

Much is spoken about behaving professionally. Most people can actively recognise professionalism or the lack of it in others, but find it extremely difficult to define it, or model it when considering their own behaviour.

So let's unpick exactly what we mean by professionalism.

Think about the people you respect most because they are the consummate professional. Can you identify the elements that made them so good?

I've asked this question of so many groups of people and the replies have included the following:

- * A good role model for others including, their behaviour, attitude and relationships
- * Good Time Keepers - always in before time, uses time well
- * Dresses appropriately for the role
- * Speaks in a way which is appropriate to each different audience without being patronising or putting people down.
- * Knowledgeable about the job, organization, etc.
- * Good with people
- * Communicate effectively, whatever the circumstances - actively listens
- * Manages their time well
- * Works well under pressure
- * Fulfills deadlines
- * Prioritises effectively - Is prepared to put in the time and effort to get things done, but also manages to have a reasonable work life balance
- * Is accountable and takes responsibility for what they do and say, and for what they leave undone

Look more deeply into the issue of professionalism and you begin to realise that professionalism includes all of those strands above but also so much more.

Those who are thoroughly professional, demonstrate a rounded personality. They are able to act as a good role model for their colleagues. They have the ability to take the rough with the smooth, and are always consistent with others whatever their personal circumstance or problems may be. They never take their frustrations out on others.

The experienced professional behaves appropriately in all situations:

They know when it is appropriate to have a laugh over a coffee and when to behave formally. They are able to run effective meetings. They are well versed in when to speak out and when to bite their tongue. They do not feel the need to be seen to be always right or stand on their dignity. They are prepared to play the long game and wait for time and experience to prove their point. They do not dodge the issues but tackle them without aggression or anger. They can always say hand on heart 'I expect high standards from my team and I demonstrate the same high standards at all times'.

The consummate professional demonstrates a generosity of spirit, there is no need for their own ego to take centre stage, they allow the credit to be taken where it is deserved.

The professional person is open to the views of others and the possibility that there might be a better way. They make decisions based on the best interest of the organisation. They are fair and even handed to all people even those they do not particularly like. The professional evaluates their own performance, has high expectations of themselves and others and constantly strives to improve.

Professionals see themselves as part of the solution rather than the problem.

If you are keen to succeed in any business you need to demonstrate the appropriate levels of professionalism. If you want promotion in the future start to demonstrate that you have the potential to fulfil that role. Just wanting the job, the title, status and financial reward is simply not enough.

Show your commitment, your ability to come up with the goods, others will begin to notice and it will hold you in good stead whether you go for an internal promotion or need a reference for an external promotion.

You will also gain a huge amount of personal satisfaction in knowing you have what it takes to be a great professional.

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