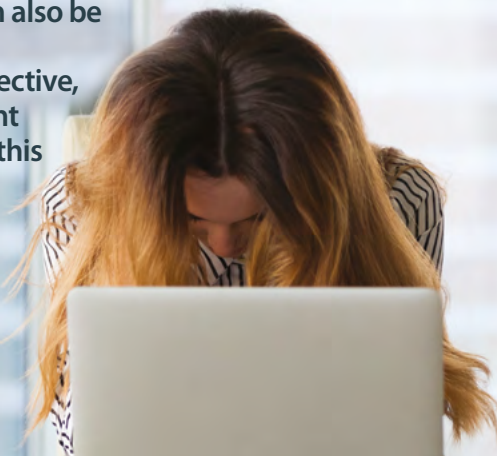


Self-management skills in the #MeToo era

The concept of competence is easy to understand from the perspective of knowledge and skills (know-how). But competence can also be understood from an interpersonal perspective, i.e. self-management skills. So what does this have to do with the Me Too movement (#MeToo)?



At all times and in all circumstances, engineers must behave with respect, courtesy, moderation, objectivity and openness when interacting with project stakeholders. And although the engineering profession may not seem as conducive to sexual misconduct as therapeutic professions, remarks and gestures that are sexual in nature, demeaning, threatening or otherwise inappropriate are no less unacceptable in our profession.

OFFENSIVE WORDS FROM AN ENGINEER

For instance, in June 2018, the Disciplinary Council rendered an unequivocal decision on remarks deemed obscene and vulgar which were made by an engineer about a female colleague. In this case (*Ordre des ingénieurs v. Semerjian* [CDOIQ 22-17-0526], pages 8 and following), the respondent was a manager and on-site supervisor for construction work on highway 40. The Disciplinary Council relayed the following facts, which we have translated into English here:

"[...] Some witnesses claim that the respondent tarnished the reputation of a female colleague by making derogatory remarks about her on several occasions.

Furthermore, according to the witnesses:

- a) The remarks were made in a professional context even though the respondent and his female colleague did not have any personal relationship whatsoever;
- b) The remarks were intimidating and sexual in nature;
- c) The remarks were made by the respondent to his female colleague in the presence of various witnesses who found his behaviour appalling;
- d) The witnesses did not dare criticize his behaviour at the time because the respondent held a position of authority in the hierarchy.

The complainant listed some of the disgraceful remarks made by the respondent. The Council chose not to state them in its record because they were particularly offensive and degrading to the complainant targeted by them.

It should be mentioned that the complainant reported the respondent's remarks to his superior. The complainant added that other female colleagues had also been targeted by comments that the Council described as amoral and outrageous. [...]"

AN UNQUESTIONINGLY GUILTY ATTITUDE

The Disciplinary Council mentioned that:

"[...] the respondent held a higher position in the hierarchy at the construction sites. [...]"

"[...] the respondent took advantage of his position [...]"

"[...] the attitude of the respondent, whose relationships were continuously marked by verbal attacks, must be severely punished." (page 15)

The Disciplinary Council concluded that the respondent's attitude constituted an unfair act that tarnished the reputation of a female colleague. Because his attitude was derogatory to the honour and dignity of the profession, it also undermined public trust in the profession.

AVOID CERTAIN CONDUCT!

In this era of the "me too" movement, where abuses of power of a sexual nature are being condemned, all professionals, including engineers, must make sure that their professional relationships are at all times free of aggressive, threatening or offensive behaviour rooted in a bias against gender, race, colour, identity or gender expression, pregnancy, sexual orientation, civil status, age, religion, political convictions, language, ethnic or national origin, social status or disability.

Quebec society expects no less from its professionals. Aside from professional conduct requirements, self-management skills and collaborative, respectful relationships help forge a solid bond of trust between engineers and the public; the visibility and credibility of the engineering profession depend on them. t

OTHER DECISIONS ON THIS SUBJECT

In its past decisions, the Disciplinary Council has determined that engineers acted in a manner that was derogatory to the honour and dignity of the profession because they did one of the following:

- made offensive remarks about an employee of the Régie du bâtiment (OIQ v. Paré [CDOIQ 22-02-0268], Professions Tribunal [750-07-000002-068], November 17, 2007);
- sent a colleague an unexplained e-mail with extremely gratuitous content during an e-mail exchange, which had an insulting, offensive remark and demonstrated a lack of professionalism (OIQ v. Paré [CDOIQ 22-02-0268], Professions Tribunal [750-07-000002-068], November 17, 2007);
- threatened a representative of Québec's ministry of transportation during a meeting at the construction site (OIQ v. Babin [CDOIQ 22-11-0385]);
- made inappropriate, contemptuous, aggressive or blasphemous remarks about the OIQ and a member of the Office of the Syndic (OIQ v. Truong [CDOIQ 22-11-0391]).

TO READ MORE ABOUT SELF-MANAGEMENT

You will find in the PLAN archives:

- "La compétence, c'est aussi une question de savoir-être," parts 1 and 2, November and December 2012 issues;
- "Menacer, une attitude indigne de la profession," October 2013 issue;
- "Communication, the Basis for a Relationship of Trust," May-June 2015 issue.