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# Professionalism: A lost treasure?

York College of Pennsylvania's Center for Professional Excellence conducts a nationwide study on the state of professionalism in the workplace. This is the fourth year for the study. The focus is on employers' experience with recent college graduates. Primarily, human resource professionals who are responsible for hiring decisions involving new college graduates are surveyed on a variety of topics related to the professionalism exhibited by these employees. Findings from the study are used to track changes in the state of workplace professionalism.

Two findings from the 2013 study I found to be of particular interest are:

- More than 48 percent feel less than 50 percent of new employees exhibit professionalism in their first year.
- More than 44 percent reported a worsening of work ethic.

"Professional is not a label you give yourself — it's a description you hope others will apply to you." This quote by David Maister from his book "True Professionalism" pretty much sums up my philosophy. Whether you're a new employee, a veteran or somewhere in between, there are probably a few professional qualities you could tighten up. Let's review eight that appeared to be consistently mentioned in current research.

1. Live up to your commitments. Do what you say you are going to

do. Being a person of your word is a valuable reputation to develop and maintain. It can differentiate you from the crowd.

2. Demonstrate honesty and integrity. Tell the truth, and be known for practicing ethical behavior and consistent principles. Maintain confidentiality of information at all times.

3. Be reliable. Make being on time a priority. Show up to work on time, return from lunch on time and make a concerted effort to meet work/project deadlines.

4. Show respect for others. Keep in mind the cliché, "to get respect, you must give respect." Or, as quite eloquently spoken by Thurgood Marshall, the first African American to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court, "In recognizing the humanity of our fellow beings, we pay ourselves the highest tribute."

5. Dress appropriately. While every workplace has its own guidelines or dress codes, appropriate attire can vary depending on the industry, company, geographic locale and even the level of client involvement and exposure. One of the most important points to keep in mind though is the organization's image comes before your image. What you wear to work should work for the greater good, not against it. In the end, business is still business and you should dress accordingly.

6. Project a positive demeanor. Smile. Your pleasant smile is one of the first things people tend to notice about you. Demonstrating a

positive attitude goes a long way in interacting cooperatively and professionally with customers, co-workers, bosses and the general public. Though there are numerous variables that can color your view of a situation, you have the power to choose what that color will be.

7. Watch your mouth. As Dawn Rosenberg McKay mentions in her article, "How to Conduct Yourself at Work," "Swearing, cursing or cussing — whatever you call it — has no place at work. If you wouldn't say it to your grandmother, refrain from saying it at work."

8. Stay work-focused. Avoid using the company's time for personal issues or attending to personal matters. Control your on-the-job use of technology. Minimize distractions by not tweeting, checking Facebook, conducting Internet activities that do not belong on the job or continually checking your cell phone for texts, emails and voicemail.

Many of us, for years, have been hearing how important it is to perform "professionally" on the job. So, where do you stand with your level of professionalism? Are you on track? Or is your professional reputation a "lost treasure?" Incorporating professionalism in the workplace should be a critical component for any company seeking to achieve success.

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