John Wooden was one of the most revered coaches in the history of sports and was known for his simple inspirational messages to his players. One such message was: “the true test of a man’s character is what he does when no one is watching.” (In more modern translation—“the true test of a person’s character is what he or she does when no one is watching.”)

This quotation resonates with professionals. The idea is that professionals are driven by an intrinsic commitment to high standards of competence, conduct, and ethics. Intrinsic in the sense that professionals should demonstrate this commitment to high standards even when no one is watching.

In fact, one could argue that this aspect of professionalism is the most important in regards to the protection of the public. It is what makes self-regulation a viable approach to professional regulation. It is also the reason why the public will put their trust in professionals. Professionalism has always been tied to character. This is important to professional regulation. Simply, professional regulatory bodies cannot ‘watch’ the professionals they regulate so closely that any chance that the public would be put at risk is eliminated.
This was recognized in the UK’s Professional Standards Authority’s *Right-Touch Regulation*\(^1\) approach: “We believe that it is primarily the professionalism of doctors, osteopaths, pharmacists, nurses, physiotherapists and the other 25 regulated professions that deliver quality care. Regulation is working in the public interest when it supports professionalism and allows it to flourish.”

“The extent to which regulated professionals comply with standards and rules only when there are mechanism in place to monitor compliance should be a cause for concern.”

The idea is that professional regulatory bodies do not want the professionals they regulate to simply comply with practice standards and rules of professional conduct when they are ‘watched’ by the professional regulatory body but to internalize those rules such that such standards are rules are applied even when not ‘watched.’ It is a simple reality that there are many aspects of professional practice and conduct that professional regulatory bodies cannot ‘watch.’ Professional regulatory bodies depend on the professionalism of the professionals they regulate to protect the public.

Interestingly, this suggests a simple metric of professionalism which works both at the individuals and collective levels:

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\text{Professionalism} = \frac{\text{Compliance rates when professionals are not watched}}{\text{Compliance rates when professionals are watched}}
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The extent to which regulated professionals comply with standards and rules only when there are mechanism in place to monitor compliance should be a cause for concern.

The challenge for professional regulatory bodies is to encourage intrinsic motivation to comply with standards and rules. Of course, professional regulatory bodies cannot stop from enforcing standards. In fact, most professional regulatory bodies have a statutory duty to enforce standards of qualification, of practice, of conduct, and of competence. It would also be irresponsible for a professional regulatory body to simply trust that the professionals they regulate are compliant with standards and rules. However, professional regulatory bodies must do this in such a way that does not erode the intrinsic motivation of professionals.

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