

Understanding the Behaviors that Showcase Workplace Professionalism

Most people prefer to work in a [professional environment](#) with supervisors and coworkers who exude professionalism. Consumers or customers especially prefer to deal with individuals who display professionalism in their interactions. Professionalism can mean different things to different people, though. Some may be focused mostly on how people behave, while others might be focused primarily on physical appearances, such as a person's clothing or hairstyle.

While it may be hard to define in a simple sentence, we know it when we see it. And we certainly know it when it is missing from our interaction with someone.

Professionalism is more than competence. Sure, true professionals are good at whatever they do, and they take their jobs seriously. When we visit a doctor, hail a cab, go out to dinner, or hire an electrician, we always appreciate engaging a “pro,” who is well trained, has experience, and will deliver a great outcome.

Professionalism goes beyond being good at what you do. Competence is a minimum standard, and the rest of what gives meaning to the idea of workplace professionalism is all about behavior. It's not just what you know—it's how you do your job, how you behave, and how you come across as you interact with others.

11 Characteristics that Showcase Workplace Professionalism

If you want to improve your own professionalism in the workplace or set guidelines for those who work for you, consider the characteristics that best exude what most people consider to be professional behavior.

1. **Keep commitments.** Professionals do what they say they are going to do and they don't over promise. They are dependable, they keep their appointments, and they don't have to be reminded over and over when something is due. Punctuality is part of this. Making others wait is a sure sign of a lack of professionalism.
2. **Use language properly.** Those who display workplace professionalism do so in every aspect of their work, including how they talk. They choose their language carefully, minimize the use of slang and they definitely pass on the use of inappropriate language. This includes the use of proper grammar when speaking and writing—even in less formal settings.
3. **Avoid drama.** It's impossible to separate our work lives from our personal lives completely. We all, at some point in our lives, will be in and out of relationships, have children or parents to deal with, and experience the roller-coaster ups and downs of life. Bringing too much drama into the workplace can cross the line and come across as unprofessional. For

example, while it's unfortunate to have gone through a bad divorce, your co-workers don't need to learn about your challenges and disagreements directly or indirectly through your loud phone conversations. True professionalism includes maintaining an appropriate wall between our personal problems and our workplace lives.

4. **Ensure a great appearance.** True professionals strive to ensure their physical presentation works for them instead of against them. From wearing clean, environment appropriate clothing to ensuring impeccable personal grooming, there are no gaps in this individual's aesthetic appearance.
5. **Practice ethical behavior.** Displaying professionalism demands an unyielding commitment to doing the right thing. The best professionals are attuned to the ethical implications of their decisions, and when faced with one of those gray-area issues (no clear right or wrong), they seek help.
6. **Never bully.** No one likes a bully, and there's no room for this behavior whatsoever in the workplace. Sometimes bullying is veiled in odd attempts at humor, and you know it is wrong when the humor comes at someone else's expense.
7. **Avoid gossip.** When we hear workplace gossip, it's hard not to listen. Similar to bullying, when you hear a gossip talking about your coworker, you can assume the gossip will be talking about you next as soon as you're not around. Be the person who stays out of these conversations.
8. **Display a positive attitude.** People enjoy working with coworkers who are always upbeat, positive, and energetic. People who are excessively and constantly negative drain the positive energy from a workplace. Focus on ensuring **your mood** is in the right place every day when you walk through the door at work.
9. **Be accountable.** Professionals admit it when they are wrong, own up to their mistakes, don't point fingers at others, and don't make lame excuses. They display **accountability** and expect accountability from others.
10. **Control emotions.** Is it OK to show emotions at work? Of course, but professionals don't lose their tempers, don't lose their composure, and stay cool under pressure.
11. **Avoid dirty jokes and sexual innuendo.** If it's something that would earn an R-rating for a movie, then it doesn't belong in the workplace. Professionals don't embarrass or harass their coworkers in any way, shape, or form. Ever.

The most valuable asset in your career is your reputation. Those who understand this fact of life do everything in their power to always display professionalism in every encounter. There are no compromises, and most of the time we never get a second chance to correct a bad impression.

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