

Inspector Skills

ISBN: 978-1-60983-516-3

Cover Design:	Ricky Razo
Project Editor:	Phil Arvia
Project Head:	Steve Van Note
Publications Manager:	Mary Lou Luif
Interior Design:	Sue Brockman

COPYRIGHT © 2014



ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. This publication is a copyrighted work owned by the International Code Council, Inc. Without advance written permission from the copyright owner, no part of this book may be reproduced, distributed or transmitted in any form or by any means, including, without limitation, electronic, optical or mechanical means (by way of example, and not limitation, photocopying or recording by or in an information storage retrieval system). For information on permission to copy material exceeding fair use, please contact: Publications, 4051 West Flossmoor Road, Country Club Hills, IL 60478. Phone 1-888-ICC-SAFE (422-7233).

The information contained in this document is believed to be accurate; however, it is being provided for informational purposes only and is intended for use only as a guide. Publication of this document by the ICC should not be construed as the ICC engaging in or rendering engineering, legal or other professional services. Use of the information contained in this book should not be considered by the user to be a substitute for the advice of a registered professional engineer, attorney or other professional. If such advice is required, it should be sought through the services of a registered professional engineer, licensed attorney or other professional.

Trademarks: "International Code Council" and the "International Code Council" logo and the "International Building Code" are trademarks of International Code Council, Inc.

Errata on various ICC publications may be available at www.iccsafe.org/errata.

First Printing: January 2014

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	v
Dedication	viii
Acknowledgements	viii
About the Author	ix
About the International Code Council	x
1 Safe Buildings	1
An Important Job	3
Foundation	4
Support	6
Principles of Code Administration	8
Minimum Requirements	9
Interpretation	10
Alternatives	12
2 Approaches to Inspection	17
Starting on the Right Foot	19
Decision Making	22
Costs	31
Consistency	32
Finding Solutions	35
Teaching and Learning	36
Managing Time	43

Professionalism	48
3 Getting Along	53
Inspector as Facilitator	55
Respect	56
Keeping an Open Mind	56
Giving Bad News	58
Difficult People	59
Common Mistakes	63
4 Customer Service	69
First Impressions	72
Listening	73
Honesty	74
Expectations	75
Choose Your Words Carefully	77
Obstacles	78
Complaints	79
5 Doing the Right Thing	89
Professional Integrity	93
Code of Conduct	94
Public Welfare	96
Rights	96
Accuracy	98
Conflict of Interest	98
Making Ethical Decisions	100
6 Communication	105
In Person (Face to Face)	106
Telephone	113
Written	116
E-mail	122
7 Conclusion	139
Appendix A	
ICC Evaluation Services Report (ESR)	145
Appendix B	
Inspector Certification	149

PREFACE



Inspector Skills addresses the soft skills that are essential for construction inspectors to excel in their mission to ensure safe, code-compliant buildings for the public. Soft skills, in this context, are the nontechnical traits and behaviors that enhance an inspector’s ability to interact with others and to successfully carry out his or her job duties. In addition to people skills—those social graces that improve interaction with people—soft skills include decision making, problem solving, professionalism, integrity, honesty and time management, to name a few.

As new methods and materials become available, and lessons are learned through experience, construction and the codes that regulate it are becoming more complex. It follows that an inspector's job, while interesting and rewarding, is becoming more challenging. It makes sense then that training and resources for the inspector often have been aimed at "hard" skills—the occupational knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) related to technical provisions of the code and methods of construction. There are many texts and resources available to the inspector, including the codes themselves, to gain the technical knowledge necessary for performing the job. But there are no texts available for addressing inspector-specific soft skills. Inspectors have been left in large part to develop their soft skills on their own, by trial and error or based on their previous life experiences. *Inspector Skills* was developed specifically to fill that void. Its purpose is to raise awareness of the importance of soft skills and to provide guidance toward recognizing and improving those skills. The text also serves to reinforce the positive behaviors of skilled inspectors who possess and practice effective soft skills. A solid understanding of the technical provisions of the code serves as a baseline and is essential to becoming a good inspector. But developing appropriate soft skills can be equally important and can elevate an inspector from good to excellent.

Today's employers understand that soft skills are important, particularly in jobs that interact with or provide service to the public. Good customer service, communication, organization and self-management skills, for example, can make the difference in the success of any company. So it is with building departments, where these skills are critical in pursuing the goal of safe, healthy and durable buildings for the community. That goal is best accomplished with buy-in from the public—

acceptance that the mission of the department and its inspectors is worthwhile and benefits the community. The inspector interacts with the public in the office and on the job site, and is often the first or only point of contact in representing the building department. In this regard, the inspector is an ambassador for the department in gaining the public trust and support. *Inspector Skills* is written to provide additional tools for the inspector for eliciting cooperation rather than confrontation. The book encourages team-building with contractors, designers, property owners and others involved in construction of buildings, and supports the premise that the inspector and the customer are not on opposing teams. The inspector is encouraged to develop skills to move interactions from contentiousness to collaboration. Operating with respect and diplomacy not only makes life easier for the inspector, it raises the bar of professionalism and improves the image of the inspector in the eyes of the public. Building public trust and acceptance of construction codes works to promote code adoption and application, thereby improving public safety.

Inspector Skills was written for construction inspectors in all disciplines. It applies to building, fire, electrical, plumbing, mechanical and combination inspectors, and to inspectors in specialized fields. Students of construction technology considering a career in code administration or inspection will also benefit from the material covered in the text. Of course, there is a broader application of the material—developing good soft skills is equally important to all employees of public service agencies including permit technicians, plan reviewers and building officials. Additionally, the content is useful to building officials and fire code officials with a focus on developing policies and procedures, and as a training

tool to promote uniform and fair inspection practices while improving communications and public relations. For purposes of this text, the term “building department” is interchangeable with “fire department” and “code safety department.” Likewise, the term “building official” is equivalent to “code official” and “fire code official.”

The opinions set forth in this text are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position of the ICC. In addition, the code official has sole authority for the administration and interpretation of the codes, and for other operations of the building safety department.

Comments concerning this publication are encouraged and may be directed to the ICC at: inspectorskills@iccsafe.org.