



What goes around, comes around

In the early years, I got some sound advice from Lloyd White — a salty and wise old guy at Lincoln Steel who had supplied steel to my father (who was a general contractor) for years. “There are a few ‘bad actors’ out there who will do you wrong,” he said. “Just remember, if you want to be in business for a long time, ‘treat people right’ and they’ll be loyal to you. The bad ones will likely be at your mercy sometime in your career because *what goes around comes around*.”

As the years unfolded, White’s words proved prophetic many times over. Treating people right always benefited my engineering practice. And for the few times my firm encountered ‘bad actors who did us wrong,’ they often ended up needing us for something later. I suppose we could have taken pleasure in retaliation or acted spitefully. But holding a grudge and seeking revenge is not worth the effort.

Almost every engineer has experienced the “what goes around comes around” adage. Below is what nine respected professional engineers think about the proverb:

- David Fowler from the University of Texas said, “It’s been in my vocabulary a long time. People who mistreat other people and put aside ethics generally get their comeuppance. People who do things right usually have good things happen to them regularly.”
- Jim DeStefano of DeStefano & Chamberlain concluded, “If you treat your clients poorly, miss deadlines, pepper them with extra charges, pass off something less than your best effort for contract documents, then you can expect they’ll be less than prompt paying your invoices and may think twice before including you on their team.”
- Al Dorman with AECOM agreed, “We live in a rotating world. People and conditions we have encountered in the past are likely to re-enter our lives. Therefore, leave every situation with good relationships and better conditions.”
- Fintan Lynch of engologist.com opined, “Here in Ireland, we use, ‘As ye sow so shall ye reap.’ If engineers intentionally cut corners with regard to safety and, an accident occurs, they must accept the consequences.”
- Tom D’Arcy, a past-president of Rocky Mountain Prestress, pointed out, “The Vail Pass Segmental Bridges were an example of an unscrupulous person/company trying to take advantage of another party and being punished for it later. RMP had invested heavily in engineering the casting curves for the bridges’ segments. The contractor completely ignored our directions and improperly erected the segments, over our protestations, creating a serious miss-alignment, which they then blamed on RMP. In a

subsequent lawsuit, the contractor was proved wrong and RMP won a substantial settlement.”

- Seattle Consultant Dave Gilbert said, “In my many years with Bechtel on construction management projects, dispute resolution was a frequent occurrence. At first, adversarial relationships were a common thing, and not just between organizations, but between different people in our own organization. Once managers realized a lot more could get done by cooperating than by being antagonistic — and once everyone better understood the concept of ‘what goes around, comes around’ — adversarial situations significantly diminished. Because of this concept, on my next-to-last job in Saudi Arabia in the late 1990s, a wonderful cooperative attitude was maintained among all parties throughout the job. It was exhilarating to see how much more we accomplished in a shorter time than before.”
- Fred Berger with the Louis Berger Group stated, “Our industry is very small in terms of its human capital. Many times, I have seen an employer treat an employee badly or unfairly, only to see that employee turn up later as the employer’s client. Ethical behavior is always right, and always smart.”
- Joe Siccardi, a past Colorado Department of Transportation chief bridge engineer commented, “When I was a young engineer at the Air Academy in Colorado Springs, my boss thought I was too inexperienced and tried to get me removed — and failed. Eventually he changed his mind and gave me an outstanding rating. When the Academy Construction Agency dissolved, he came to me after I had moved on to a high leadership position with the Federal Highway Administration. I gave him a job.”
- Dick Wiltshire, who was formerly with USBR, concurred, “This adage also applies to mentoring the interests of young engineers, helping them develop, and enjoying their subsequent advancements.”

In the long run, people who mistreat others or put aside ethics generally get their comeuppance while people who are fair have good things happen to them. That’s why the *what goes around comes around* adage is good to keep in mind. ▼

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