



Reprinted from the December 2017/January 2018 issue of BIC

Professionalism: 10 'do's' for today's work environment

Dawn Rosenberg McKay, a career planning professional and contributor to “The Balance,” points out, “Professionalism is defined as an individual’s conduct at work. In spite of the word’s root, this quality is not restricted to what we describe as ‘the professions,’ which are typically careers that require a lot of education and have high earnings associated with them.” McKay continues with the idea cashiers, maintenance workers, servers and clerical workers demonstrate a high level of professionalism even though those occupations require minimal training and the employees have modest earnings. On the other hand, as many of us have experienced, some doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, etc. — often called “professional” — demonstrate very little “professionalism.”

This quote by David Maister from his book, “True Professionalism,” pretty much sums up my philosophy: “Professional is not a label you give yourself — it’s a description you hope others will apply to you.” Whether you’re a new employee, a veteran or somewhere in between, there are probably a few professional qualities you could improve. Here are 10 “do’s” for professional behavior on the job that are consistently mentioned in current research and can impact your overall job performance, as well as career advancement.

- Do be reliable. Make being on time a priority. Show up to work on time, return from lunch on time and make a concerted effort to meet work/project deadlines in a timely manner.

- Do live up to your commitments. Follow through on what you say you are going to do. Being a person of your word is a valuable reputation to develop and maintain. It can differentiate you from the crowd.

- Do demonstrate trustworthiness. Honesty and integrity are key “do’s” in practicing professionalism. Be known for engaging in ethical behavior and consistent principles.

- Do respect confidentiality. Main-taining confidentiality of private information at all times is a “must do.” In conjunction with that, avoid gossiping as well as discussing personal issues/information with everyone in the office.

- Do show respect for others. Keep in mind the cliché, “To get respect, you must give respect.” Or, as eloquently spoken by Thurgood Marshall, the first African American to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court, “In recognizing the humanity of our fellow beings, we pay ourselves the highest tribute.”

- Do strive for excellence. Whatever task or responsibility you perform at work, striving for excellence is the quality that enables you and your work to stand out. It impacts your reputation positively and can earmark you as a “true professional.”

- Do stay work focused. Avoid using company time for personal issues or attending to personal matters. Minimize work distractions by not tweeting, checking Facebook, conducting internet activities that do not belong on the job, or continually checking your cell phone for texts,

emails or voicemails.

- Do project a positive demeanor. Smile. Your pleasant, sincere smile is one of the first things people tend to notice about you. Demonstrating a positive attitude goes a long way toward interacting cooperatively and professionally with customers, co-workers, supervisors and the general public. Though there are numerous variables that can color your view of a situation, you have the power to choose what that color will be.

- Do dress appropriately. While every workplace has its own guidelines or dress codes, appropriate attire can vary depending on the industry, company, geographic locale, and even the level of client involvement and exposure. What you wear to work should work for you, not against you. Keep in mind you never get a second chance to make a first impression.

- Do watch your mouth. In other words, refrain from swearing; it has no place in the professional work environment.

Where do you stand with your level of professionalism? Are you on track? Or do you need to tighten up a bit? The choice is up to you.

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