

A Comparison of the Codes of Ethics that Confront CPAs

James H. Thompson and Thomas G. Hodge

One of the trademarks of recognized professions is a code of ethics. The fundamental purpose of a code of ethics is to provide members with guidelines for maintaining a professional attitude and conducting themselves in a manner that will enhance the professional stature of their discipline (Whittington *et al.*, 1992). Walters (1990) states:

. . . codes of ethics are not something to frame and hang on the wall; they must be taken seriously, which means that they must be reasonable and operational.

Because the accounting profession serves the public, the importance of ethical considerations is even greater. In any public service activity, trust is an important element. If accountants perform their services in an ethical manner, a trust between the public and the accounting profession is developed. Thus, a benefit of compliance with ethical principles is that public trust allows the profession to maintain a source of accountability.

Occasionally, public trust is violated when accountants fail to perform their services in an ethical manner. In the Enron financial collapse, for example, several instances of unethical behavior have emerged that have

© *Professional Ethics* 2000. Correspondence may be sent to James H. Thompson, Meinders School of Business, Oklahoma City University, 2501 N Blackwelder, Oklahoma City, OK 73106; or Thomas G. Hodge, Department of Accounting, University of Louisiana at Monroe, Monroe, LA 71209; email: jht@okcu.edu.