



**In my opinion...**

**DEAN SAYS:**

## **The Marks of Professionalism, Part II— Justice**

What are those qualities that clearly make one individual appear professional when compared to his or her peers?

We began last issue with a discussion of the quality of "compassion" as one of the marks of a professional. This time I want to suggest that among those key items which point to professionalism is a strong sense of justice. Lest there be some confusion on this point, let me hasten to explain that by the phrase "a strong sense of justice," I am referring to a quality that is somewhat different than a sense of fairness or fair play. While I agree that fairness is one of the qualities that marks a professional, by a strong sense of justice I am referring to an attitude that "right" must always be vindicated and "wrong" must always be punished.

Do you remember an event in New York City many years ago when a young lady by the name of Kitty Genovese was stabbed to death in the entrance to her apartment building in the plain view of her neighbors. They heard her screams for help. Some of them even saw the man who stalked and killed her. When asked why they had stood by and done

nothing, several of her neighbors replied, "We didn't want to get involved."

"*We didn't want to get involved.*" I cannot help but reflect on that answer in light of what Cain said to God during their conversation recorded in the Bible. God said, "Where is your brother, Abel?" Cain replied, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Ironically, as you no doubt recall, Cain, in a fit of jealousy, had already killed his brother.

Getting involved. A person with a strong sense of justice simply cannot help getting involved. He or she is forced to take some action whenever a situation arises where "wrong" seems to be on the verge of triumphing.

During one recent lunch, as my good friend Jerry Polisky and I sat in the McDonald's parking lot we saw two young people hanging around a *USA Today* newspaper box across the street.

"Look at those two," Jerry remarked. "What do you suppose they're up to?"

"Probably waiting to panhandle," I replied with my usual cynical distrust.

"Hey, look," he said. "They're stealing from the box." And sure enough, with a very smug look on her face, the girl turned and handed the boy a fist-full of coins. In a flash he put them in his jacket pocket and the two double-timed it down the street.

I honked the horn. Jerry opened his door and yelled at them.

"Wait a minute," Jerry exclaimed. "Look at this guy."

A tall man in a long cashmere coat

had suddenly jumped out of a car across the way and was running after the errant pair. They spotted him and started to run. His long stride was just too much for them. He grabbed them, they struggled. A shower of coins hit the pavement. The boy and girl looked for just a second or two at the spilled coins and then tore off down the sidewalk.

"Cashmere coat" bent over and painstakingly retrieved every single nickel, dime and quarter. He walked back to the paper box and for several minutes stood there depositing every coin back in the box. He brushed his hands together when he finished and strode back to his car.

Now I don't know anything about this noontime hero. But I would guess that if we were to examine his life closely, we would find that he carries the marks of a professional. You see in those few moments of action and reaction he displayed a strong sense of justice. He was going to do his part to make certain that "right" prevailed and "wrong" was punished.

In our fire and burglary alarm industry, how many of us when we prepare a set of specifications ask for exactly what is needed to provide proper and adequate protection—no more and no less? When we as Authorities Having Jurisdiction review a set of drawings, how often do we resolve to make certain every detail is properly covered without adding some particular pet item that is a "nice to have" rather than a "need to have?" A strong sense of justice can be a valued guideline as we deal with customers and with our peers. It is a quality worth cultivating in our lives. Just one more of those qualities that mark a professional.

Admittedly, there are times when those who do have this quality come across too harsh or too demanding. When that happens, perhaps it would be wise for those of us who are still cultivating that quality to try to understand the force that motivates their behavior. A strong sense of justice helps give those who bear the marks of a professional a mindset that they *are* their brothers' keepers. And frankly, that is a mindset to be admired. □

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