



**In my opinion...**

**DEAN SAYS:**

## ***The Marks of Professionalism, Part III—***

## ***Common Sense***

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

We began two issues ago with a discussion of the quality of "compassion" as one of the marks of a professional. Last issue, we discussed the quality of a strong sense of "justice." This time I want to suggest that among those key items which point to professionalism is an obvious application of "common sense."

"Now wait just a minute," I hear you respond. "How can common sense be a mark of a professional? You either have common sense or you don't."

I think I know what you're trying to say. In fact you remind me of the time nearly 25 years ago when on a very rainy night Fire Chief Bob Gilmore and I were standing at the front of the fire house looking out through the windows in the overhead door. Somehow the conversation turned to a discussion of the neighbors and the Chief remarked that the son of one particular neighbor was so stupid he didn't know enough to come in out of the rain. As if to magically verify that point, around the corner of the house

next door came the son in question, strolling slowly past our vantage point, clearly oblivious to the drenching downpour.

My coeditor, Wayne Moore, often remarks to seminar audiences that the reason why so much common sense is available is that so little of it is used. Whether this is true or not, if you think you've known a true professional who did not exhibit a clear ability to apply common sense to the problems of everyday life, I would beg to differ with you.

Trying to find a definition for common sense is not really such an easy task. The dictionary is only marginally helpful. Asking various people as to how they would define the term "common sense" yields no clearer a result.

I did recently stumble on a definition, however, that I believe truly captures the essence of this elusive, yet critical, quality of professionalism. The source of this definition was a letter of recommendation written by my niece Tara's summer employer. As part of her college intern program, "Tee-Tee" (as I call her—much to her chagrin) had worked for the New York State Department of Mental Health. In writing a letter back to the professor overseeing the internship program, the supervisor for whom Tara worked offered a glowing recommendation. One of the statements he made was that Tara continually showed good common sense. And then he went on to explain that encountering various situations requiring a decision

or some direct action, Tara always seemed to carefully consider the consequences before making a decision or taking action.

WOW! What a terrific description of common sense—considering the consequences of a decision or of a direct action before making that decision or taking that action. In other words, before I step out on the limb of a tree, I think about whether that limb will be able to hold my weight.

In more appropriate terms, before I select a particular component for an alarm system, I consider whether that component is suitable for the application. Before I decide to cut this corner or that one in either a system design, or in installing a system in accordance with a particular design, I consider the consequences.

I can think of a host of circumstances where I have wondered why a particular individual made this decision or took that action without seeming to have had a sensitivity to what might result from the decision or action. The sprinkler head omitted from the large closet where the hospital later decides to store a large quantity of plastic disposable medical supplies. The architect/engineer who opts to provide smoke detection only in the hallway of the board and care facility, because the code permits it and, anyways, the corridor detectors will detect the fire before it spreads beyond the room of origin. The purchaser of a fire alarm system who automatically selects the lowest bid without carefully studying the differences between the bids, looking for logical reasons why the price differential exists. And I'm certain you could add many other examples to this list.

The fact is that if every one of us aspired to being able to consistently apply common sense to solving the problems we face daily in our fire protection systems and burglary protection systems work, we would go a long way toward raising the overall level of professionalism in our industry.

How 'bout it? Are you willing to join me in considering the consequences *BEFORE* we make decisions or take action? □

**The Moore-Wilson  
SIGNALING  
REPORT**

**August/September 1990  
Page 12**