

# Professional Ethics

Andrew R. J. Yeaman, Column Editor



## What If?

By Timothy W. Spannaus

### Scenario

Steve and Tricia stared at the white board on the wall while trying to schedule their people. The “What If?” exercise was a weekly ritual for project managers at the consulting firm. They balanced necessary tasks against the available designers and consultants. It should have been easy.

At this point, there was one open position for an instructional designer and one available person, Megan. Problem solved: assign Megan... except that Tricia felt unhappy with the obvious solution.

No one questioned Megan’s skills and knowledge. She was good but Tricia was not sure Megan matched the open position. The project required experience with content related to manufacturing and product development.

Steve argued that any designer can learn any content. That is what designers do. Tricia countered that the project was fairly short, so Megan would not have much time to absorb the terminology and processes of the manufacturing client. Assigning Megan would put her at a disadvantage.

The best designer for a manufacturing project, Roger, was already busy. The current client liked him and Roger had established credibility with the client. Steve did not want to move him.

Tricia recalled seeing a recent application from a designer with

manufacturing experience. Maybe they should hire her and “furlough” Megan until they find the right opportunity.

*(Apply the principle to the scenario for yourself before going on to read the analysis below.)*

### Principle

#### AECT Code of Professional Ethics Section 3 - Commitment to the Profession

##### Principle 7

In fulfilling obligations to the profession, the member:

7. Shall delegate assigned tasks to qualified personnel. Qualified personnel are those who have appropriate training or credentials and/or who can demonstrate competency in performing the task.

#### About the Author

Dr. Tim Spannaus is Senior Lecturer and Program Coordinator, Instructional Technology, Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. Tim was CEO of a consulting firm for many years.

#### Notes

Dr. Andrew R. J. Yeaman is the Editor of the Professional Ethics column in TechTrends. The Professional Ethics scenarios published in TechTrends are fictitious (see TechTrends, March–April, 2006, pp. 10–11). There is no intentional resemblance to specific people or particular organizations. The instructional purpose is to raise consciousness about AECT’s Code of Professional Ethics.

### Analysis

Every firm’s goals are to satisfy clients, to treat employees fairly, and because it is a business, to be profitable. These goals connect with Section 3, Principle 7 which deals with qualified personnel. Their assignment is a key to achieving the three goals.

The “What If?” scene represents a problem especially common in small consulting firms. The success of any project depends on giving it to the right person. However, the best are not always available.

Given time, everyone agrees Megan could excel. She has the requisite design skills and knowledge but not the desired experience with the specific content. Laying off Megan treats a valuable employee badly and might send her looking for another job.

Here are some ways through this situation. One is to use Megan and help her get up to speed on the content. It might be possible to buy a couple of days of Roger’s time to prepare Megan and support her through the first stages of the project. Alternatively, providing assistance after hours would be a way of keeping Roger engaged in his current project while getting Megan started.

Another approach is that either Steve or Tricia could work more closely with Megan during the project to extend her skills and knowledge. Each of these approaches has the benefit of further developing Megan as an employee.

Finally, they could hire the applicant to work alongside Megan who will orient the new designer while learning from her. This tactic costs more but is suitable if management believes there will be work in the future for an additional designer.