

Professionalism – it *IS* for Everyone

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What is a professional?

What makes them a professional ?

Degrees, attitude, profession - - - -

I think the definition of professionalism is someone who exhibits competence, high level integrity, character, appropriate attitude and responsibility in their work as well as in life – no matter the job or work title.

It really has nothing to do with the title someone has, their education or profession. We have all seen people who have high-level degrees or have a job that indicates a professional status who exhibit low levels of integrity, lack of character and a poor attitude. I would say “professionals behaving badly.”

What are some of the adjectives that fit a professional?

Respected

Well groomed

Ethical

Self-confident

Articulate

Educated

Positive attitude

Let’s dig into some of the characteristics of Professionalism . . .

1. Attitude - Our attitude is our choice. Every moment of every day we get the opportunity to choose how we will think and feel about everything that is going on in our world.

You know that when you are around people who have a positive or pleasant attitude it is a much more enjoyable experience. People who are negative, always complaining and grumbling about stuff are just no fun to be around. They tend to drag you down if you aren’t careful.

I agree with Abraham Lincoln who said “People are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.” Do you agree too?

Did you ever read “Man’s Search for Meaning” by Victor Frankel who was a concentration camp survivor? If not, you may want to read it, there is much value contained within it. Through all of his time there, he maintained a positive attitude and helped his fellow camp victims who liked him and wondered why he would share his meager food; even some of the German guards were nice to him because of his attitude.

A quote from the book:

“Man . . . determines himself whether he gives in to conditions or stands up to them. He is self-determining . . . always decides what his existence will be, what will come in the next moment.”

So how do we have a better attitude?

Make the decision.

As I said previously, we choose whether or not to have a more positive attitude with the circumstances that life brings.

You are what you think about whether you like it or not. So when you think about how difficult life is, you get a more difficult life. When you think about some of the people that you must deal with in your work – colleagues, employees, vendors, suppliers and such, some of them can be trying for sure and I would suggest a couple of approaches with those people in your life that have a lousy attitude – my first thought is to tell them to “buck up” and quit being that way because they are no fun to be around. Or to be more sensitive, perhaps asking if something is going on that is causing them to be negative.

Another suggestion is to think about your approach with them – don’t always expect them to be difficult. Think about the way you would like them to be, change your perspective and it just might help them start to get on a better path. We all send out our energy and when we send out an energy expectation of difficulty, people feel it.

No matter what our circumstances we can choose to improve our attitude.

One thing to note here – if you don’t like your job and have a bad attitude about it – you have 2 choices – quit and get a job that you like or change your attitude. It does you, your employer and your co-workers no favor for you to have a bad attitude – it ripples out everywhere – it oozes out like slime and gets all over everyone – yuck!

- 2. Responsibility** – anyone who is a professional in their work is responsible. They do what they say they will do within the time frame determined. They show up at the appointed time, prepared. They do not blame someone else if they haven’t gotten the job done. They do not shame themselves or put themselves down. They do not justify the reasons why things haven’t gotten completed. They step up and own their responsibility.

What level of responsibility do you exhibit?

- Are you always on time? If not, do you make excuses to justify why you weren’t?
- Do you deliver your projects or your part of a project on time?
- Do you treat all people with respect – vendors / employees / sales reps / service personnel?
- Do you blame others for your situation?
- Are you one to put yourself down if you’ve not done something well?
- Do you under promise and over deliver?

In order to exemplify responsibility, you must walk your talk and request that others within your organization do the same. This will take your company, your organization to a much higher level.

Many people complain about some of your colleagues not being responsible – not showing up as promised, not getting things completed on time within the price quoted and in some instances they are justified in their complaints because you know that there are a lot of companies in your industry that ARE NOT professional.

So if you want the reputation of your company, your industry to change – you must be the change you want to see in your world. You can’t lay the blame on anyone else if you are not stepping up to the plate and delivering a home run.

3. **Ethical** - Professionals are ethical – they have high standards and values. Standards and values that exemplify a professional:

- Honesty – they are honest / truthful in all that they do
- Confidentiality – they respect the privacy of others and do not share information that is not to be shared with others
- Truthful – they speak the truth as they know it, they don't gossip or share stories about people that they don't know for certain is true
- Respectful – they respect that all of us are basically the same - everyone deserves to be heard and treated fairly

These may sound a little difficult to always do, but practicing these values and standards consistently will take you to the top. You will gain respect from all around you and feel more confident too.

4. **Successful Appearance** - A professional knows that you have one time to make a good first impression. People will make a decision about your success based on your appearance – like it or not. Everything that you wear makes a statement about you, be certain you are making the statement that represents you.

Here are some suggestions in an overview:

- 1) Business Casual is not social casual, party casual or beach casual. Clothes worn in the office need to fit well, be clean and pressed. Slacks and skirts of the right length and fit make excellent choices. All need to be worn with no skin showing in the midriff and skirts should come approximately no shorter than 1 – 2 inches above the knee. Tops with sleeves are appropriate, no tank tops or camisoles unless a part of a layering look. No plunging necklines – that is for social wear, not the office or the construction site. Shoes should be appropriate for your work – in the office or on a job site flip flops and sandals are not appropriate.
- 2) Business Wear is appropriate for certain positions / titles in the workplace. Suits with pants and skirts have come a long way to be more comfortable and more stylish. Blazers work well too.
- 3) Grooming – always be well-groomed. It probably doesn't need to be said, but it is important to make certain that you and your clothes are always clean. I think a little makeup is suggested for work. Some of you have beautiful skin, not all of us are that lucky, even so, a touch of mascara and lip gloss or lipstick can make a much more professional appearance. Take a few moments to style your hair – don't make the habit of pulling it back in a ponytail if you have long hair, unless you are going to be wearing a hard hat all day. Remember other people will be looking at you all day, make that experience a pleasant one for them.

“Do you approach your closet in the morning with a smile on your face, saying to yourself, ‘What do I get to wear today?’ or do you say with a frown, ‘What can I wear today?’ . . . If you do not feel that everything in your closet is a power piece, get rid of those clothes. This does not make you a wasteful person. If you do not feel successful and strong all day every day, you cannot and will not be a successful person. Remember – you create your own success.”

- Kathleen Collins author of *Your Mirror Image*

5. **Exhibits Good Manners** - A professional is always on time, if not early for work and for meetings; it shows respect for yourself and others. Speak and walk with confidence. Be courteous even if the situation is difficult – kindness goes a very long way and says a whole lot about your character. If you feel uncertain in new situations, read up on how to handle yourself appropriately – there is a wealth of information at your fingertips. Etiquette is not passé, the more you know, the more successful you can be.
6. **Communicates Well** - As a professional you will handle all of your communication with clarity whether written or verbal.

- **Written** – Be clear and to the point in business communication.
 1. **Emails** - make certain you have read and reread the email prior to sending. **Assume Everyone Will Read Your Message** -A very important reminder. -- In today's world, many companies monitor all of their employee's emails. Even if you send an email message from home, you can never be sure exactly who will end up seeing what you wrote.

Reply - in replying in frustration or anger – **don't**. Write your response in a Word document and let it sit for an hour (or 24-hrs.), then reread it and if it is appropriate, copy / paste it into your email response. –

No texting and driving – ever!

- Text-messaging is not an alternative to using the phone when calling would be considered rude. You would not take a call in the middle of a movie, a performance, or a meeting, and likewise, you should not send text messages.
- Make sure you're texting to the right phone number! It's very easy to dial the wrong number or select the wrong phone book entry.
- Don't text-message anything confidential, private, or potentially embarrassing. You never know when someone might be looking over your significant other's shoulder—or worse yet, when your message might get sent to the wrong person.
- If you text-message someone who doesn't have your phone number, start your message by stating who you are: "Hi—it's Kate (yoga). Chiropractor's number is: 1-802-555-2020. Good luck."
- Just as you should not be answering your phone during a conversation, you should not send a text message when you are conversing with someone else. If you are with someone who will not stop text messaging during your conversation, feel free to excuse yourself until they have concluded their messaging.
- You should not use text messaging when informing someone of sad news, business matters, or urgent meetings, unless it's to set up a phone call on the subject.
- If you receive a text message that was sent to you by mistake, reply explaining that you aren't the intended recipient. You don't have to respond to anything else in the message.
- Finally, remember that as with email, you can't know for sure when the recipient is going to read his or her message—so don't freak out if your text message doesn't get an immediate response.

2. **Thank you** notes should be handwritten.

- **Oral** – speak clearly and distinctly. When you answer the phone, answer it with a smile – no matter who it is – especially if you are the receptionist who answers the company phones, you make the impression people receive about the company.

The #1 Communication Skill – Listening

We listen more than we do anything else but breathe, and most of us don't do it very well. In an age of multi-tasking and accelerated communication we constantly receive and filter endless amounts of information. Listening is exhausting. Listening enables you to truly understand and empathize with another person and it is a prerequisite for being heard. In fact, listening is rated the number one skill of great leaders. Bottom line: If you want to have healthy professional and personal relationships learn how to listen well.

Listening is an interactive process. You don't listen with your ears; you listen with your entire body, using your intellectual and physical energy. When you listen to people, your goal is first to hear, then understand and finally reflect your understanding so the speakers know they have communicated their message clearly.

Listening tips:

- **Open body language:** When you are listening, start by facing people, uncrossing your arms and creating about two feet of distance between you, and maintain eye contact. Note: be certain to research cultural norms.
- **Verbal cues:** These are small interjections that show you are following the conversation without interruption. Words like, “uh-huh” or “okay” are fine.
- **Nod and lean in:** Nodding shows that you are digesting the information and leaning in shows that you are interested. Studies show that men and women have very different styles when it comes to leaning in. When men listen, they tend to lean back; while women tend to lean in and get close to the person. A compromise is to lean in slightly and still give the other person space.
- **Questions:** Inquiries illustrate interest in what the person is talking about. Instead of remaining silent or changing the subject, ask an open-ended question.
- **Mirroring:** Subtly match your tone and body language with theirs to help them feel more comfortable with you
- **Paraphrase:** Repeat what they told you to verify that you understood them correctly. Start by saying something like “So, what you're saying is...” Then follow it up with a confirmation: “Is that right?” Paraphrasing shows the speaker unequivocally that you understood the message.

When replying or commenting, never say “I understand” because you don't. You may have experienced something similar, but each person is different in the way they experience life. A better response might be, “I can appreciate where you are coming from, experiencing, etc.” or possibly, “I think I understand.”

If this seems like too much work, remember the old adage: People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. The best way to get people to listen to you is to listen to them first. Pick someone in your life and give it a shot. Chances are the results you get will make you want to listen a lot more.

Getting Your Point Across Clearly

Have you ever had the awkward experience of making a point and watching as the words tumbled out of your mouth, and landed in a messy pile in front of you? If only we could express our thoughts as clearly as we think them.

The truth is that you can. You don't have to be eloquent to get your point across, you just need to remember some basic rules about communicating.

1. Use the 5-Second Rule.

When you feel nervous or agitated you slip into the stress response.

Studies show that in as little as five seconds you can slow your body down and reverse the stress response by doing two things: 1) pause, put your attention on your heart and then take one deep abdominal breath. 2) take two more deep breaths, this slows your heart rate and gives you time to clarify what you are going to say.

2. Enumerate.

Most of us talk too much. Studies show that most people will only listen for about 20 seconds before another thought distracts them.

To keep people's attention, preview what you are going to say in 20 seconds or less by enumerating your points. Say something like "I think we should expand our business for three reasons..." or "I have two concerns..." That way people can follow you and they know what to expect. It also helps you zero in on the points you want to make.

3. Match your body with your words.

85 to 90 percent of your communication is your body language. People unconsciously read you all the time. To express an opinion that you feel passionate about, what will your listener think if you round your shoulders, cross your arms in front of you and refuse to make eye contact? Let's put it this way: No sale.

People who express themselves with great conviction are doing four things with their bodies while they speak: 1) They stand tall, 2) lean forward, 3) use their hands to accent what they are saying, and 4) they make eye contact with everyone they can. Their body language is what makes them so convincing.

Three Rules for Uncomfortable Conversations

Communication is a breeze when there's nothing to talk about. No one likes having difficult conversations, to ask for a raise or fire someone. It is no picnic to tell your spouse that you're not happy in the relationship or to explain to customers that they cannot have something they

want. But these are the conversations that matter. They are the ones on which our personal and professional relationships depend, so we'd better get them right.

There's no road map to uncomfortable conversations, but here are a few rules to follow that can make the process a lot easier. By using these three guidelines you will find those awkward moments less painful than you fear.

1. **Give up the idea that you're right.**

Most problems between people aren't about facts; they're about perceptions. Trying to convince someone that you are right clouds the real problem and prevents resolution.

Before having a difficult conversation, remind yourself that you have two goals: 1) to understand their perceptions and 2) to make your perceptions understood.

2. **Script it.**

We've all had the experience of wishing we had said (or had not said) something in a difficult conversation. Feelings of anxiety induce what's called the stress response which clouds our judgment and prevents us from communicating clearly.

There are three things you need to consider when you're scripting: What, when and where.

- 1) Start by planning the words you want to use. The conversation won't go exactly as planned, but having a sense of the discussion before it happens will give you confidence and guidance.
- 2) Use the PIP-CIP rule; you'll know exactly where to have the conversation. PIP-CIP stands for praise in public; criticize in private. Always get the person alone to keep egos at bay.
- 3) When should you have the conversation? Right away. There's no great time for an uncomfortable discussion, so the faster you take care of it the better. Difficult conversations are like low-grade infections: If you don't take care of them immediately, they usually get worse. So don't procrastinate.

3. **Put the ball in their court.**

We often turn difficult conversations into monologues. The other person may shut down out of fear or anger, and leave us feeling more frustrated than when we began. When you decide to take the initiative, you have the power, so make sure that you share that power by soliciting feedback with open end questions. You can say what you think and feel, but always check in with people because their perceptions will most likely differ from yours.

So the next time you have a conversation you're dreading, start by giving up ideas of right or wrong, then script what you plan to say, and always put the ball in their court during the conversation. And remember that the most important thing you can do with an uncomfortable conversation is to have it.

Body Talk

The problem with our bodies is that they are always communicating. Studies show that body language makes up 85 to 90 percent of our communication. Even in a heated argument when

we listen, our bodies speak volumes. It's much easier to change diction, vocabulary, and pronunciation than it is to change our body language.

The three elements of good body language are eyes, posture and arms.

1. Eyes

You may have said or heard someone say in the heat of an argument, "Don't look at me in that tone of voice." Our eyes convey tone, and it's the first thing people focus on when we are communicating. We roll them, raise them, shift them, and that tiny movement says it all.

The next time you are in a heated conversation and you feel the frustration coming on what can you do? Avert eye contact for a moment by shifting your eyes downward towards the floor. Then look up again. Do it slowly and try it a few times during the course of the conversation. This purposeful but subtle movement will help the eyes (and the situation) stay under control. It will also send a message back to the brain: Remain calm.

2. Posture

People form their first impressions within five seconds of meeting. The way you sit or stand can tell a person a lot about you. When standing, ignore everything you have heard about a straight spine, tummy in and shoulders back. Instead try leaning slightly on one hip, head tilted a bit to one side, and hands either clasped behind you, or down at your side.

3. Arms

Most people have no idea what to do with them when they are in front of group. The best thing to do with arms and hands is to use them to accentuate what you say.

Controlling your body means understanding first how you use it. If you can bear the answer, ask a close friend or colleague what some of your habits are, and start to consciously make an effort every day to change them. Just a little movement goes a long way.

7. Professional Development – All professionals continue to learn and be involved throughout their lives. They take courses, read books that help them improve their business and books that increase their knowledge as well as books for pleasure. Make sure that you do too.

They set goals in more than one area in life:

- Business
- Relationships (family/friends/co-workers)
- Financial
- Personal Development
- Charity
- Spiritual
- Health
- Self-Care
- Free-Time / Recreation

I suggest that you write 3 items for each goal / intention and the action steps you will put into place to help you achieve them.

Professionals also get involved with their community. Often we get involved because of our children and their events, but be sure to do something with an organization whose work you really admire at least once in a while.

- 8. Self-Care** - Make certain that you take time for you. Your work and family life can be quite demanding so be sure to take time for self-care. Remember, you cannot give from an empty cup. Spend a few moments each morning getting yourself centered. Just five minutes of being quite with your focus on your heart and some deep breathing will be much more beneficial than you can imagine. As a Stress Relief Expert, I have studied the effects of this simple step to start your day, relieve your stress and when you practice it during your day and again before bedtime, it will help you sleep better. If you have a busy family, teach your children this exercise, it will help them too.

Also add some fun to your life. While you've been here you have met new people and connected again with "old" friends and hopefully had some fun. Do something on a weekly basis to have fun. That is one of the beauties of grandchildren – you get to play more with them than you probably did or do with your own children.

Many of you may already be doing all of or many of these suggestions and for those who are not, I encourage you to embrace these ideas to continue to improve your life. I firmly believe we are here on this earth at one of the most pivotal times in recent history. And that each of us has the opportunity to do something, even very one small thing to make our world a better place.

I offer a challenge to you, by using the skills that have been provided to you, what will you do to improve yourself, your community, your world? How will you use what you have learned?

Remember, Professionalism IS for Everyone!

What will you do?

Enjoy,

Margaret

Margaret Martin:

Margaret Martin, author of *The Chatter that Matters . . . Your Words ARE Your Power*, is dedicated to helping people make positive change in their lives. She works with individuals and organizations to become more effective, efficient and to achieve personal balance, fulfillment, and a more profitable future by assisting in their development utilizing her ability as a coach, workshop facilitator and speaker.

Life Guide Coaching:

Priority “One” Coaching . . . Taking YOU to the TOP of the List, Margaret coaches highly motivated, successful women who have a deep hunger for a more meaningful life; women who are striving to *do it all*, yet do not find or make time for themselves. She helps them discover how to put Self at the Top of the List, reduce their stress, increase their Time Efficiency so they can live an abundant life of peace, joy and fulfillment. Of course this doesn’t mean that she does not work with men, she maintains a healthy balance of men in her practice.

Career Transition Coaching - Margaret is a certified Career Transition Consultant and provides assistance / processes for individuals who are in the midst of career change. She is an expert resume editor, having successfully helped hundreds of individuals in creating a resume that tells their story and makes them shine.

Margaret provides keynote presentations and workshops on *The Chatter that Matters . . . Your Words ARE Your Power* - Increasing the awareness of how: we use our words in Self-Talk, with each other, to set boundaries with negativity of others.

A graduate of CoachU, Margaret is the past director of the Tampa Bay Professional Coach Association, is a member of International Coach Federation, National Speakers Association Central Florida, and on the Board of Directors of Leadership Pinellas. She is a skilled trainer in: Stress Relief, Time Efficiency, Conflict Dynamics Profile, Professionalism and the DiSC™ Personal Profile, often utilized for Team Building. Margaret is licensed by the Institute HeartMath, LLC as a coach with their programs of Stress Relief, Optimizing Performance. She is a Certified Career Consultant by Career Partners International.

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