

RIBA Ethical Practice Guide

Views from others

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The code of conduct and practice establishes a universal standard by which architects are to go about their business. But is it enough to be trustworthy, competent and professional? Where does empathy, generosity and tolerance come in? Is it actually our human judgement that enables us to truthfully meet our obligations to society?

Our work as architects impacts on others way beyond the site of construction. We must consider those mining or manufacturing materials we specify, those applying chemicals we have selected, those simply fearful of change and those entrusting us with the safety of their families when they make their home in the spaces that we design.

As architects we need to be the change we want to see. Our own studio is a good start. A supportive work environment that is inclusive, has clearly articulated values and encourages people to ask questions helps to establish a safe environment empowering those we work with to make a difference.

We are not alone. Wherever we work, there are neighbours, constituents and stakeholders with interests, some verifiable and with statutory protection, others informally acquired. Living together as a community requires us to respect and embrace the interests of others, however eccentric they may be. Some of the most rewarding moments in my career have been the instances when local people have opened up to share stories about the places where we work.

Those occupying, using and maintaining the spaces that we create have little choice but to place full trust in the decisions that we have made or endorsed during the design process. But complying with design codes, standards and benchmarks is only the baseline. As architects we are, to an extent, responsible for peoples' wellbeing, and the spaces we design inevitably contribute to their happiness and their sense of purpose.

It is high time for us to stop judging architecture on the basis of its professional and competent execution, but instead ascribing true value to the level of engagement, investment and good, human judgement employed during its conception.

