

professionalism

the skill, good judgment, and polite behavior that is expected from a person who is trained to do a job well

Why is professionalism important? In the working world, your professionalism encompasses the way you carry yourself, your attitude and the ways you communicate with others. Being professional can ensure a positive first impression, successful interpersonal relationships and a lasting reputation within your organization and industry. Regardless of overall performance, careers have been known to stall (or even fail to start) because an individual did not display these qualities.

Generally speaking, etiquette centers on respect. In an office environment, it's important to be thoughtful when it comes to your interactions, acknowledging other people's time and how you treat your workspace. Workplace etiquette is important because it ensures that your presence won't be a burden on anyone else's work experience. According to U.S. Department of Labor, there are few things employers value more than employees who fulfill their duties in a professional manner. In fact, employees with a high degree of professionalism are frequently perceived as being more credible and reliable than their coworkers.

But professionalism isn't just one trait — it's a combination of a few different qualities. That might seem confusing, but consider the following five ways you can employ workplace etiquette within your organization:

Honor your commitments With a topic as expansive as professionalism, it can be difficult to know where to start when it comes to your own workplace habits and practices. Following through with your commitments is pivotal. If you are continually accountable for your assignments and other commitments, it will show that you're a responsible person who can do what needs to be done to accomplish a goal. In addition to meeting deadlines, you should aim to be on time to start your day, to meetings and to any other work-related events, whether in person or virtual.

Be attentive, responsive and proactive It may sound simple, but one of the most effective ways to display professionalism is to show that you're invested enough to pay attention. Another way to show your investment in and commitment to your organization is by being proactive about improving the company. But that requires doing more than just identifying concerns or pain points. Make sure to pair your complaints with solutions. Instead of simply bringing a problem to your manager, come armed with a proposed resolution.

Get to know the workplace culture The general work culture will often change from company to company. That's why it's important to learn as much as you can about the cultural norms whenever you start a new position. Determining the right workplace attire is a good example. This can also impact your communication habits, as standard practices can vary. In some offices, it's common to just send a quick email or arrange an impromptu video chat to discuss something. Other environments may require formally requesting a meeting via an administrative assistant. Once learned, these cues and others will reflect the unofficial rules of your organization and help you to navigate to success.

Keep personal matters to a minimum Because the overall goal of workplace etiquette is to be respectful of your organization and your coworkers, you'll want to avoid things that might interfere with anyone's productivity. Whether you're in an office, cubicle or open space, it is important to mind the personal space and time of others. A 'quick' conversation about the movie you saw last night could turn into 15 to 30 minutes, which is not a productive use of time for you or your colleagues. Catch up on last night's game or your weekend plans at lunch time or after work.

Avoid the negative side of office politics It's true that office politics can be unavoidable. At times, it's a necessary part of climbing the corporate ladder. The truth is, you're already part of your organization's political landscape simply by being an employee. But it's possible to stay on the positive side of things in the following ways:

- Find common ground with your colleagues
- Don't try to make others look bad
- Be mindful of your place in the larger company structure
- Prioritize company success over personal 'wins'

Politics can have a positive outcome when coworkers build up and work alongside those in their workplace community. But the political climate in an office can turn negative when colleagues are in competition with one another, rather than working together for the greater good. When you do encounter negative gossip, don't participate in the conversation.

Success looks different for everyone, but practicing proper professionalism in the workplace can get you far regardless of your ultimate goal. If you honor your work commitments and remain dedicated, productive and respectful of those around you, building a respectable reputation within your organization will happen naturally.



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