

Are trust, integrity and respect outdated?

By Ken Campbell, P.Eng, Vice President, R.V. Anderson Associates Limited



Our family has an album with some old family photographs and letters. The album contains some gems. There is a letter that my grandfather carried with him on ship when he immigrated to Canada:

**Burg Surveyor's Office
Inverness, Feby 20th, 1903**

I have the pleasure in certifying that Mr. Roderick Campbell has served in my office as apprentice and assistant for over four years, that during the whole of that time he has given me the greatest satisfaction, and that he has made the best of his varied opportunities of learning the profession of a civil engineer. He is a good surveyor, leveler and draftsman, is quick and sure in his calculations and has a marked capacity for general business. He has also had experience in architectural work and is capable of designing and carrying out the erection of any ordinary building as well as sewerage works, roadmaking, paving or more important engineering works. Mr. Campbell's private character is excellent while this conscientious attention to work is all that can be desired. I have every confidence in heartily recommending him to any one requiring the services of an engineer.

**J.A. Mackenzie, Civil Engineer,
Burg Surveyor, Inverness**

While there must certainly have been some hyperbole used in this letter, it is the character and integrity of the subject that stands out.

Two other letters in the album were written by Rod's father, my great-grandfather. He was a contractor in the North of Scotland in the early part of the last century. The first, dated October 13, 1910, is a quotation to construct a stone "garden wall" at "Ness Side" - an estate just outside of Inverness. More interest-

ingly, the second letter is a curt follow-up dated October 14, 1910, as follows:

J. Godman, Esq.

Sir: Ness Side Garden Wall

I am in receipt of your letter today. With regard to the above wall, I will build it according to the directions in your letter for the same money as my former offer (Namely Sixty Two Pounds, Ten Shillings).

Although I did not mention the foundation course in my former offer, we never build a wall without foundations as you describe.

Yours faithfully,

James Campbell

The tone of the letter was almost one of disgust - how could someone not trust that my grandfather would build a wall without a proper foundation?

The present

Now a century later, and across the Atlantic Ocean, I wonder what evolution has occurred in qualities of trust, integrity, and respect as these apply to business relationships in Canada today? And specifically - what about engineering and construction for the public sector?

Today, construction contracts are let with thicker and thicker specification and contract documents. The objective is to precisely define a construction project so that there is no question or shading as to the exact appearance and performance of the end product.

Engineering contracts are similarly becoming thicker and more complex. Insurance requirements are becoming more onerous and require coverage limits going up. Many municipalities have purchasing departments whose objectives are to make engineering assignments just like construction assignments - based on tight, objective, measurable parameters.

Now back to the question presented in the title - are the qualities of trust, integrity and respect, as illustrated in my ancestral documents, outdated? Have our modern concepts and developments in contract and agreement preparations replaced any need for a correct personal or corporate personality?

I would like to suggest that proper contract documents and engineering agreements are necessary to document

the project scope and expectations, and to deal with major problems that can happen from time to time. However, agreements, insurance, and complex legal text are not enough. Without basic integrity, mutually earned trust and respect between contracting parties - projects will not fully succeed, and relationships will ultimately fail.

This conclusion is based on observations of a number of difficult projects that we have been involved with in recent years. Where there has been a breakdown in the basic trust and respect between owner, operator, consultant, and contractor - problems can explode. On the other hand, when difficult problems are tackled by team work based on the integrity of the individuals involved, with a basic degree of trust and respect, problems are usually managed, minimized, and ultimately resolved.

I recently assisted the City of Hamilton Water and Wastewater Division in the development of a consultants manual, in which the City stated:

The City of Hamilton is committed to obtaining services from professional consultants who take full responsibility for their work, and deliver quality, professional products. The City of Hamilton has a long history of working cooperatively with professional consulting firms, stakeholders and regulatory bodies. The City places a high value on professionalism, quality, and cooperation with its consultants.

As a result, while arrangements with consultants will be based on properly developed procurement documents and agreements, the City expects all of its consultants to work cooperatively and proactively with City staff to achieve the best results for the citizens of Hamilton.

If governments can take Hamilton's approach and encourage and reward integrity, if they can encourage the development of trust and respect, and if consultants can deliver on the challenge, our industry will continue to prosper and grow, to the betterment of our Canadian society.

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