



## Professionalism in the Workplace and First Year on the Job

(Source: Salisbury University Career Services)

According to the research done by York College, **employers are looking for attention to appearance, ability to communicate respectfully and clearly, willingness to listen carefully and with attention, and the motivation to finish a task.** And, while many employers appreciate the fact that many college graduates are tech savvy, they are less than impressed with the constant need for many to bury themselves in it, answering every text (sometimes during work hours and interviews). Here are some helpful hints for showing your professionalism:

1. **Dress for the job:** Before you go into an interview, call and find out **what sort of dress is common at the office.** During the interview, and after you get the job, make sure you dress appropriately, and pay attention to hygiene and personal grooming.
2. **Prepare:** My husband is starting the job hunt as he finishes his Ph.D. Before he has an interview, he reviews his resume, thinks of his strengths (and a couple weaknesses, and ways he can overcome them), and considers the points he wants to bring up about his qualification. **Prepare for your job interview, and, when you do get a job, prepare to do your best each day.**
3. **Finish your tasks:** Make it a point to **finish your tasks and do them well.** If you are working on a task that takes more time to finish, break it down into smaller tasks that can be accomplished daily. That way you can focus on doing your job, and have a way to show your boss that you are making progress.
4. **Keep personal problems...personal:** There is no need to go into great detail about personal issues at work. Focus on your job.
5. **Communicate with respect:** **Listen carefully, and take constructive criticism as a way to improve your performance.** When you speak with co-workers (and especially your bosses), avoid using profanity and speaking as you would with your friends.
6. **Turn off the cell phone:** **Don't text while you are working, unless it is business related. Put your personal phone on silent, and ignore non-emergency texts.** Check and answer personal, non-emergency text messages when you go on break. The same is true of personal email.

Our society has become much less formal in recent years. However, many employers desire a certain level of professionalism. If you want to get a good job, or even get a raise, it is vital that you conduct yourself in a professional manner, and learn how to interact with others in a way appropriate to the workplace.

### Students can practice professionalism by:

- Turning in work on time
- Interacting politely with professors and students
- Paying attention in class (no texting)
- Not missing class unless they have a good reason, and coming to class on time
- Not making excuses, and taking responsibility for poor work or missed deadlines
- Not doing as little as possible to get a decent grade
- Not complaining that the work is too hard or too much

### Your First 30 Days on the Job

Congratulations on your new job! If you're lucky, **you now have a honeymoon of less than a month to prove you can perform and fit in.** There is nothing worse than starting out on the wrong foot.



## Some of the most common mistakes to avoid include:

1. Misunderstanding the corporate culture
2. Not asking enough questions
3. Lacking integrity
4. Not following the rules
5. Lacking attention to detail
6. Making job-related errors
7. Communicating poorly
8. Misinterpreting the job description
9. Poor interaction with co-workers
10. Trying to change things too fast

Use this important time to construct the framework for success. Here are my tips to ease the transition and jump start you in the right direction:

**Day One** - Start by getting mentally prepared for your first day. On day one, **arrive a little early, and then walk into the office with a smile and a bag full of bagels with cream cheese.** The first impressions people have of you can have a lasting impact and it all starts on your very first day. All of your interactions will be scrutinized closely, and so it is natural to feel like you are under a microscope.

**Co-workers** - **Treat everyone with respect and the way you want to be treated. Get to know your co-workers, but avoid excessive chattiness. Office gossip is dangerous for your career development.** Critical and negative comments can come back to haunt you. It's just counterproductive. Instead, find common interests and get others to talk about themselves. Open the lines of communication by asking for ideas and guidance. Ask them for help when you need it. Let them show you the ropes. **Observe how your co-workers dress. Attempt to blend in rather than stand out.** Office politics are inevitable. Observe how the styles and behaviors of staff and managers as well as the current political issues. Be keenly aware of both the verbal and non-verbal messages you are sending.

**The Boss** - Immediately be proactive and request an "Expectations Meeting." **Find out what he or she needs you to do in the first two weeks. What are the goals? Are they concrete, measurable and realistic? How often and what format should you provide project updates? How will your success be evaluated? Don't guess!** Be clear on what you think are the top five priorities and then compare your notes with your supervisor's objectives. Really listen to what he or she is saying. This meeting will also help you learn more about your supervisor's personality and work-style. **Play "Follow the Leader." Demonstrate your dedication and effort to your boss and co-workers early on. Ask yourself, "What could I do to exceed the expectations?"**

**Culture** - Study the culture, respect it and then learn to how to adapt to it. **Pay close attention to the unwritten rules and adopt them as your own. Listen for possible pitfalls to avoid.** Control the impulse to make comparisons to your last employer. This will only alienate your new colleagues and create the impression that you are an outsider and not a member of the team.

**Orientation** – **Give orientation or training your full attention. Listen carefully and be sure to follow instructions.** Observe and write down things as you learn them. Learn as much as you can early on especially from watching experienced workers. **Discover what your role is in the department as well as the larger organization. Understand the office policies and procedures as well as the strategic issues.** Ask smart questions about anything you don't understand. This will help prevent mistakes and misunderstandings.

**Change** - Resist the temptation to make too many changes immediately. Take some time to observe the subtle nuances of the culture and organization. **Wait until you have established some rapport and a credible reputation before suggesting a major overhaul.** If you alienate your boss or co-workers by pushing too hard



you run the risk of failure. **Be helpful without taking over.** Pick the appropriate time to share your ideas for improvement. Go from team player to team builder.

**Attitude** - Every day come in with a **positive attitude**. Present yourself in the best possible light from the start. **Be yourself at your best.** Stay focused on learning and doing the job quickly and efficiently. Don't get distracted. Don't wait to be given work to do; take the initiative to request it. Demonstrate that you want to be held accountable. Be flexible and embrace the challenges of the job.

**Mentors** - Find one or more mentors that are willing to take you under their wing so you can learn how to get things done. Your mentor is someone you can trust to help you grow and develop. He or she should be someone open to discussing ideas and helping you get connected. Identify some of the star players and role models in the organization that you can emulate.

**Networking** - How you are viewed is based both on your performance and your personality. Get them to like you. **You have got to get out and meet people that can tell you the hidden rules of success in your new workplace.** Come up with a strategy for your internal networking. Seek out the project managers, teammates, deal-makers and potential mentors. **Then start buying them lunch.** Set a goal of building relationships with three to five people in the first two weeks. **Reserve two days a week for networking lunches.** Your goal is to listen and find out how the place really works. What are the DOs and DON'Ts of the organization? Buying others lunch beyond the first two weeks will help deepen the quality of your relationships and expand your network. Start to build allies.

It's up to you to establish yourself as a valuable and dependable employee as fast as possible. Success in the first 30 days is more than getting tasks done. The two things that matter the most are 1) how you are accepted and 2) how you perform beyond expectations. Be patient and give you and your new work environment a fair chance. This may take up to a year before you really get into the groove.

## Your First Year on the Job

### The Second Month

By now you should have a sense of your real job duties, but don't assume your boss knows what you are doing. Many issues are simply a result of miscommunication. **Write down your job description and be specific. Create a list of questions about what you thought you would be doing and what you were lead to expect as well as any opportunities to pursue.** Ask yourself, "Was the initial job description written with wishful thinking rather than written with reality in mind?" Does it differ wildly from what you had bargained for? **Take the initiative and request a "How am I doing? Meeting" and collaborate on a clear job description that you can both agree on. Get further clarity on what are the criteria to evaluate your performance. Accept feedback and say you appreciate him/her helping you do your job better. The purpose is so you don't waste any precious time being off track.**

**Bosses are looking for people that can take initiative, make decisions and are willing to hold themselves accountable.** Keep busy by asking your supervisor what else needs to be done. Keep your supervisor informed when you either complete a project or are not sure on how to handle a situation. During the first year you want to become more and more self-sufficient.

**Make sure you arrive at least 15 minutes every day.** This will send the message that work is a priority and you want to be there. Resist the temptation to bolt out the door when regular business hours end. **Be the first one in and the last one out of the office on a regular basis.** Don't spend an excessive amount of time on phone calls or personal Internet activity. Bring your 'A' game every day.

**Achieve some desired results on a project that you can put your name on.** Having some small victories of your own can bolster your self-confidence and your manager's confidence in you. Articulate what you have specifically accomplished so far. If you are regularly making your supervisor look good, you are heading in the right direction.



### **The Third Month**

You should approach your first 90 days on the job as the blueprint for your long-term success. **Have another check in meeting with your boss to assess your progress.** Continue to build on the basics you developed in the first two months. Make yourself valuable.

**Always be positive.** No doubt you will come across negative people. Kill them with kindness and be polite to them. Don't gossip about co-workers; it won't get you anywhere. Keep private matters, private. Don't share your salary with ANYONE in your office. It can only end up hurting someone's feelings. It's okay to grab a drink with co-workers or managers, but don't get wasted.

**I suggest that you pick with whom you associate with very carefully because it can have an impact on how you are perceived.** Present a positive attitude to begin new relationships on the right foot. Expand your networking within the company and then beyond to the larger industry and community. Make sure people know that you are there. Continue to sell yourself and reinforce the organization's correct decision to hire you. A critical component is to create a "SAFETY NETwork" of contacts. Don't wait for your job to be in jeopardy before making a concerted effort to develop strong business relationships. You are CEO of your career.

**Let your job description evolve** into your strategic contribution to the office and larger organization. Continue to observe the corporate culture and the process of figuring out your place in the office.

### **The Second, Third and Fourth Quarters**

**Treat the rest of your freshman year as you would the first 90 days.** View everything that has happened as a learning experience.

**Ask to take on additional duties, but be prepared to put in the time to make them successful.** Continue to reinvent your role. Embrace new rules, responsibilities and relationships. **Stay open-minded and keep your expectations realistic.**

**Your career is not going to be built in a year so stay focused on the Big Picture.** Understand what is expected at this level and then ask what it takes to get to the next level and how long it typically takes. **Join a professional association so you can stay current and connected.** Set some concrete goals that you will achieve in your first year on the job and don't lose sight of the long-term goals.

**Evaluate at the end of the year.** What went right and what needs improvement? What do you need to start doing and what do you need to stop doing? Never burn any bridges. If you have to leave at the end of the year, then be sure to leave on good terms, because it is a small interconnected world.

### **Here is more advice:**

√ **Be professional regardless of your job.** The nationwide survey of 520 human-resources professionals and business leaders concluded that employees don't need to be in a specific field - such as accounting or engineering - to be considered professionals. In fact, 88 percent of respondents said professionalism is a quality of the person, not the field. Anybody in any position should exhibit professional traits and behavior.

√ **Accept responsibility.** We asked respondents what qualities recent college graduates should possess. They said it's especially important that they accept personal responsibility for their decisions and actions. Why should an employer hire anyone who won't?



Other qualities deemed important included competence in verbal and written communication, projection of a positive image, and independent thought and action.

- ✓ **Don't worry about immediate promotion.** The most eye-opening answers came when we asked what qualities respondents found most often in first-year, college-educated employees. They were asked to rank these traits on a scale from one to five, with one being "rare" and five being "common."
  - The only quality that scored higher than a four was concern about advancement. While this is a valid issue for seasoned workers, it should not be a top concern among new hires.
- ✓ **Clean yourself up.** Our survey found that six traits were often ascribed to unprofessional employees. The one mentioned most was sloppy appearance or dress.
  - **Other unprofessional qualities included poor communication skills, poor work ethic, bad attitude, and a sense of entitlement.**
- ✓ **You are not entitled.** The survey also asked if newly employed, college-educated workers' sense of entitlement had increased, decreased, or stayed the same over the past five years. Entitlement - defined as expecting rewards without putting in the effort to merit them - is perceived as being on the rise.