

Professionalism in the Workplace

Professionalism is the conduct, behavior, and attitude of an individual in a work environment conducive to the norms and standards of an organization. Developing and maintaining professional behavior is essential to success in the workplace and is determined by the way you conduct yourself, relate to others and approach tasks.

Here are some ideas on how to achieve and maintain professionalism in the workplace, as adapted from Indeed.com (2021):

Be reliable

Reliability is crucial to workplace success. Departments are more efficient and effective when teams can rely on one another to do their part. When you and your teammates trust each other to meet deadlines, produce quality work and respond promptly to requests, it's easier to meet organizational goals and overcome challenges.

To be reliable, you also need to be flexible and focus on your duties when faced with unforeseen obstacles.

You can demonstrate reliability in the workplace by:

- Always following up on requests or questions. If you don't have an answer yet, at least respond by acknowledging the request and letting your teammate know when they can expect to hear back.
- Arriving on time or early for work, meetings, and events
- Producing a consistent quality of work
- Responding to issues in a consistent manner
- Following processes and procedures
- Giving full attention to the task at hand

Demonstrate humility and consideration

Another essential aspect of professionalism is humility or freedom from pride or arrogance. Those who exhibit humility are confident without being arrogant and recognize the value others bring to the team. Humility helps people cooperate and work together as a team without one individual considering themselves more important than others.

Humble employees respect their peers, acknowledge others' hard work and avoid boasting about personal accomplishments. Employees who show consideration are mindful of the thoughts, feelings and needs of others. This is a vital interpersonal skill. Those who are considerate demonstrate thoughtfulness and empathy, which can include everything from asking a colleague about their weekend to helping an overwhelmed co-worker complete a challenging project.

You can demonstrate humility and consideration in the workplace by:

- Seeking ways to help develop others alongside yourself
- Acknowledging your mistakes
- Asking for assistance when necessary
- Accepting constructive criticism



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- Asking for and following advice from more experienced or knowledgeable professionals
- Doing what it takes to meet team goals even if it involves tasks below your level of expertise
- Encouraging others to share their thoughts and ideas
- Being polite and kind to your peers, managers, and customers
- Making an effort to assist others in need
- Remaining tolerant and respectful of others and their feelings
- Listening to others' thoughts and opinions carefully before responding

Demonstrate etiquette

Etiquette is an unwritten code of conduct or the “proper” or “right” way to act in workplace situations. Using proper etiquette often means demonstrating good manners, being polite and treating others with courtesy and respect. While business etiquette can vary between employers and industries, it's always better to be more formal than not formal enough.

You can demonstrate proper business etiquette in the workplace by:

- Greeting new people in a way that is comfortable i.e., a handshake, fist bump or polite salutation
- Dressing appropriately. Be aware of cologne, makeup, hair styles and clothing choices, making sure they fit the environment and ask if you're unsure.
- Using professional language and full sentences in written communications
- Putting your phone away during meetings and in face-to-face conversations
- Greeting others by name
- Making eye contact when speaking to others, if possible and culturally appropriate
- Keeping conversations focused on work and avoiding personal topics, unless relevant to building authentic relationships at work. We don't want to come across as being cold and stand-offish, but we also do not want our personal stories to overwhelm our work or take the focus from our role. Being self-aware helps in this area and may take some time to learn when and how to share.
- Following organizational policies when taking time off from work or calling in sick

Demonstrate a strong work ethic

Demonstrating work ethic shows employers you support the company mission and goals and are committed to delivering positive outcomes through your work. Proving you're dependable and willing to put in extra effort to meet your overall goals will help you advance your career, as long as you maintain authenticity and alignment with your personal values.

You can demonstrate dedication in the workplace by:

- Taking initiative and volunteering for new projects
- Exhibiting a positive work ethic
- Delivering high-quality work
- Being punctual



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- Meeting all reasonable deadlines
- Maintaining a positive attitude about your job duties
- Fulfilling the responsibilities and duties of the job for which you were hired. If this isn't clear, ask for clarity.
- Understand the policies within the organization. Are smoke breaks allowed? How long should they be?

Be organized

Organized professionals can better manage their time and obligations. They have a clear grasp of what they're supposed to be doing at any given time and set personal deadlines to keep themselves on track. Being organized ensures they don't miss important details and make the best use of their workday.

You can demonstrate organization in the workplace by:

- Maintaining a clear agenda
- Creating and updating to-do lists
- Always returning items to the right locations
- Preparing for tasks by gathering the proper tools and information ahead of time
- Learning and using time management skills

Be accountable and show integrity

Demonstrating accountability shows others you take responsibility for your actions and their results. Accountability requires you to accept your role in mistakes or failures which can be challenging. However, it also proves your self-awareness and commitment to honesty and integrity. Integrity is an important part of professionalism because it assures others that you will always try to do what is right and fair. Those who have great integrity are honest, ethical and respectful of all those around you, including co-workers, supervisors, subordinates and customers.

You can demonstrate accountability in the workplace by:

- Completing all tasks assigned to you on time
- Accepting responsibility for the outcome of any project you've participated in
- Striving to achieve your goals and do your part to help your team meet business objectives
- Accepting constructive feedback
- Keeping your word
- Avoiding workplace gossip
- Being honest in all your business dealings
- Maintaining confidentiality when required
- Avoiding discussing sensitive topics not relevant to your job
- Adhering to all company policies and procedures, even when no one is watching
- Giving credit to others for their accomplishments



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Acquire expertise

While you don't need to be an expert on everything, it's important to be competent in the areas for which you are responsible. In most cases, it takes ongoing effort to maintain a high level of industry expertise. To continue developing your knowledge and skills, you might read industry journals, attend conferences, enroll in relevant courses, practice with new technology and seek a mentor in your field. The more expertise you have in your field, the more professional you will appear to others.

You can demonstrate expertise in the workplace by:

- Recommending new products, tools and processes to improve outcomes
- Asking your manager for feedback about performance to determine where you can improve
- Staying current on new industry developments
- Pursuing continuing education in your field
- Practicing essential skills often
- Volunteering for training opportunities, both as a student and an educator

Be tactful and relevant

Tact and relevance can be exemplified in knowing when, where and with whom to share information. As individuals with lived experience, we exhibit professionalism by knowing when it is appropriate to share our lived experience and to what extent.

You can demonstrate tact and relevance in the workplace by:

- Knowing when our share will be beneficial to share (i.e., your job is based on sharing your experience)
- Only sharing parts of our story that are relevant
- Staying away from sensationalization or sharing to elicit shock or excitement
- Understanding the implications of sharing our story in the workplace

Know values

Understanding your values as well as the values of your employer can help you align your professional demeanor. Do you value integrity and respect? Does your employer? Do you value honesty and clear communication? Does your supervisor? Unfortunately, our values don't always align with those of our employer, so knowing where they align or not can be important.

REFERENCES:

Herrity, J. (2021, December 3). Guide to professionalism in the workplace | indeed.com. Indeed.com. Retrieved November 21, 2022, from <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/the-ultimate-guide-to-professionalism>