



In my opinion...

DEAN SAYS:

The Marks of Professionalism, Part I— Compassion

"Say what you want about women in the fire protection field, but she's a real professional!"

"You may not agree with him very often, and you may not like the way he looks, but that man is a true professional."

I agree with those I overheard at a recent meeting of the Society of Fire Protection Engineers. The two people they were talking about carry the marks of professionalism.

What are those marks? What are the qualities that make us "feel good" about the competency of one working in our chosen field of endeavor?

I think I have a few clues. In the next few issues, I want to share these with you, because I'm pretty certain that you and I should be aspiring in these directions on a regular basis.

Compassion. I've chosen one of the seemingly warm fuzzy qualities as the first. I guess I've done that because the popular press has lately been pushing a mind set of tough negotiation. In reading this literature I don't find any room for compassion, and I know that it is a critical seasoning in the recipe of

life.

Have I ever told you that I like my dentist? In fact, I really like him. And, not only do I like him, he's a real professional. He carries the marks of a professional. Among many important qualities, he has compassion.

Cartoonists depict dentists as persons recruited from a sadistic subculture that lurks around the biology laboratories at colleges and universities. The expression "It's like pulling teeth" came about for a reason, as anyone who has had a tooth pulled knows first hand.

And yet there are ways of pulling teeth that are somehow more compassionate than others. Case in point. My dentist, John Rosenlieb, recently undertook to remove one of my upper teeth.

Instead of taking a 42-inch long needle on the end of a novacaine syringe, John carefully used a topical anesthetic to numb the outer tissue. Then ever so gently he inserted a normal-sized needle into the tissue and began to push in the deadening fluid.

From past experience, I braced myself for a mouth-wrenching shock as the entire upper portion of my face was blasted by this devil-potion. But, alas, John only gently squirted a little bit of the novacaine into my mouth, waited for the tissue to become partly numb and then push in some more. It probably took him the better part of five or six minutes to accomplish the task of numbing the tissue deeply enough to be able to extract the errant tooth.

What was the difference between John and others who had clanked around inside the Wilson mouth? John did what needed to be done, but he did it with compassion.

Certainly his time was valuable. Just as valuable as any dentist's. He had every reason from a coldly economic viewpoint to rush through the procedure with dispatch and let the pain simply be accepted as a part of the procedure. But he didn't do that. He took the time he needed to treat me with compassion.

Later on in the procedure there was a moment where a nerve ending turned just a shade raw and an involuntary tear slid out of the corner of my eye. "It's OK, Big D," John said softly, "we're almost done." That's compassion. And compassion is one of the marks of a true professional.

Equipped with knowledge and the wisdom to apply that knowledge. Gifted in communicating with patients so that they actually understand the treatment that is necessary to restore them to a proper level of dental health. The presence to command respect without having to say anything. A strong sense of ethics in handling the business side of dentistry and in working with his assistant, Linda Petersen (who is also a professional). Honesty in dealing with diagnosis and with any negatives involved in treatment. All of these qualities are certainly a part of John Rosenlieb, DMD. **And, he has compassion.**

I like my dentist. I like him a lot! He carries the marks of a professional.

In our industry as we strive to provide fire alarm and burglary protective signaling systems that will help preserve lives and property, may it be said of you and me: "There's a professional." I don't know how all this strikes you, but I'm going to start being more compassionate.

When I deal with a contractor who obviously hasn't done her homework. Or someone on one of the NFPA Committees takes a position that I believe is intolerable. Or one of my employees disappoints me over some truly trivial issue. I'm going to season my response with compassion. I know it will make me a better person. How about you? □

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