



## What Sets Us Apart

# Ethical Roofing

**M**ost people want to believe the best about others. We don't want to be disappointed, so we trust, hope, and try not to worry too much about the contractor we just invited into our home. But something is nagging at us in the back of our mind, "What if he doesn't deliver what he promised?"

Thousands of dollars are on the line when the person we wonder about is the same guy putting on our new roof. Everything is under that roof: our family, our stuff, our memories, our future!

Contractors are the most complained about industry in the *Better Business Bureau* and roofing contractors are the worst of the lot, with 6 times more complaints than the second worst contractors. Yikes! That is painful.

Comedian Jim Gaffigan even has an old bit on contractors.

*"You've heard of the Pearly Gates of Heaven? I didn't know Heaven was in a gated community?! Why? Too many kids playing in the pool? St Peter said they had to go to Hell to get a contractor."*

What is it about contractor work that seems to draw shady folks with shoddy workmanship? Before we answer that, let's step back and ask the larger question:

***What is the philosophy of ethics?***

# Grounding Character

Ethics is the human capacity for goodness or evil involving knowledge, freedom, and responsibility. Asking ethical questions about right and wrong, good and evil, justice and injustice, is ultimately a conversation about what kind of person are you and I ought to become.

In Ancient Greece, philosophy was the pursuit of the happy life. To be happy was not about pleasure-seeking, but **virtue**. For them, the virtuous life was synonymous with happiness. **Virtues** were habits of human persons towards the Good and **vices** were habits of the human person towards Evil. Vices dehumanize us. Virtues elevate us.

The philosophers looked not just to individual acts, but our default behavior. This reveals our character. For instance, if you lie once, you aren't necessarily a liar. But if you lie habitually so that it's your default response, then it has become deeply rooted in your heart. It is your **character**. It's who you are. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins put it thus:

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:  
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;  
Selves — goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,  
Crying *Whát I dó is me: for that I came...*

Virtue is *habitual goodness*. This goodness is social as well as personal. My interactions with those around me form me. Most philosophers saw four virtues as the cardinal virtues around which every person became better and every situation was improved. Those four cardinal virtues are:

1. **Prudence or Wisdom:** the virtue of practical wisdom about how to act not only rightly, but to give the very best of oneself in acting.
2. **Justice:** the virtue of giving to others what is there due, be it to God, self, family, stranger, or enemy.
3. **Temperance or Self-control:** the virtue of limiting the use of good things so that we are not overly attachment to their pleasures.
4. **Fortitude or Courage:** the virtue of staying true and faithful when confronted with difficulties, sufferings, or duress.

Just taking these on face value, wouldn't we all agree the world would be a better place if everyone we met were wise, just, courageous, and had more self-control? Lord knows my life would be better!

# Greedy Roofing

Before I lose you in Philosophy 101, let's quickly apply this to the ethics of building roofs. There are a lot of homes out there and they all have roofs of one sort or another. When a storm rages through Texas, hail and wind can cause considerable damage to asphalt shingles that are your main line of defense of what's inside your home from the weather outside.

When shingles fail, your home leaks. Leaks mean big trouble- algae, mold, mildew, bugs, weakened wooden structures, wet drywall, and more. There is a lot on the line, which means there's a lot of **MONEY** to be made.

Money does crazy things to otherwise good people, causing them to warp their own ideals and standards for the sake of a buck.

- Owners become unjust to their salesmen, firing them instead of paying their sales commissions they are justly owed
- Contractors hire day laborers, let them build the asphalt roof all day, then speed off without paying them, knowing these laborers have no legal recourse against him
- Salesmen overpromise and underdeliver, lying to homeowners usually by underbidding, knowing they will surprise them with the real costs later
- Installers can be incompetent or just plain shady, leaving your roof with poor workmanship or worse, cut corners done deliberately to pocket the money for themselves
- Insurance companies can take the attitude of "Deny, Delay, Defend" when it comes to what is justly owed to the homeowner when they make a claim

All of these are examples of unethical behavior that is so rampant it has almost entirely ruined the industry. Associations at the local, state, and national level are working against this problem, but it still plagues us.

The problem is any roofing company and say "We're the most trusted..." and "We're committed to excellence and customer service!" Anyone can put platitudes on their website. Anyone can call themselves "ethical", but how are we actually doing what we claim to be doing?

# Ethical Roofing

**Petrus Roofing and Solar** is different and, to be honest, a little weird. We have two Ph.D candidates in Philosophy who work for the company, Brian our sales lead and Keaton, our project manager and Navy veteran. Then there's me, Michael Gormley, whose actual full-time job is to be a traveling evangelist and speaker. I handle the marketing and sometimes do sales.

Then there's Charlie, one of the owners, who spent most of his adult life working with Adore Missions in Houston, a religious non-profit dedicated to the underprivileged of Houston and surrounding areas.

John Abraham, the other owner, has spent his entire life in the trades, was born in Argentina and is on a first name basis with every subcontractor from Dallas to Mexico City. He's got 9 kids! The oldest, John Robert, is our lead repair tech who is a self-taught philosopher and engaged to be married.

When I started at Petrus Roofing and Solar I had a list of questions. Essentially, I researched the roofing and solar industry on YouTube and you basically find that the majority of results are scams and consumer reports about bad roofers and solar panel installers who rob people blind, including their own employees.

I asked Charlie how he paid his salesmen their commissions, knowing this was a huge scandal in the roofing industry.

*"I don't even look at it. As soon as the money clears our general bank account within five minutes the sales rep. is paid. I never want those numbers distracting me."*

I asked about our subcontractors and how we protect them. He said,

*"John knows everyone in the industry. We only work with foremen who have a solid reputation in paying their employees. Also, we only work with those who have workman's comp insurance. And we are insured and bonded for our part in their liability insurance as our workers install the new roof."*

I asked about sales tactics once in a meeting and Brian said,

*"Our goal is 'detachment from outcomes'. This means the more detached you are, the more room you'll give the homeowner to breath and think clearly. After all, it's their money and their responsibility, only they can make the right decision. We cannot make it for them."*

## Ethical Principles: the Four Nevers

Since we train our salespeople to be *detached from outcomes*, that means there is no high-pressure sales. Also we refuse to underbid to win a contract, only to hit the homeowner with surprise costs later. Thus, our first ethical principle is:

***“Educate. Never manipulate.”***

When it comes to workers and their wages, the biblical mandate is absolutely clear. The sin of an employer who deprives workers of their just wages is classified as a sin that “cries out to Heaven for vengeance.” That’s no small thing! It’s up there with murder of the innocent. So this is our second ethical principle:

***“Never deprive a laborer of his wages.”***

Homeowners are afraid of being cheated so we offer 3 layers of protection: the *GAF Manufacturer’s Warranty* on materials, our own *5 Year Workmanship Warranty* against faulty installations, and third, we offer what no one else does, which is our *One Year Later inspection*. Our third ethical principle is:

***“Never regret our own work.”***

Finally, when it comes to making insurance claims, submitting roof and attic reports, and yes, even filing lawsuits against the insurance companies, we can never exaggerate or lie about the damages we claim. The moment we lie to get more insurance money we are contributing the insanity of the roofing market. We do not “eat” deductibles nor encourage homeowners to commit insurance fraud. Our fourth ethical principle:

***“Never exaggerate for the sake of gain.”***

## Conclusion

I can almost hear you saying, “So, don’t lie, cheat, or steal. Got it. That’s not revolutionary or new. It’s common sense!”

The sad problem is in the roofing industry today living by these “Four Nevers” is revolutionary. The love of money creates a reality distortion field. People lie, cheat, and steal to get more of it or to keep what isn’t theirs.

By keeping education, truth-telling, just wages, and honest work at the forefront of our minds and our business, putting our money where our mouth is, we create a radical antidote to greed, both personally and as a part of our work culture.

If greed leads many in our industry to injustice, immoderation, imprudence, and cowardliness, then we have to constantly remind ourselves of the words of Thomas Jefferson:

***“God is just and His justice does not sleep forever.”***

Saint Joseph the Worker, Pray for us!