

# PROFESSIONALISM

## Competency Development Guide

### Professionalism Defined:

One of the most foundational challenges with professionalism as a competency is that it is complex and difficult to define. We usually recognize its absence much more readily.

Professionalism Defined (simple): A person's conduct at work.

Professionalism Defined (In-depth): According to dictionary.com, the definition of professional includes the following:

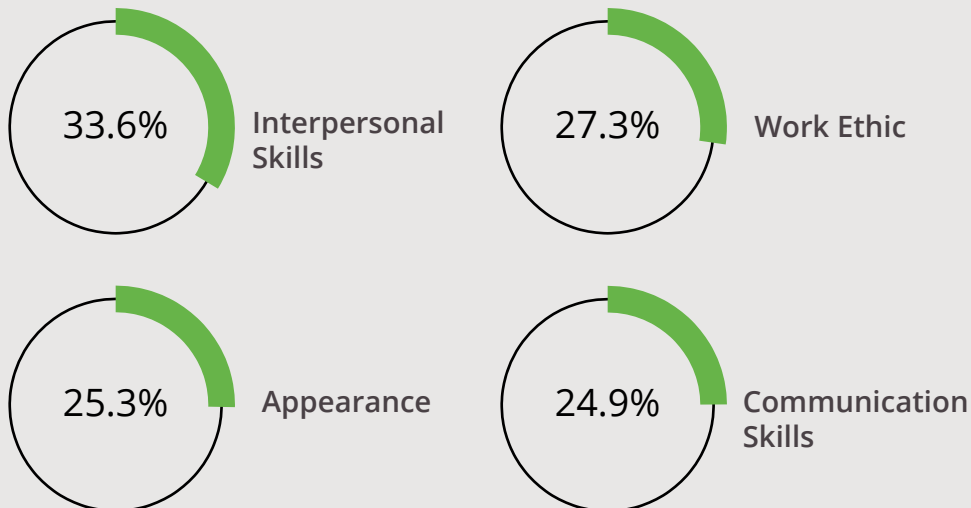
Expert in field which one is practicing, excellent practical and literary skills in relation to profession, high quality in work, high standard of ethics, reasonable work morale and motivation, appropriate treatment of relationships with colleagues, and commitment to the field.

So the definition of the term can range from the simplicity of one's workplace conduct to excellence in work quality, high ethical standards, relationship management and commitment.

From a purely developmental perspective, a working definition that falls someplace between these two ends of the spectrum that is appropriate for each position and person in your organization is probably the way to go.

Employers want new workers to be responsible, ethical, team oriented, and to have strong communication, and problem solving skills. Wrap these skills up all together and you've got professionalism.

According to a "Professionalism in the Workplace" study by the Polk-Lepson Research Group, the four indicators of professionalism are:



### DO'S AND DON'TS OF BEHAVING PROFESSIONALLY AT WORK

DON'T be rude and insensitive

DO show respect to others

DON'T abuse privileges

DO be responsible and trustworthy

DON'T flirt or misbehave

DO maintain professional relationships

DON'T mix personal and business

DO manage boundaries

SOURCE:  
Video Program, Cutting  
Edge Communication:  
Behaving  
Unprofessionally

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### Supporting Behaviors

As we said, it's usually easy to spot a lack of professionalism. So let's first explain some basic behaviors that demonstrate professionalism.

Appearance is important. In today's more casual work environments, this may seem counterproductive and counter intuitive, but the simple fact of the matter is that each and every employee tells their colleagues, our prospects and customers something important about their professionalism by their appearance. It's great to have a casual dress code. But are employees maintaining a clean and neat appearance?

Communications is another key aspect to professionalism. Are emails spell-checked and grammatically correct? Is the language used appropriate to the situation and clear? See more tips on email etiquette below\*. How do our employees sound on the phone? Do our employees make a presentation of our organization that reflects our values and the message we want to send to the market?

Attitudes are also important indicators of professionalism. Pessimism and negativity do not contribute anything positive to a work environment. Optimism and positive outlooks tend to be more engaging and motivating for everyone.

At its core, professionalism is about excellence, and nothing indicates excellence and competence to outsiders more quickly and effectively than positive attitudes.

Be clear in your subject line. With inboxes being clogged by hundreds of emails a day, it's crucial that your subject line gets to the point. It should be reasonably simple and descriptive of what you have written about. Expect that any email with a cute, vague, or obscure subject will get trashed. Also, proof your subject line as carefully as you would proof the rest of the email. - Peter Post, Director of the Emily Post Institute.

Keep it short and get to the point. The long email is a thing of the past. Write concisely, with lots of white space, so as to not overwhelm the recipient. Make sure when you look at what you're sending it doesn't look like a burden to read - feel free to use bullet points. The person reading your email should not have to dig through several paragraphs in order to figure out what you're asking. You should state the purpose of the email within the first two sentences. Be clear, and be up front. - Lindsey Pollak, Career and Workplace Expert and author of Getting from College to Career.

### SUPPORTING BEHAVIOR STATEMENTS

To identify competency skill gaps consider outlining key supporting behaviors that are important in your organization.

You can assign a basic Likert scale to each behavior statement (examples outlined below) and have the employee and the employee's manager rate proficiency.

#### **CONFLICT MANAGEMENT:**

Creates opportunities out of conflict.

Finds common ground and minimizes disruption.

Diffuses high-tension situations easily.

#### **TEAMWORK:**

Assists the group in effectively using individuals' talent and contributions.

Helps remove organizational barriers and identifies resources to assist the team.

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### Development Activities and Suggestions

**Dress for Success:** While we may work in a workplace where casual attire is appropriate, find ways to always look prepared for work, be neat, clean and wear clothing that supports the outward appearance of competence in your field and is age and position appropriate.

**Verbal Communications:** Keep track of conversations and meetings in which you have either positive or negative results. Think and reflect about not only what you said, but how you said things. Tone, inflection, eye contact and body language are all part of effective verbal communication. We may use exactly the right words. But if we are distracted, use a flat tone and use poor body language, the entire message we want to convey can be lost, confused or taken exactly the wrong way. Conversely, when you have a great meeting or conversation, think back on what worked. You can learn as much or more from successes as failures if you take the time to study and reflect on why conversations worked well.

**Optimism and determination:** We can choose our attitude. Things will not always go our way. Professionals know this, and they learn how to overcome setbacks. In fact, optimism in the face of adversity is one of the most attractive characteristics leaders and employees can show. Find ways to see possibilities in the future and ways to learn and grow when things do not go as planned. Business life is rarely a straight line from a strategic plan through implementation to achievement of goals. Professionals learn to adjust, and people who understand how to adjust, remain calm and optimistic tend to be far more successful in the long run.

### Recommended Resources from the BizLibrary Collection

How to Project a Professional Image in a Casual Environment  
Emily Post Etiquette: the 24/7 Professional  
Cutting Edge Communication: Behaving Unprofessionally  
Seven Keys to a Positive Mental Attitude  
To watch these courses and more within the BizLibrary Collection, [request a demo today!](#)

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### SUPPORTING BEHAVIOR STATEMENTS

#### DECISION MAKING:

Foresees the long-range consequences or implications of different options.

Makes decisions at the right time when there is ambiguity or considerable personal or organizational risk.

Focuses on objectives and results when considering the various alternatives to a decision.

#### ESTABLISHING FOCUS:

Takes responsibility for developing, communicating and gaining alignment of broad organizational goals.

Helps focus others' time and resources on the most important work priorities.

Creates personal job goals based on the business objectives.