



Ethical Professionalism in Arboriculture

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Arboricultural practices have evolved into an applied science over many years and basic concepts have forged the way for a safer, more effective industry. These concepts continue to influence our practice and philosophy both personally and professionally. Every year new research findings have expanded the concept of tree care and improved practices, applications, and health care techniques that, in turn, improved business and profitability. Every organization aims for a reputable and sustainable business; and to maintain that, we should adhere to principles that strengthen and build upon the science in an ethical way. These are principles which bind us to a responsibility of care, not just the application of care.

Ethics should be a consideration in any kind of business. It is as important as the practice itself. Sustainable business provides a skilled service in an ethical, effective, profitable way. This begins with the guidelines a company establishes when interacting with people inside and outside the company. It is a conscious effort to treat others with respect and establish a positive working environment as well as create credibility and a degree of security with patrons and peers.

One of the most effective ways to implement ethical practices within the business is with a “top down” approach. Those working at the top of the hierarchy are often seen as role models for other employees, and if they are behaving unethically, many lower-level employees will follow this same path. When a company has a productive, positive philosophy with a strong set of ethical guidelines, a more effective corporate culture develops and nurtures growth. This includes transparency and consistency within every aspect of the organization as well as good communication of company expectations throughout the ranks.

A business can be seen as a single entity, but the actions of the company, and many times an individual, dictate how the whole industry or organization is perceived by others. This is representative responsibility and of critical importance to any business. It takes just one senseless or irresponsible action by another company or employee to create a “black eye” on our profession. Our industry has often been negatively labeled by misinformed consumers and public misrepresentation. It’s not just how we see ourselves or our business, but how the consumer and the public see us and our industry.

What do we have available to us to help guide our profession and our efforts in a unified, consistent manner? Many of us have professional credentials, which indicate a level of knowledge and representative skill set such as the ISA Certified Arborist, or other credential. These credentials represent a consistent body of information across the industry and guidance for interaction with a client. However, these do not include the need for a responsibility of care or ethical treatments.



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This is what led to the consideration of a long-standing, historical set of guidelines that are science-based, yet interactive with the patient (tree), the practitioner (arborist) and the client. The Hippocratic Oath is one of the oldest binding documents in history and is an oath historically taken by physicians and other healthcare professionals swearing to practice medicine honestly and requiring strict loyalty to peers.

The tenets of the medical profession, adapted to arboriculture, connect us to the science with an ethical directive. This is the foundation for an ethical practice that includes accountability to the patient (tree). The parallels between humans and trees within this doctrine are strikingly similar. Both are dynamic living organisms that respond to external stimuli in various degrees in which the principles can be applied.

The Oath, adapted into Ethical Practices for Arboriculture.

- *I will respect the hard-won scientific gains of those physicians in whose steps I walk, and gladly share such knowledge as is mine with those who are to follow.*
 - **Respect the scientific gains of others, keeping current with industry research.**
- *I will apply, for the benefit of the sick, all measures which are required, avoiding those twin traps of overtreatment and therapeutic nihilism.*
 - **Apply all curative measures required, avoiding overtreatment.**
- *I will remember that there is art to medicine as well as science, and that warmth, sympathy, and understanding may outweigh the surgeon's knife or the chemist's drug.*
 - **Arboriculture is an art as well as a science, requiring mind and muscle in the practice.**
- *I will not be ashamed to say "I know not," nor will I fail to call in my colleagues when the skills of another are needed for a patient's recovery.*
 - **There is no shame in saying, "I don't know." Be resourceful, never letting the situation exceed your skills.**
- *... tread with care in matters of life and death. If it is given me to save a life.... But it may also be within my power to take a life;*



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- **Understand that not all trees can be saved, mitigating for the greater good.**
- *I will remember that I do not treat a fever chart, a cancerous growth, but a sick human being...*
 - **Remember to treat the tree, not just the issue, considering the impact of the intervention on the tree in whole, not just in part.**
- *I will prevent disease whenever I can, for prevention is preferable to cure.*
 - **Know that prevention is preferable to cure wherever possible.**
- *I will remember that I remain a member of society, with special obligations to all my fellow human beings...*
 - **We belong to a society with an obligation of respect to your colleagues and peers.**
- *...May I always act so as to preserve the finest traditions of my calling and may I long experience the joy of healing those who seek my help.*
 - **Act to preserve the science and practice and enjoy the experience of your discipline.**

This philosophy should be considered a guide for the practitioner (arborist) of modern arboriculture. It delivers basic criteria for evaluating the appropriateness of arboricultural practices and for deciding upon the ethical choice of care for short- and long-term objectives. As professionals, remember that in many cases, we are accountable for our decisions and actions and the consequence of those actions. We must consider our responsibility of care for the tree and the urban forest and abide by the physiological demands of the tree. The first consideration for ethical decision-making with the treatment of trees should be biology, not business.

People are concerned for the planet and we, as a society, want to help the Earth and create a more sustainable, improved quality of life. As air and water quality are challenged, people are taking a more serious look at this perfect biological machine...the tree. This patriarch of our landscape is essential for our survival on the planet. As professional arborists, our primary duty is to maintain safe and healthy trees to improve the quality of life. With such an important charge to us as tree care professionals, we should abide by an ethos that includes ethics and responsibility of care to our objective, the trees.