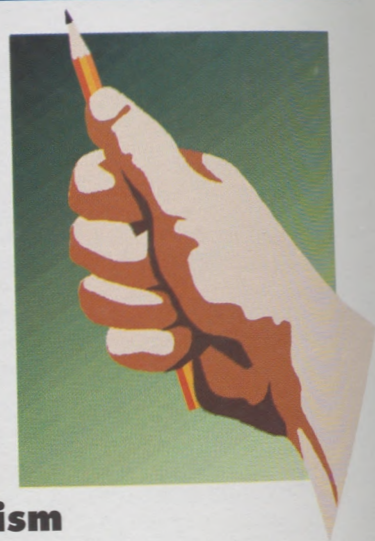


# R C I Responsibility, Competence, and Integrity



## Or: Communication Can Reflect Professionalism

By DR. HERBERT BUSCHING

*(The following is an extract of a speech given by the late Dr. Herbert Busching, then RCI Chairman of the Board of Regents, at RCI's annual meeting in New Orleans in February 1985).*

The technology and practice of roofing are changing rapidly. The roof is the only portion of the building that requires major rehabilitation periodically. That period may be 15-20 years, or, unfortunately, it may be less than 10 years.

The proliferation of products for low-slope roofing compounds the difficulty of dealing effectively with the large number of products and problems. As consultants, you often oversee the demise of the old roof as well as the specification and construction of a new one. Hence, you serve as both undertaker and pediatrician. There is ample opportunity to improve the U.S. inventory of approximately 1200 square miles of low-slope roofing. There should be well-defined responsibilities and liabilities for roof consultants.

The initials of this Institute—RCI—remind me of my responsibilities as an instructor in a land-grant university where our efforts encompass Research, Continuing Education, and Instruction. For the Institute, I propose that RCI stand for (especially this evening) Responsibility, Competence, and Integrity. To be a professional in any field requires a good measure of each of these characteristics.

Acting responsibly, competently, and with integrity is what professionalism is about.

The professions normally have education requirements, certification of competence through internships and examination, requirements for continuing education, and a code of ethics. RCI members have made good progress this year, it seems, in addressing increased responsibility, competence, and integrity.

The agenda of the Regents meeting has been directed to

improve the competence, utility and visibility of RCI. Hopefully, several of the suggestions made by the Regents can be initiated and completed during the coming year. RCI programs should assist in increasing competence of members and ultimately benefit materials producers, roofing contractors, and building owners.

Perhaps one of the most important facets of your professional life and your contact with clients is your communication skill. It is a reflection of your responsibility, competence, and integrity. In the university, our industrial advisory boards all recommend that we require engineering students to take technical writing and, if possible, public speaking. Requirements for being technically competent are misdirected if our product, the students, cannot communicate effectively. Likewise, the need for practicing communications skills continues throughout your careers. Your letters and reports are perhaps your most important product.

Let us learn this evening from an expert—columnist James Kilpatrick. He has provided some brief rules for workers in the "carpentry of words." He provided these rules for student editors; however, these rules are useful for RCI members, too. Here is Mr. Kilpatrick's advice.

"1. Be clear. This is the first and greatest commandment. In a large sense, nothing else matters. For clarity embraceth all things: the clear thought to begin with; the right words for conveying that thought; the orderly arrangement of the words. It is a fine thing, now and then, to be colorful, to be vivid, to be bold. First be clear.

"2. Love words, and treat them with respect. For words are the edged tools of your trade: you must keep them honed. Do not "infer" when you mean to "imply"; do not write "fewer" when you mean "less than." Do not use "among" when you

mean "between." Observe that "continually" and "continuously" have different meanings. Do not write "alternately" when you mean "alternatively." Tints are light, shades are dark. The blob on the gallery wall is not an abstract. Beware the use of "literally," "virtually," "fulsome," "replica," "many-faceted," and the "lion's share." "Pinch-hitters" are something more than substitutes. Learn the rules of "that" and "which." When you fall into the pit of "and which," climb out of your swampy sentence and begin anew.

"3. As a general proposition, use familiar words. Be precise, but first be understood. Search for the solid nouns that bear the weight of thought. Use active verbs that hit an object and do not glance off. When you find an especially gaudy word, possessed of a gorgeous rhinestone glitter, lock it firmly away. Such words are costume jewels. They are sham.

"4. Edit your copy; then edit it again; then edit it once more. This is the hand-rubbing process. No rough sandpapering can replace it.

"5. Strike the redundant word. Emergencies are inherently acute; crises are grave; consideration is serious. When you exhort your readers to get down to 'basic fundamentals,' you are dog-paddling about in a pool of ideas and do not know where to touch bottom. Beware the little qualifying words—"rather," "somewhat," "pretty," "very." As White says, these are the leeches that suck the meaning out of language. Pluck them from your copy.

"6. Have no fear of repetition. It is better to repeat a word than to send an orphan antecedent in its place. Do not write "horsehide," "white pellet," or "the old apple" when you mean

baseball. Members of City Council are not "solons," they are members of City Council. If you must write "banana" four times, then write "banana" four times; nothing is gained by three "bananas" and one "elongated yellow fruit."

"7. If you cannot be obviously profound, try not to be profoundly obvious. Therefore, do not inform your reader that something remains to be seen. The thought will have occurred to him already.

"8. Strive for a seasoned perspective. "True crises" come infrequently; few actions are "outrageous"; cities and economies are seldom "paralyzed" for long. A two-alarm fire is not a "holocaust." Not much is "imperative" or "urgent"; still less is "vital." To get at the size of a crowd, divide the cops' estimate by 3.1416.

"9. Style depends in part upon the cadence of your prose. Therefore, listen to your copy with a fine-tuned ear. In the prose that truly pleases, you find that every sentence has an unobstructive rhythm that propels it on its way. With a little re-arranging, you can keep the rhythm going. But do not do this always; you may sound like Hiawatha.

"10. Beware of long sentences; they spread roots that tend to trip the reader up. The period key lies nicely on the bottom row of your machine, down toward the right-hand end. Use it. Use it often."

With more attention to effective communications, RCI members will serve themselves and the Institute well. I wish you success in your ventures this year and hope you will, with new members, attend the next RCI meeting.

---

## "U Hall" at U of V Closed Due to Tension Ring Corrosion at Roofline

After a determination by structural engineers that inadequate grouting caused collapse of steel cables just under the roofline of University Hall ("U Hall") at the University of Virginia, it was closed. U Hall's most distinctive feature is its curved, white, precast panel roof with two cast-in-place rings. At its center is a compression ring, and along the perimeter is a tension ring of 670 steel cables. More than 30 of these

cables, which work like the hoops that hold the staves of a barrel together—were broken. In 1997, a balcony in the building collapsed and killed a woman on graduation day. A \$3.4 million lawsuit was recently filled in that matter.

U Hall is the smallest arena in the Atlantic Coast Conference, and a new building is being planned.

---

## Steel Associations Involved in Roofing

AISC—American Institute of Steel Construction, 1 East Wacker Drive, Suite 3100, Chicago, IL 60601. Patrick Newman. 312-670-2400.

CSSBI—Canadian Sheet Steel Building Institute, 652 Bishop Street N, Unite 2A, Cambridge, ON M3H 4V6 Canada. Steven Fox. 519-650-1285.

III—Institute of the Ironworking Industry, 1750 New York Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20006. John McMahon.

202-783-3998.

MBMA—Metal Building Manufacturers Association, 1300 Sumner Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44115. Lee Shoemaker. 216-241-7333.

MCA—Metal Construction Association, 11 South LaSalle Street, Suite 1400, Chicago, IL 60603. Jim Stanley. 312-201-0101.