

# **Professional Ethics:** *A Quick Overview*

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# Characteristics of a Profession

“A profession is typically described as an occupation characterized by three features:

[1] specialized training in a field of codified knowledge usually acquired by formal education and apprenticeship,

[2] public recognition of a certain autonomy on the part of the community of practitioners to regulate their own standards of practice, and

[3] a commitment to provide service to the public that goes beyond the economic welfare of the practitioner.” (Sullivan, 2005, 36)

# The Value of Professional Social Compacts

“By taking responsibility through one’s work for ends of social importance, an individual’s skills and aspirations acquire value for others.

Professionalism thereby forms a crucial link between the individual’s struggle for freedom in a fulfilling existence and the needs of the larger society, so that individual opportunity can serve the demands of interdependence.” (Sullivan, 2005, 30-31)

# Six Basic Properties of Professional Ethics (Abbott, 1983)

1. Nearly all professions have some kind of formal ethical code. (857)
2. Belief in, and compliance with, formal ethical codes tends to enhance intra-professional status. (858)
3. Professional ethics codes address individual professionals and individual actions. (860)

4. Most ethical codes have a preamble that describes an ideal of service to the public—setting up a social compact. (860)
5. Most ethical codes are related to maintaining a level playing field among professionals, the remainder focus primarily on obligations to clients. (862)
6. Formal prosecution under professional ethics rules is common when the offense is publicly visible. Intra-professional violations are less severely punished. (859)

# References

Abbott, A. (1983). Professional ethics, *The American Journal of Sociology*, 88(5), 855-885.

Sullivan, W. M. (2005). *Work and integrity: The crisis and promise of professionalism in America* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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