

A professional is a person who, in the normal course of affairs, does work for a client such that the client cannot reasonably judge the applicability of the specific acts of the professional to the job for which the professional was hired. The client is forced to depend on the ethical behavior of the professional in accomplishing the task. The problems in modern society with professionals are twofold:

- the lack of an all-encompassing moral standard; and
- the lack of a standard definition for "professionalism" among the many activities whose practitioners refer to themselves as "professionals".

At one time, the term "professional" was generally limited to a select group of practitioners, generally doctors of medicine, lawyers, and clergymen (Sullivan, Work and Integrity, p. 35). However, in modern society, the term is used to apply to many other jobs. I believe that many of the "professions" using the term do so, in part, to attempt to capture some of the credulity automatically invested in a "professional" (Sullivan, p. 2). This also vests them with the aura, in the eyes of the client, of knowing the best way to proceed without submitting themselves to the step-by-step approval of the client. An analogy can be drawn to the difference between the non-commissioned ranks and the commissioned ranks in the military; the commissioned ranks being allowed to accomplish tasks with independent freedom of action (which is why, for example, all fighter pilots must be commissioned officers) whereas the non-commissioned ranks must obtain orders to proceed, even when the next course of action may seem obvious. (This is only a general analogy; paradoxically, with many commissioned officers serving under a ROTC six-and-out program, but many non-commissioned officers being in the military as a career, the "professional" military personnel are often more notable in the non-commissioned ranks than in the commissioned ranks.)

So what are "professions"? Doctor of medicine, lawyer, clergyman are obvious. Secondly, one might include other civic-based practices requiring special knowledge such as banker or realtor. There are, however, a wealth of other "professions" today. There are professional auto mechanics, professional race-car-drivers, professional stuntmen ("Don't try this at home - we're professionals!"). Even in works of fiction, where there is no actual -person- trying to sell his or her services, there are references that are beyond the traditional; for example, a conversation between "Herald Dirk", a representative of a Kingdom that has hired some mercenaries, and "Kero", the captain of those mercenaries:

(Dirk says) "...You and your Skybolts have handled yourselves exceptionally well on the march up; she's very pleased with your diplomacy and -"

"Diplomacy?" Kero said, too annoyed to be polite. "Restraint? What did she think we were going to do, ride down little children, rape the sheep, and

wreck the taverns?"

"Well-" Dirk looked embarrassed.

*That's exactly what they expected. Which we knew, really.* "Herald, we are professionals," she said tiredly. "We fight for a living. This does not make us animals.." (Mercedes Lackey, By The Sword, 1991, DAW Books, New York, p. 425)

What I see tying all these together is a *specialized body of knowledge which cannot be easily judged by the client, and which therefore requires self-regulation by the individual practitioner, by the profession, or by both working in concert.* This definition requires that the practitioner be "honorable" insofar as dealing with the client; it does -not-, however, require "honor" or "morals" insofar as dealing with the rest of the world. This type of honor requires turning down jobs where one cannot maintain this trust and honor with the potential client, even though the practitioner might both advance his interest and what he perceives to be the better interest of the community at large. An example of this type of honorable behavior would be that of General Robert E. Lee, who was offered command of the Union troops in the Civil War by President Lincoln. If General Lee had accepted command, he could potentially have wreaked such havoc in the Union Army as to destroy the North's chances of winning; however, being an honorable officer, he turned down the offer made by Lincoln and accepted a command with the military of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Thus, the professional must have two 'types' of knowledge:

- the technical knowledge specific to his profession; and
- the general knowledge of how to make independent choices, how to decide things 'honorably', and how to conduct relations with the client.

The technical knowledge may be garnered by either a formal course of schooling or by apprenticeship; in most cases with modern society, the formal course of schooling is taking over. The liberal arts notion of a university characterized as "a free and ordered space", as developed by President Eliot of Harvard (I think that's from On Higher Education by David Riesman, but I can't find the book to be sure), is particularly good for the general knowledge as it furnishes an area for inquiry into the notion of honor and the conduct of choices, as well as permitting the development of a general notion for "honor" amongst future practitioners of varying professions. The general knowledge could also be obtained in an apprenticeship or in a technical school particular to a profession; however, when that is the case, it allows for the development of divergent ideas of "professional" and "honor", blurring the meaning of the term "professional".

Although the duty of the professional is to his client, this does not mean that the general welfare can be disregarded. As in basic economic theory, certain individual actions in certain situations will have the aggregate result of massive harm to all. For example, a stockbroker has a fiduciary responsibility to advise a client when a stock will likely take a loss, so that the client may sell the stock prudently; but, in a situation where selling stocks may crash the market and make the money it sold for worthless, it would actually be disloyal to the client to advocate selling. True professionals must take into account the aggregate result of actions that their counterparts, serving other clients, will likely take and refrain from actions which will result in an aggregation harmful to their clients.

In summary, a professional - as seen in the eyes of the modern public - is a technically trained, liberally educated individual who owes loyalty in the execution of his duties to the client who has hired him and placed his trust in the professional's skills. The professional must exercise this loyalty without necessarily taking regard of general moral principles, but making sure to take regard of the effects of aggregate actions caused by other professionals exercising the same loyalty towards their clients.

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