart, with words, if not with fists.

In politics, two camps seem to prevail: the pragmatists and the ideologues. The pragmatists want to get the job done. They want to accomplish the task at hand.

They don't care as much about principles. They are men and women of action!

On the other hand, the ideologues care more about holding to principles rather than getting a particular job done. Right thinking has a greater importance to them than accomplishment. Oh, they want to get things done, but not at the expense of their values.

In fire protection, every one of us who stakes a claim in this profession has to balance wisely between being a pragmatist and ideologue. You see we have to accomplish the objective. But, we also have to hold to a carefully chosen set of values, or what we accomplish will not have lasting effectiveness.

A building needs a fire alarm system. So, we just put one in place. Or do we? No, we have to perform the steps necessary to ensure the long-term effectiveness of that fire alarm system. At the same time, we cannot become so bogged down with rules and regulations that we never accomplish the task at hand.



As a result, we walk a tightrope, balancing the practical against the ideal. Only then can we serve the customer while we hold up a standard of righteousness that will encourage others to do the same.

But how? How do we do this? Here's a suggestion. Create a master plan that will get the job done while honoring your fire protection values, then execute that plan on every job. For example, here are

eight steps to not only help get the job done, but also done “right”:

1. System needs and features analysis.
2. System design.
3. System design review.
4. System installation.
5. System installation verification and acceptance testing.
6. System user training.
7. System maintenance and reacceptance testing.
8. System periodic testing.

Complying with codes and standards guards the pathway through each of these steps. Getting the job done promptly and in a cost effective manner seems to flow out of each of these steps. These eight steps can help us navigate our way across the tightrope, balancing the pragmatist and the ideologue in each of us.

You do not need to sacrifice your hard-won values, as one who believes in code-complying fire alarm systems, in order to meet the needs of those you serve. You can perform your tasks properly and in a code-complying manner. And, you can get the job done in the most cost-effective and timely fashion.

Begin by making a decision to “know what you believe.” Sounds silly, does it? But, how can you accomplish a task in the most value-added way if you don't set some boundaries for your actions based on principles you hold dear? If you decide that complying with codes and standards offers the best way to provide a cost-effective fire alarm system that will perform properly when called upon to do so, then you have begun to “know what you believe.” If you decide that meeting national requirements for the specification, design, installation, testing, maintenance, and use of a fire alarm system will help ensure the long-term operational integrity of that system, you have added another layer of certainty to the process of knowing what you believe.

Then, take your fire protection values and beliefs and put them into practice on every job. If you do, you will be well on your way to walking that tightrope with balance, and with “style,” too. □

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