

## LETTER

### Principles of Professional Ethics for Scientists

We at the Chelm Institute all attend mandatory weekly seminars on professional ethics. With the help of outside experts, many of whom have never been indicted, we try to examine, understand, and simplify the complex and difficult ethical issues of our times. We are grateful to the corporations that support our seminar for the speakers that they send us, as we cannot afford the honoraria charged by academic ethicists. I would like to share with you some of the principles and rules of thumb that have emerged from these discussions. We have found them helpful in dealing with ethical issues, both before and after they arise.

#### General

- Working for the greater good doesn't mean you have to stay poor.
- We live in a world full of chaos, envy, and stupidity. Strangely, some people refuse to understand and accept our faith-based judgments.
- Ethics are even more in the eye of the beholder than the law. Stick with the law.

#### Planning

- Ask yourself, "What would Desmond Tutu do?" Then ask yourself, "What would Donald Trump do?" Then decide.
- Learn from our elected representatives. Don't accept consulting fees from a company—you could face a conflict of interest. Accept consulting fees from twenty companies.
- It's better to be right than rigorous. If your conclusions are promising enough to get funding, it's better to be

wrong than rigorous. Don't try to confirm preliminary results until after you get the funding.

- As a leader, stay ignorant of details. Say no more than, "Wouldn't it be nice to have some human stem cells?" or "Who will rid me of this meddling priest?"
- If an experiment is worth doing, its results are worth publishing, no matter what. If your results are worth publishing, then they're worth publishing again and, after reanalysis or more data mining, they're worth publishing yet again. It's also OK to publish lots of overlapping short papers as long as the author lists differ by at least one person.
- It's OK to cite yourself instead of the lab whose work you've extended. To justify a priority claim ("This is the first demonstration of X"), add the appropriate adjective—for example, "definitive," "molecular," or "in vivo"—before "demonstration." Alternatively, add a species name at the end (especially "in humans") or make X at least three lines long with two subordinate clauses.

#### Damage Control

- If companies can restate earnings, you can restate published results.
- A patent is a certificate of good behavior.
- When questioned about your behavior, avoid addressing specific actions and consequences. Instead, discuss intent, motivation, complexity, division of labor, organizational structure, and efficiency, preferably at length. Call for an investigation.
- Keep it simple. Blame others.

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