

Employability Skills:

#6 Professionalism

Standard 1: Demonstrate employability skills required by business and industry.

Modified from "Professionalism." Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor,
www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills/professionalism.pdf

Warm-Up:

- What is professionalism?
- If I demonstrate professionalism, what actions might I display?
- What do employers want new workers to demonstrate?
- Is it professional to have friends in the workplace?
- How does the cultural divide influence the workplace?

Opening:

Scan the QR code to watch a video while responding to the following prompts:



1. What was the FIRST “unprofessional” act done by Jason?
2. What was the SECOND “unprofessional” act done by Jason?
3. What was the THIRD “unprofessional” act done by Jason?
4. If someone is “self employed”, is there a need to conduct themselves in a “Professional” manner? Why or why not?

Professionalism

Read the article below. While reading highlight at least 3 sentences that are important/catch your attention.

Throughout our working lives, most of us will have many different jobs, each requiring a different level or set of skills. No matter the industry – from customer service to an office job to construction and the trades – all of these jobs have one thing in common: in order to succeed and move ahead, you need to demonstrate professionalism. Professionalism does not mean wearing a suit or carrying a briefcase; rather, it means conducting oneself with responsibility, integrity, accountability, and excellence. It means communicating effectively and appropriately and always finding a way to be productive. Employers want new workers to be responsible, ethical, and team oriented, and to possess strong communication, interpersonal, and problem solving skills. Wrap these skills up all together and you've got professionalism.

As today's labor market becomes more and more competitive, jobseekers will need to continually find ways to stand out from the crowd. There are few things an employer values more than employees who carry out their duties in a professional manner. Professionalism isn't one thing; it's a combination of qualities. A professional employee arrives on time for work and manages time effectively. Professional workers take responsibility for their own behavior and work effectively with others. High quality work standards, honesty, and integrity are also part of the package. Professional employees look clean and neat and dress appropriately for the job. Communicating effectively and appropriately for the workplace is also an essential part of Professionalism.

Regardless of the job or industry, professionalism is easy to spot. On a construction site or in a trade, a professional worker will work hard and manage time effectively, including arriving and returning on time from breaks. A professional worker in a customer service setting will speak clearly and politely to customers and colleagues and have a neat and clean appearance. In an office setting, an employee with professionalism will work productively with others and strive for a high standard and constant improvement. Professionalism may look slightly different in various settings, but the core elements are always the same – and give young employees an edge as they begin their careers.

The activities in this section focus on each of the five individual soft skills presented in this publication (communication, enthusiasm/attitude, teamwork, networking, and problem solving/critical thinking), but in a broader framework. This is because professionalism, in and of itself, is not one skill but the blending and integration of a variety of skills. When professionalism is demonstrated, it tends to be thought of as the entire package.

Answer the comprehension questions.

1. What do employers want in new workers?
2. What qualities combine to create professionalism?

Work Session:

Activity 1: Professionalism in Today's Workforce

The face of the workplace is constantly evolving as one generation begins to retire and another moves up to take its place. In 2010, an office may have a mix of baby boomers (and older), Gen X-ers, and Gen Y-ers (Millennials) all working together. In addition to generational differences, differences in education, upbringing, social norms, and values may create cultural gaps that may lead to misunderstandings or conflicts at times. In reality, a variety of perspectives in the workplace can actually benefit and strengthen an organization. The purpose of this activity is to have participants discuss how to bridge generational, cultural, and other diversity gaps in order to build a new standard for professionalism in the workplace.

Answer the following questions.

- What do you think the older generation thinks of the younger generation?
- What does your generation think of the older generations?
- Do you think these ideas are always true? Sometimes true? Never true? Why do you think each group may have these ideas about the other group?
- How can these different generations of workers all get along when so often their values, ideas, and experiences are so different?
- Define Stereotype.
- What causes these stereotypes? How can our society rid itself from grouping people by stereotypes?

Activity 2: Stereotypes in the Workplace

Think about a time when someone made a biased judgment about you or acted unfairly toward you because of your age, skin color, clothes you were wearing, gender, the way you speak, where you live, how much money your family has, or some other reason. Why do you think those assumptions were made about you? How did that experience make you feel? How do you think you should have been treated in that situation?

Write a brief paragraph (at least five sentences) that answers the questions above.

Work Session:

Activity 3: The Cultural Divide

Today's workforce is very diverse. People of different ages and backgrounds are working alongside one another more so today than ever before. The purpose of this activity is to consider how we perceive others and how others may perceive us, as well as whether or not these perceptions paint an accurate picture of who we are.

Consider the following situations and answer the questions in each:

Sandra is 19 years old and has her first job as an administrative assistant. She wears very low cut shirts, short skirts, heels, and lots of perfume.

What might Sandra's attire lead others to believe about her? What might the reality be?

Tony is 24 years old. He has tattoo sleeves on both of his arms, as well as a name tattooed on his neck. Tony would like to be a waiter at a very fancy restaurant. He has first interview today.

What might a job interviewer think of Tony? What might the reality be?

Terrence is 18 years old and just graduated high school (where he had a 4.0 average). Terrence has an interview today for a summer internship. Terrence is a wheelchair user.

Do you think there is a chance that the interviewer might not ask Terrence the same interview questions he or she would ask of someone who isn't in a wheelchair? Why or why not?

Marissa is in 10th grade. She comes from a family of mechanics. Her dad and three brothers are mechanics, and her grandfather owns a garage. Marissa has secretly wanted to work on cars but has been afraid to tell her family. She now wants to approach her grandfather for a summer job.

Why do you think Marissa has kept her career dream a secret? How might she ask her grandfather for a summer job?

Ruthie is 62 years old and is looking for a job. She loves one of the local clothing stores and applied online for a job as a sales clerk. She has an interview today and is afraid the store manager will be much younger than her. Ruthie considers canceling the interview.

Why do you think Ruthie is worried about her interview? What would you tell Ruthie?

Sam is 20 years old, a sophomore in college and is looking for an engineering internship. Sam has Asperger syndrome (a form of autism), and while he has an A average in his engineering courses, he recognizes the fact that he has trouble interacting socially and is worried about his interviews.

Why do you think Sam is worried about his interviews? What advice would you give Sam?

Work Session:

As an employee, your attitude at work contributes to your work environment and how you get along with your co-workers and supervisors. A positive attitude can improve morale and increase productivity for all. The purpose of this activity is to generate a discussion about workplace attitudes (of both supervisors and co-workers) and how these attitudes impact those around us.

Activity 4: Working with Friends

Read the scenarios below.

SCENARIO #1: LaToya, Rosa, and Day were great friends. All three received their lifeguard certification together and were very excited to be working at the same community pool during the summer. The pool's supervisor knew the three girls were all close friends – and that this would be their first paid job. He wanted to be sure they recognized how fortunate they were to be able to work alongside their friends, but also needed to stress the importance of not letting their close friendship get in the way of doing their jobs. If you were the supervisor, what specific instructions would you give to the girls?

SCENARIO #2: Trent, Ben, and Antonio all started working at a local home improvement store at the same time. They were in the same orientation group and liked each other immediately. Trent and Ben work in the customer service department and Antonio works in accounting. The three usually go out after work on Friday night, text each other during the day, and try to eat lunch together several times a week (when they can). Sometimes they even hang out on the weekends. While Trent, Ben, and Antonio are lucky to have found such good friends at work, some of their co-workers are not as pleased about their close friendship.

Answer the following questions in short answer form.

1. What is the danger of becoming too friendly with co-workers or socializing with them too much?
2. What objections might other co-workers have to this three-person clique? Why might some of these co-workers not be pleased?
3. How can the three maintain their friendship without damaging their relationships with their coworkers?
4. Why is it important to have friends at work?

Activity 5: Are Cliques Professional?

Write a brief paragraph to define “Cliques” and explain the benefits of working with your best friend? What would be the drawbacks? Would you want to work at a job with you best friends? Why or why not?

Closing/Formative Assessment:

Self-Reflection Questions to Answer

QUESTION: HOW DO YOU WANT YOUR LIFE TO BE?

CONSIDERATIONS: Think about what you would like to experience on a day-to-day basis. If you were totally 100% happy with your life what would that look like? What do you want to be doing a year from now or five years from now?

ANSWER:

QUESTION: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT WORK VALUES TO YOU?

CONSIDERATIONS: Some examples are: independence, helping others, challenge, advancement, risk taking, change and variety, prestige, stability, making a difference, social status, leadership, making decisions, security, artistic creativity, self expression, adventure/excitement, public contact, mental stimulation, travel, working alone, etc.

ANSWER:

QUESTION: WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF TIME, MONEY, AND EXPERIENCE WERE NOT A CONCERN?

CONSIDERATIONS: After you've travelled, bought you and your family a house and car, etc., what would you do next if there were no limits?

ANSWER:

QUESTION: WHAT WOULD YOU DO OR LEARN IF YOU KNEW YOU COULDN'T FAIL?

CONSIDERATIONS: Put fear to one side and allow your imagination to work without restrictions. Would you start a brand new career or start your own business?

ANSWER:

QUESTION: WHAT ARE YOU PASSIONATE AND ENERGIZED BY?

CONSIDERATIONS: What do you love doing? What could you talk about for hours? What would other people you know say if I asked them?

ANSWER: