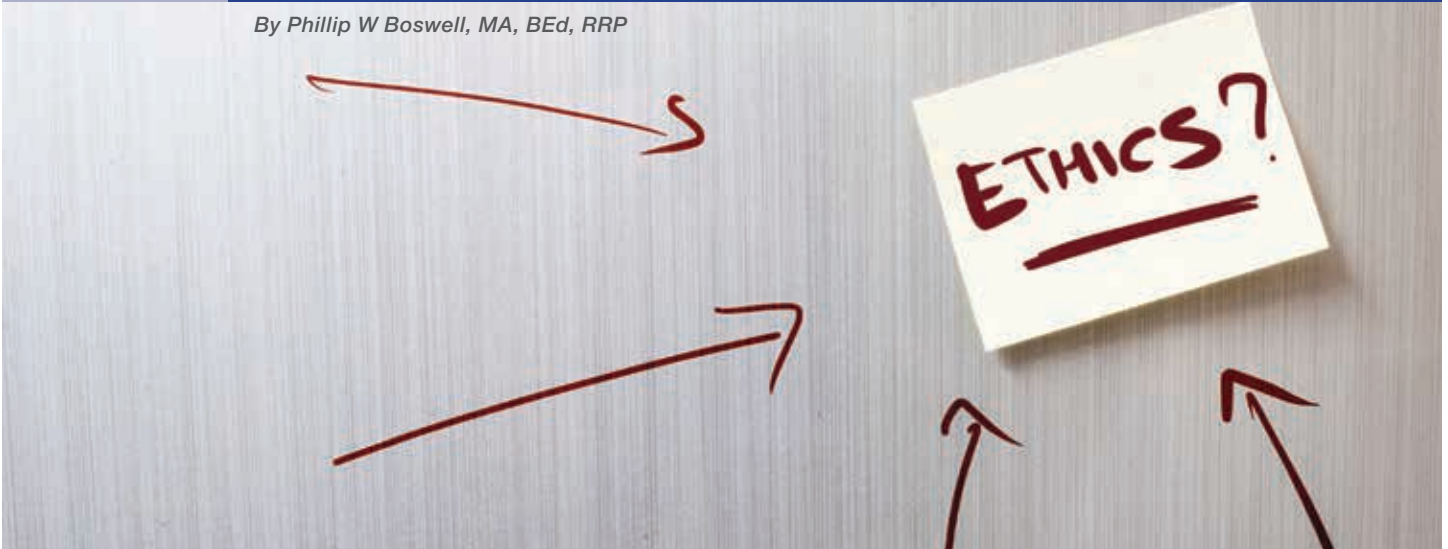


CAVEWAS Corner

The Role of Ethics in the Professionalization of Vocational Rehabilitation

By Phillip W Boswell, MA, BEd, RRP



CAVEWAS Corner

Dear fellow colleagues and readers, here is our most recent contribution to CAVEWAS Corner.

As many of you know, CAVEWAS (Canadian Assessment, Vocational Evaluation and Work Adjustment Society) is a member society of VRA Canada, serving in large part to represent and support the professional and developmental needs of vocational evaluators as well as professional rehab personnel specializing in work adjustment of injured workers and the like. In this section, you will find current and candid articles authored by CAVEWAS members, non-members (and future members alike) that will share, discuss, and communicate with you developments and changes affecting our membership. Amongst them issues of best practice, professional development and designation, as well as industry trends

We hope you continue to find the content in this section stimulating, motivating, and informative and we encourage your ongoing participation and contributions.

Enjoy!

CAVEWAS National Board Of Directors

If you are a CAVEWAS member and have any ideas, opinions or thoughts relevant to this section and you would like to share, discuss, and communicate them in the next issue, please contact: Jodi Webster at jodi@keyrehabservices.ca We also encourage you to join our group on LinkedIn.



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In Canada and the United States the vocational rehabilitation profession is striving for recognition. Adherence to an ethical code of practice signifies that one is involved in a “profession” rather than simply “doing a job.”

Ethics are at the heart of who we are, how we act, and how we want others to view us. Ethics provide guidelines for what is acceptable and not acceptable. As vocational rehabilitation professionals, we must view our actions and behaviours through the lens of our code of ethics to preserve and protect the welfare of those we serve and to promote the public good.

A profession can be defined as a calling, vocation, or employment requiring specialized knowledge and often intensive academic preparation. To qualify as a profession, the following characteristics are expected to be present:

- Knowledge – A common body of knowledge for entry and competence
- Organizations – Representative professional organization(s)
- Standards – Benchmarked performance standards
- Perception – An external perception as a profession
- Competence – A need to ensure competence is maintained and put to socially responsible uses
- Credentials – Required training for entry and career mobility
- Skill Development – An ongoing need for skill development (lifelong learning)
- Ethics – An enforced code of ethics

Underlying the practice of any profession is the delineation of specific knowledge and skill requirements necessary for effective service delivery. This can be a challenge in vocational rehabilitation given the

multi-disciplinary nature of the work. Many professions claim a piece of the rehabilitation pie: some including physicians, occupational therapists, physical therapist, kinesiologists, chiropractors, nurses, massage therapists, psychologists, social workers, case managers, life care planners, economists, and vocational evaluators.

“Ethics is about promoting benefits and reducing harm”

The role of an organization, such as the American Board of Vocational Experts, is to develop a body of knowledge, establish a credentialing process, provide education and training opportunities, as well as support standards of ethics, practice, and care for members.

In Canada, vocational rehabilitation is an unregulated profession. Only 20 per cent of people in Canada work in regulated professions (1). Regulated professions are controlled by provincial and territorial (and sometimes federal) law and are governed by a

professional organization or regulatory body. Professions and trades are typically regulated to protect public health and safety. Regulatory bodies create entry requirements and standards of practice, to assess applicants' qualifications and credentials to certify, register, or license qualified applicants, and to discipline members of the profession/trade. Requirements for entry usually consist of such components as examinations, a specified period of supervised work experience, language competency, etc. Sometimes the requirements are different in each province/territory.

One of the interesting challenges of regulation lies in establishing a standard of care and standard of practice. A standard of care is the level of skill and competence demonstrated by professionals of the same discipline, in the same locale, and faced with same/similar circumstances. A standard of practice is a guide to the knowledge, skills, judgement, and attitudes that are needed to practice safely. Standards of practice deal more with the methodological standards (i.e. the how to) of a profession.

Experience often teaches us the hard way, by giving the test first followed by the lesson.

Most ethical dilemmas are first recognized when the professional experiences serious uncertainty. Making decisions can lead practitioners into a gray area where there is no clear “right” or “wrong.”

Having a code of ethics helps professionals when they encounter ethical dilemmas. The code of ethics can prompt, guide, and inform us in our everyday work, but ethical awareness is a continual, active process that involves deliberate methods of fulfilling our professional responsibilities. Adhering to a code of ethics is not only the right thing to do, it's what makes us professional. ☺



To view references for this article, visit our website www.vracanada.com/media.php



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