

What does being a professional mean?

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This short account is intended to stimulate you to think about what being professional means to you in your work contexts.

It doesn't matter if you work for yourself or a boss, there are expectations that you will be professional in the course of business.

But what is professional behaviour?

Most people would probably find it easier to tell you what being unprofessional is, giving examples of unprofessional people they have dealt with in the past. However, it is much easier and more positive to know what to do than not to do. Thus, some major aspects of professional behaviour are listed below:

Respect for others

Showing others respect is the basis of all professional behaviour. It includes:

- § Being courteous and having good manners
- § Being punctual
- § Keeping confidential details confidential
- § Being fair in all dealings
- § Keeping personal opinions of people private
- § Doing what needs to be done, not leaving it for others to do
- § Acceptance of constructive criticism
- § Being fair and gentle when giving feedback
- § Dealing with sensitive issues privately
- § Make allowances for other's mistakes
- § Listen to others
- § Apologise for any errors or misunderstandings
- § Speak clearly and in language others can easily understand

Responsibility and integrity

This is where you must take care of yourself and present yourself in order to gain others' trust and respect.

All professionals need to take responsibility for themselves and their work. They need to consider consequences and the impact on others.

- § Honesty is crucial – avoid even the smallest of lies at all costs
- § If you commit to something, then follow through with it
- § If you are delayed, let the other person know as soon as possible
- § Always be respectful about competing businesses/people – point out your benefits rather than their faults
- § Be prepared before meetings and when presenting reports and the like
- § Ensure you have made yourself clear to avoid any miscommunication
- § Avoid conflicts of interest
- § Be impartial – keep personal bias and intolerances out of the business world
- § Be reliable and dependable
- § Take appropriate actions, rather than trying to hurt someone or their business when you feel wronged
- § Ensure you present yourself pleasantly with good hygiene and appropriate dress codes.
- § Pay for services and products promptly, whatever the cost to yourself
- § Demonstrate self-control and avoid public arguments and disagreements
- § Commitment to quality and to continuous improvement and personal development

A professional always aims to give the best they can. Whether it is putting together a product that will last and be safe to use or providing a service of value, you need to do give the customer more than they expect. Never give out work you are not proud to have your name on and always do your best work, and the results will reflect these attitudes.

A professional can see beyond him or herself and is willing to share.

Some ways to give to others in a professional capacity are as follows:

- § Take on an apprentice or student
- § Participate in professional organizations you belong to
- § Volunteer services to a worthy community or charity group
- § Encourage conservation within your work place
- § Join networking groups and help the members
- § Have referral systems in place with competitors for busy periods and complementary services

Being professional is about seeing beyond the immediate needs and planning for the future. By thinking about the long term perceptions of you and your business, rather than achieving quick wins, you are likely to behave professionally.

So what does being professional mean to you in your working contexts? Do you agree with the above? What is missing?