



### ***Project Professionalism!***

Today's business world demands more than ever before. Competition is intense. The one that crosses all the "t's" and dots all of the "i's" is going to get farther than the rest. Often I've seen businesses struggle because their people take a lackadaisical attitude toward their appearance, to-do list, and communication. I tell people that they can just stand still sometimes and out run the competition. Wouldn't you like an "edge" over everyone else? That edge is Professionalism. It is a MUST if you are going to succeed in the marketplace today. Supervisors are scrutinizing budgets with great intensity to see where the excess "fat" can be trimmed. Techniques such as Six Sigma and LEAN are emphasizing better production, less mistakes, with fewer workers and more profits as a result. In the '90's it was "in" to look more casual. Many people took advantage of that dress code to start behaving casual in their business dealings. But in the new millennium, it's back to business suits. Yes, like the '80's, "it's 'hip' to be square (again)."

But what does it take to project a professional image? What are the marks of a true professional? Here are 12 steps that everyone should cover on the road to becoming a success in life and on the job. Work on one each month for the next year and you'll find that by next fall, you have adopted a very professional presence with your co-workers and your customers.

**Positive Attitude.** More people are hired and fired because of their attitude. In study after study, poor workers are retained long if they get along with everyone than those who don't. Decide tomorrow morning that it is going to be a GREAT DAY and watch your expectations come true! Attitude is everything. In fact, if you take the letters in ATTITUDE and assign their number in the alphabet to them (A=1, T=20, etc.) you will find that they total 100. Attitude counts for 100% of your image and success! In fact you'll see that as your attitude changes, your altitude in life will increase.

**Reliability.** This is an earned reputation for doing what you say you will do, and on time, too. I lived in South Florida in the mid-'90's and the service industry in my town was terrible. Why? Because many people went to the beach on sunny days (most days in South Florida are sunny!) and they knew you couldn't call anyone else to repair or install your services. Try that in Atlanta, Minneapolis,

New York, Chicago, Charlotte or anyplace where people want the business and you'll be OUT of business! Remember, you are writing the resumé for the rest of your career every day.

**Organized.** Can you find your notes, your schedule and your contacts with little effort? How does your workspace look? Do you project an image of clutter or organization? The next appointment you miss or show up late for may be the one that takes your business down. Trust me, people are watching you. Use Outlook, ACT!, Maximizer or some other contact management system. Learn to prioritize. A quick way is to take your top ten items that you do and circle the top two. Concentrate on them and the rest will take care of themselves. Try it!

**Flexibility.** This naturally follows being organized. Once you are organized it makes being flexible easier for you. Rigidity in today's market can kill you. Businesses that are unwilling to change with the times are being left in the dust every day. The day when Henry Ford could offer only black Model T's is laughed at in the market of the new millennium. Stay on schedule and on your mission, but be willing to show some flexibility in dealing with people. They will respect you for it in the long run.

**Even-tempered.** How well do you handle stress? Do you bring problems home with you from the office? Worse yet, do you bring problems to the office from home? In a competitive market, no one wants to deal with someone's personal problems on the job. The art of coping is a learned art and required of all professionals. It is increasingly hard to concentrate on the job when there are terror threats, warnings and an unstable market/economy. Those who can't cope are left by the side of the road to success.

**Speak Positively** to everyone. Watch your speech. How do you convey yourself? Can you express even negative comments in a positive manner? Instead of telling what you won't do for customers, learn to express the things you will do. Major on the positives! Be the first to complement someone practice on waitresses and cashiers. You'll be surprised at their response and it will give you the reward to do so more often.

**Self-aware.** Professionals know their personality and behavioral style. They know how they can be most effective in relationships with co-workers, clients, and customers. They also know what they need to work on in their character to be successful. Use the DiSC Classic Assessment ([www.jimmathis.com/DiSCTeamwork.pdf](http://www.jimmathis.com/DiSCTeamwork.pdf)) to evaluate your strengths and weaknesses. As Clint Eastwood's character says in "Magnum Force," "A man's go to know his limitations." A woman does, too, Clint!

**Informed.** Are you staying on the growing edge? Do you seek new ways to educate yourself in your profession? There are many opportunities today that didn't exist just ten years ago for self improvement and continuing education.

Check out the local college, tech school, or other extension educational services for classes to learn more. Go to the library and see what they have to offer. If you haven't been recently, you'll be surprised at the books on audio you can check out for free a listen to on your way to and from work. Use your "down time" as growth time. Ben Franklin said, "When you're finished growing, you're finished."

**Objective.** Can you look at every situation with an objective eye? Can you put yourself in the other person's place? Professionals know how to look at the problem from every angle. Supervisors and CEOs alike enjoy having someone close to them who can objectively look at ideas, problems and solutions. The old adage of having a bunch of "yes Men" around you is passé. Today's market requires problem solvers who can look five steps down the road and two steps ahead of the competition.

**Neat.** Okay, I know the casual '90s were fun and many businesses still have casual Fridays. But if you want to get and keep business in a competitive market today, you have to look more than just competent. It's back in style to "dress for success." Don't buy the cheapest suit or dress you can for the office. Spend the money where people will notice your appearance and give you their business. Don't make your first impression your last one. Again, people are watching you!

**Accountable.** Are you a man or woman of integrity? How well do you handle money (corporate and personal)? Does the boss know where you are when you are on the clock? Are you giving your best effort on the job? If you aren't it is already showing. Practice keeping your co-workers and supervisors informed of where you are on a project. Don't be afraid to ask for help. It is better to ask for help now, than as for references tomorrow because you failed on an important task.

**Listening skills.** How well do you listen to others? Do you know how to ask "listening questions?" These are questions that seek more in-depth information--ones that don't require a "yes/no" response. Do you make a practice of taking notes in a conversation? Often I've found this practice keeps me from dominating the conversation and allows the other person to not only speak, but feel like you are hearing what they are saying. Everyone wants to feel that they are important. Hearing someone out is a great way to tell them that what they are saying is important to you. Also, do you know how to restate the other person's comments back to them to clarify what was said? This also reinforces their importance and your comprehension of their message.

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