



Online Ethics Center  
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

## **Maintaining Professional Standards: Writing a Letter of Recommendation (adapted from NSPE Case No. 77-7)**

Year

1999

Description

This is an open-ended scenario for discussion based on a case from the NSPE Board of Ethical Review. It discusses the nature of the obligation to write letters of recommendation and the value of professional-society membership in one engineer's respect for another.

Body

Niemeyer is an engineer working for a medium-size manufacturing company and is being considered for a promotion. Niemeyer's employer contacts other engineers who have worked previously with Niemeyer and asks for their comments.

How should an employer determine who should be contacted for peer performance evaluations? Should the person being evaluated have input into the selection of peer review? Should the peer review results be shared with the employee? Should this be open or anonymous?

One of the people contacted about Niemeyer is Singh, who is currently employed by another company and who no longer has a direct professional relationship with Niemeyer. Singh is aware that Niemeyer has dropped his membership in the state professional engineering society. Singh believes that it is incumbent upon all engineers to support their profession through membership in the professional society -- preferably in an active role, or at least by payment of dues. Because of this Singh refuses to comment on Niemeyer's performance.

What is Singh's obligation to his colleague concerning performance review? Do members of a profession have an obligation to participate in their professional societies? Why or why not?

The employer reports Singh's comments to Niemeyer. How, if at all, should Niemeyer respond to his employer? To Singh? Should Niemeyer communicate with the professional society about this incident?

[NSPE Code of Ethics](#) An earlier version may have been used in this case.

## Notes

See the original NSPE case at: [Obligation to Write Letter of Recommendation for Other Engineers - Case No. 77-7](#).

## Rights

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