

Professionalism in the Workplace

You will never get a second chance to make a great first impression!

The way you present yourself to others in the professional world speaks volumes about you. Many people form first impressions about others within seconds of meeting them. Whether you're hired in a work study job, an internship or your first full-time job after graduation you must present yourself as a professional. **Here are some important tips to help you succeed in the workplace.**

Make a Positive Impression

Making a good impression on the job can improve your overall image and your confidence.

- When you enter your workplace at the beginning of your day, greet each of your colleagues.
- When a co-worker is speaking to you stand straight, make eye contact, turn towards them and listen attentively.
- Verify and follow the employer's dress code. **NEVER** assume you can wear casual attire to work.
- Your bag or purse and the things you carry in them say something about you. Keep in mind that messy items may detract from the image you would like to present in the workplace.
- When meeting someone for the first time, smile and shake hands palm to palm with a gentle firmness.
- Sleepiness has a negative effect in the workplace. Be alert and ready to contribute to the organization.
- Arrive at work a few minutes early each day. Put your personal items away, and then be ready to begin your workday.
- Remember, kindness and courtesy always count!

Cooperate with Colleagues

How you treat people says a lot about you. Each colleague plays an important role in the success of the organization.

- People like hearing their own names. Learn your co-workers' names and learn them quickly.
 - A good tip for remembering names is to use a person's name three times within your first conversation with them. Also, write names down and keep business cards.
- Don't assume a person is more or less important because of his/her title. Speak to everyone you work with or pass in the hallway. Every employee deserves your respect!
- Self-assess: Think about how you treat your supervisor(s), peers, and subordinates. Would the differences in the relationships, if seen by others, cast you in an unfavorable light? If so, find where the imbalance exists, and start the process of reworking the relationship dynamic.
- What you share with others about your personal life is your choice, but be careful. Your openness may have a negative impact. Don't ask others to share their personal lives with you. This makes many people uncomfortable in the work space.
- Respect other people's personal space. This may be very different than your own.

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Communicate with Care

Sometimes it's not what you say, but how you say it that counts! Proper communication is equally important whether your delivery is spoken, written, or implied.

- **NEVER** create or reply to a work e-mail using text message abbreviations or acronyms!
- E-mails at work should be grammatically correct and free of spelling errors. They should never be treated like personal e-mail.
- Start out all emails with Dear (Name), **NEVER** "Hey".
- When e-mailing, use the subject box wisely. Make sure your subject directly relates to what you are writing. This will ensure ease in finding it later and encourages a faster reply.
- **NEVER** write anything in an e-mail or on paper you would NOT say directly to the intended recipient.
- Underlining, italicizing, bolding, coloring, and changing font size can make a mild email message seem overly strong or aggressive.
- Return phone calls and e-mails within 24 hours – even if only to say that you will provide requested information at a later date.
- Ask the person on the phone for permission before putting them on speakerphone.
- Personalize your voicemail to ensure that callers have the correct voicemail.
- Use a receptive tone of voice when speaking with colleagues. This helps them feel you're approachable.

Mastering Meetings

This can easily be the most intimidating part of starting a new job. The environment of a meeting requires some careful navigation to maintain your professional image, whether the meetings are one-on-one, with several colleagues or with external clients.

- **ALWAYS** bring a pen and notepad to meetings, so you can take notes. Even if you don't use them, you'll be seen as prepared and conscientious.
- For a meeting in someone's office, don't arrive more than (5) minutes early, as they may be preparing for your meeting, another meeting later that day, or trying to get other work done. You may make them uncomfortable, and that is not a good way to begin your meeting.
- Don't arrive late. If you know you're going to be late, let someone know so people are not waiting for you.
- When a meeting runs late and you need to be somewhere else, always be prepared to explain where you need to be (understanding that the value of where you need to be will likely be judged).
- Do not interrupt people when they're speaking. This is a bad habit to start and a tough one to end.
- There is a time and place for confrontations. A meeting is almost never that place. You may embarrass or anger other people and you will look bad for doing it. Give people time and space outside of meetings to reflect on issues that may need to be addressed.
- Contribute to the meeting when appropriate. Meetings are a good place to share your creative ideas and solutions. It's possible you may spend more waking hours in your work space than in your home. Keep your work space professional and neat with appropriate personal touches! People will see the space and consider it a reflection of you.

Work Space Savvy

- Whether it is a cubicle or office, respect others' space. Don't just walk in; knock or make your presence gently known. Ask your colleague if they have a few minutes to speak with you. Don't assume acknowledgement of your presence is an invitation to sit down; wait until you are invited to do so.
- Don't interrupt people on the phone. You could damage an important phone call.
- Limit personal calls, especially if you work in a space that lacks a door.
- Ask your supervisor when and where it is appropriate to use your cell phone in your office.
- Some employers allow staff to listen to music. If your employer allows this, keep a low volume so your colleagues are not disturbed.
- **AVOID** using earbuds or headphones to listen to music while at work.
- Keep food consumption to a minimum. Smells and noise from food can be distracting to others.
- Avoid frequent visits from friends or family on the job.
- **NEVER** look through a colleague's belongings without their permission.

Virtual Professionalism

Many jobs and internships have shifted from being all in-person to partly in person/partly online or entirely online. It is essential to learn to adjust to this new normal and maintain professionalism. Some tips for maintaining professionalism virtually are:

- **Prepare ahead of time for your meetings.** Have your notes ready to discuss and save any important documents you might need for the meeting to your desktop for easy access.
- **Test your computer and webcam.** Make sure to test any links and check your video/audio settings before a meeting to avoid any technical issues that can be prevented.
- **Dress appropriately.** Take a few minutes before a meeting to check your teeth and make-up (if applicable) and to brush your hair. With high definition cameras on phones and computers, it is important to attend to these smaller details. Just like you wouldn't show up to an in person meeting with PJs on, you should dress appropriately for a virtual meeting. Dress as you would in the office. Not only does this make you look professional, but it puts you in the right headspace for a meeting. It'll help you stay focused and in "work" mode.
- **Be aware of your surroundings.** Make sure your background is free of any distractions like dirty laundry or a messy room. If possible, try to adjust your work set up to face a window or are exposed to plenty of light. Ideally, the light source should be coming from behind the camera onto your face. If the light is behind you, your face will be shadowed and there may also be a halo effect.
- **No food allowed.** Much like a regular meeting, try to eat a snack before your virtual meeting. No one in your meeting will want to see you eat while discussing important matters.
- **Mute yourself with not talking.** It can be very distracting to hear odd noises in the background while someone else is talking. When you are not speaking, muting your microphone gives others the chance to chime in and share their thoughts without talking over each other.

Global Business Etiquette

As the global market grows, the need to understand multiple international standards of business etiquette also increases. Research the country you will be working in or visiting. Then, note the proper etiquette, culture and customs for that specific country. There are a few key things to keep in mind when conducting business internationally.

- Knowing the native language makes an excellent impression on the people you are doing business with. However, barely knowing the language, but implying fluency, could really harm the work you are trying to accomplish.
- Be mindful of time zones. You don't want to wake someone or call colleagues with an unreasonable deadline or concern at an awkward time of day for them.
- As there is no standard global work day, you should keep in mind that work hours vary from country to country. This is important when scheduling meetings or conference calls.
- Know the holidays that will be observed for other countries and be respectful of the time surrounding the holidays, as people may be less available.
- Meals can be extremely crucial in making a positive international business impression.
- The customs that are followed when dining are often very important, and mistakes in this area could be costly. Knowing the etiquette well in advance should allow you to
- Relax and enjoy what could be an amazing new experience!

Vigilantly observe the professional culture in which you work and be aware that change will happen. Remember, your eyes and ears are your best resource in this learning process! Also, ask your supervisor questions to ensure compliance and success on the job. Practicing these tips will help you successfully transition into the world of work.