

# 10 Characteristics of Professionalism

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Being a professional in your chosen field means much more than wearing a coat and tie or possessing a college degree and a noted title. Professionalism also has to do with how you conduct yourself during your business affairs. True professionals possess a number of important characteristics that can apply to virtually any type of business.

## Dress for Success

A professional is neat in appearance. Be sure to meet or even exceed the requirements of your company's dress code, and pay special attention to your appearance when meeting with prospects or clients. Even if your workplace tends towards the casual, strive for snappy casual rather than sloppy casual. Keep something a bit dressier handy in case the big boss or an important client happens by.

## Confident, Not Cocky

Your demeanor should exude confidence but not cockiness. Be polite and well-spoken whether you're interacting with customers, superiors or co-workers. You need to keep your calm, even during tense situations. Your body language and facial expressions communicate volumes, so be sure they are conveying the message you want others to hear.

## Do What You Say You Will Do

As a professional, you will be counted on to find a way to get the job done. Responding to people promptly and following through on promises in a timely manner is also important, as this demonstrates reliability. Be at work on time, start meetings on time and follow through on all your commitments.

### Be an Expert in Your Field

Professionals strive to become experts in their field, which sets them apart from the rest of the pack. This can mean continuing your education by taking courses, attending seminars and attaining any related professional designations. A broad set of skills, from mastering software to clearing jams from the copying machine, adds to the sense that you're an indispensable member of the team.

### Behave Morally and Ethically

Professionals such as doctors, lawyers and public accountants must adhere to a strict code of ethics. Even if your company or industry doesn't have a written code, you should display ethical behavior at all times. It's not just a matter of the #MeToo movement; extend professional, respectful, appropriate behavior to everyone you do business with and in every situation you find yourself in.

### Maintain Your Poise

A professional must maintain his poise even when facing a difficult situation. For example, if a colleague or client treats you in a belligerent manner, you should not resort to the same type of behavior.

### Have Good Phone Etiquette

Your phone etiquette is also an important component of professional behavior. This means identifying yourself by your full name, company and title when you place a call. Be sure not to dominate the conversation and listen intently to the other party. Return calls in a timely manner and follow-up on any actions you agree to during a conversation.

### Strike the Right Tone

During written correspondence, keep your letters brief and to the point. Your tone should be polite and formal without being "stuffy." This also applies to email correspondence.

### Be Structured and Organized

A professional can quickly and easily find what is needed. Your work area should be neat and organized, and your briefcase should contain only what is needed for your appointment or presentation. Few things say "unprofessional" as quickly as a hopelessly cluttered, messy work area.

### Own Up to Mistakes

Professionals are accountable for their actions at all times. If you make a mistake, own up to it and try to fix it if possible. Don't try to place the blame on a colleague. If your company made the mistake, take responsibility and work to resolve the issue.