WALDEN UNIVERSITY

CAREER SERVICES

TEN STEPS TO ENHANCE YOUR PROFESSIONAL IMAGE

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DENISE: Welcome to 10 steps to enhance your professional image. I am Denise Pranke a Walden career services advisor and joining me is Katy Peper, Walden career services internship advisor. Hi Katy.

KATY: Hello everyone.

DENISE: Next let's go over our objectives for this session. We plan to cover why professionalism is so important. Share a story from a Walden alumni on how professionalism impacted her career. Then we will share 10 steps you can take to strengthen your professional image. Next, I am going to turn it over to Katy.

KATY: To start I want to hear from you. What does being professional mean to you? Maybe it is a short example, maybe just a word or two. Please share with us in the question box. Okay. Positive image. Being on time. Living our best selves. I like that one. I also see highest ethical standards. Goal completion. Having a presence that allows your work to be done effectively. Well educated and knowledgeable about your field. Strong people skills. Following professional standards. Trustworthiness. Great, well thank you for sharing with us. Those are all great comments.

Why is professionalism important? Professionalism establishes a standard of behavior in the workplace. When employees know what is appropriate and what is not, it is obvious when a standard is not being met. Employees are also encouraged to improve when examples are set for them of professional behavior. Expectations also ensure that employees remain accountable for their work and communication and are respectful of each other. When employees respect one another as well as clients and customers, conflict is minimized. To demonstrate, we would like to share an experience from one of our Walden alumni. Kimberly is in the healthcare industry. She graduated from Walden with her Master’s in Public Administration. Kimberly writes my very first internship was with a PR firm in Los Angeles. The owner really made me think about first impressions. I arrived on time to my interview for the internship and was told to have a seat in the lobby which was part of an open office suite. After about 15 minutes, a man came and sat on the couch with me and he said hello and we started a conversation. As other candidates arrived and sat down, the conversation continued. After about 20 minutes a company representative came out and said they were ready to start calling us back to our interviews. When my turn came, I was taken to the back, and to my surprise, the man who started the
conversation on the couch was the owner and he selected me for the position because he said I had the best attitude, an open smile, and answered all questions. The other candidates and I never knew we were actually doing an interview in the lobby. This taught me to always be polite and friendly to people every day. You never know who you are talking to.

With that, we would now like to share with you our 10 steps to improve your professional image.

Step one: Demonstrate respect for others. While this may seem obvious, demonstrating respect for others is a key factor in how you are perceived as a professional. The way you show respect can take a variety of forms. Actively listen to colleagues and clients. Whether you are on the sales team or providing customer service, active listening is important in our interactions. By listening and truly understanding someone's perspective, you are not only more likely to have a successful business interaction or conversation, but you also instill trust. When the other person knows you have heard their concerns and have acknowledged them, you appear professional.

Encourage more than you. Acknowledge when someone has a great idea or has done a great job. People who hear positive feedback are more likely to accept critiques more openly. Don't forget your basic etiquette. “Please” and “thank you” when used genuinely, can go a long way. We have a tendency to remember interactions where we feel acknowledged and valued, even with a simple thank you. Those are the interactions you want to be remembered for.

Show respect for differences. Recognize that each person has their own personality, experiences and culture. As you plan events and workplace policies, recognize everyone can contribute and recognize what is professional to one person may not be to the next person. So keep an open mind and be willing to hear someone's story before critiquing them.

Step 2: convey a positive attitude and demeanor. Your attitude and demeanor can have a significant impact on how professional you are perceived to be. Your attitude refers to your mental and emotional stance. This could be related to a specific situation or task. Do you have a positive and cheerful attitude? A more somber and serious attitude? or does your attitude tell others that you don't care? Do an assessment of your general attitude. Ask a few trusted colleagues to provide feedback to you.

Your demeanor is the projection of your attitude to the public. It is how you approached situations and people. We talk about how leaders can display a calm and
collected demeanor even when everyone else is panicking. Aim to keep a consistent and professional demeanor even when your inner attitude may be negative or upset. This can be especially important when receiving feedback that may be upsetting.

Step three: regulate your emotions. Everyone has had stressful days at work when everything goes wrong at the same time. And sometimes we have had to handle situations where problems escalate. In those cases, it can be difficult to stay calm under pressure. When you find yourself in one of these situations, remember that an important aspect of professionalism is self-regulation, knowing when and how to manage your emotions. Recognize the situations that trigger your frustration. Before those feelings take over, find a way to step away, take a walk, get a drink of water, or do something that has calmed you and cleared your mind in the past.

Next I will turn it over to Denise.

>> DENISE: Thanks Katy.

Step four: establish and maintain appropriate boundaries. Avoid excessive complaining. If there is a problem, take a constructive approach and brainstorm solutions with your team and go to your supervisor with suggested solutions. Critical thinking and problem-solving skills are assets, but excessive complaining is not.

Also avoid participating in or condoning gossip. Gossip can lead to misunderstanding, hurt feelings, a breakdown of a team's productivity, even employees leaving the organization. If someone tries to involve you in gossip, change the subject as quickly as possible. For example, if someone says something like: Did you hear that Frank made a huge error? Change the topic with: If he made an error I'm sure that he feels badly about it. How is the fall fundraising event coming along? Or simply leave the situation entirely.

Also, be careful when sharing personal information about yourself as the information you originally shared can change into something quite different if it spreads. And if someone shares private information with you, keep it private. Do not share it. Think of the phrase "gossip spreads like wildfire." Wildfires are destructive: so is gossip.

Step five: be aware of your verbal and nonverbal communication. Communicate clearly. State what you need and when you need it by. If you are asked to do something, repeated back to ensure there is no misunderstanding. Give credit to others who contribute to your success. Research has shown that a large part of communication is nonverbal. Our facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, our posture, and touch such as our handshake send
powerful messages to our audience. They convey our emotional state, whether we are listening or care about what is being said and our level of confidence. Keep in mind that the meaning of nonverbal communication may vary by culture and religion. In most Western cultures, eye contact and a firm handshake signify confidence, engagement, and honesty and a smile signifies warmth and happiness. But in some cultures and communities, direct eye contact may signify defiance or disrespect and in some religious communities a handshake between genders is not allowed. In today's multicultural world we need to be respectful of variations in how nonverbal communication is viewed.

Step six: polish your appearance.

What we wear, our jewelry, our hairstyle and our hygiene are also part of our nonverbal communication. It is the most noticeable visual component of our professional image and can convey a message of confidence and respect for our self and others. Professions vary in standards of dress. For example the professional attire for a public relations manager would be more formal than the attire for an early childhood educator. Research what is appropriate for your profession and find a style that projects your authentic self and fits within the standards for your profession. When preparing for an interview, we advised to dress one step up from what is typical daily dress for the profession.

Step seven: Ensure your online communication is deliberate and diplomatic.

Your online communication and presence can have a significant impact on your professional image. Follow basic rules of professional email etiquette. Include a clear descriptive subject that describes the reason for your email. Include a greeting addressing the recipient by name or title if possible. And in the body of your email be clear and concise when describing the purpose of your email and any action you are requesting. And of course avoid misspellings. Also include a signature with your title and contact information. Do not send professional emails in the same style that you would send a text to friends. Also manage your social media presence. Do not assume that your social media accounts are private. Anyone can take a screenshot and post it publicly. Always consider that what you post may be shared beyond your intended audience and can be found even years later. There are many stories of people who lost their job or an offer for a new job due to social media posts. Also, if you have a linked in account keep it up to date with a professional photo and content. And remember to periodically Google yourself to see what appears. Your online image is an important part of your professional image. And in all of your communications follow the think model. Is it true? Is it helpful? Is it inspiring? Is it necessary? And is it kind.
Step Eight: expand your professional knowledge, network and experience. You are expanding your professional expertise through your academic program, but also consider additional activities to stay up-to-date. Ideas include participate in professional development activities and associations to learn from others. Share your knowledge and expand your professional network. Another idea is to enhance your strength and leadership skills by taking on new challenges in your current position or through volunteer activities. Also consider enhancing your public speaking skills through participation in a Toastmasters group. If you are interested in learning more about Toastmasters which is an organization where people get together to help each other practice and strengthen their public speaking skills, we have a link to the Toastmasters International website at the end of the webinar.

And finally acknowledge your limitations. If you are not able to complete something by a deadline or do not have the expertise to take on an assignment, let your supervisor know and ask for help. Next, I'm going to turn it over to Katy.

>> KATY: Step Nine, manage your time and stay organized. With juggling academic coursework, responsibilities to family and friends, participation in professional activities and the demands of a job if you are employed, it is crucial to have a process to manage your time and stay organized. The key is to prioritize, plan and schedule your time according to your priorities. Stephen Covey, the author of *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, tells the story of a glass jar that needs to be filled with large rocks and small rocks. If we put the small rocks in first, there will not be enough room for the large rocks. The solution is to put the large rocks in first and then pour in the small rocks around the larger rocks. Both will fit with this strategy. In this metaphor, the jar represents our available time, the large rocks are our priorities, the small rocks are our less important tasks. The message is they can all fit if you schedule your priorities first and then schedule in the rest.

When you schedule your time be sure to include time to prepare. For example, if you have a presentation to deliver, schedule adequate time to prepare and practice your presentation. Check your schedule weekly to make adjustments and then daily so that you don't miss a commitment. Be on time or better yet to be early. By scheduling your time, you will stay organized, feel in control and ease stress. It will also help you see if you are overcommitted and need to ask for help. There are a number of planning tools available to help you including simple paper schedule or online scheduling tools such as Trello, One Note, Evernote, or Nozbe.

Step Ten: behave ethically and with integrity.
Ethics are a code or standard of moral behavior. You may have your own personal code of ethics as well as a code of ethics for your profession such as counseling or medical codes of ethics. A professional who is able to adhere to their codes of ethics is known to have high integrity. It is important to know your professional code of ethics well before you enter the field as you will be held to it. Professionals must be honest not only with others but with themselves. Make sure you only promise what you can deliver and say no when you know you will not be able to deliver your best. The same principle comes in with your organization. Do not misrepresent your organization or promise something you know cannot happen. It hurts your business’s reputation and damages the trust in you as a professional.

Maintain trust and confidentiality. Not just on the major issues where you are legally obligated, but on smaller issues as well. Unless you need to share information for business or safety reasons, maintain the confidentiality. Recognize your own biases. We all have them but it is important to know how yours affect you and the decisions you make. In order to maintain your integrity and reputation you may need to step out of situations if you recognize you cannot remain unbiased.

So we did notice that there were a couple questions and we took note of them so we can cover them in a bit. But now that you have heard about our 10 suggestions to improve your professional image, reflect on which step is most important in your profession and why, and please share with us in the question box.

All are important in human resources. Absolutely yes. One person asked a specific question about colors to be used with interview attire. I think it can depend on your style and what is appropriate for that organization. I have heard that you can dress in the colors of an organization and that shows that you have researched them but it also depends on what looks best on you.

All the steps are important.

And yes the PowerPoint will be available to you.

One says step 10 is the most important because they all correlate to that one. Demonstrating respect for others, learning to listen to others. Staying up to date on knowledge in your field. Integrity, honesty and confidentiality are all hallmarks of any profession, yes. Professional development. Step one, I work with principals in various stages of improvement. I am careful to respect them while working with their staff to make improvements in the instructional program. Awesome. Thank you. Communication, email, verbal, etc. Yes, absolutely. Explain a tip on dealing with irate customers in order to remain positive, calm and polite. One tip I have always heard is to keep your voice calm. If you escalate, they will escalate higher but if you stay calm
they are more likely to stay calmer. If you keep your voice low, they have to match you.

>> DENISE: I've heard that trying to repeat back to them, to let them know that you are listening to their concerns, you are summarizing what they are saying as well.

>> KATY: Do you have any other questions or comments for us? Please share with us.

While that is a good piece of information. Boundaries are important. I just received a promotion and am having to reestablish my boundaries. That is a great point. Yes a transcript will also be available as well as a recording of this presentation. And the recording will be available on the career services website and the archived webinars section.

How can you help others act more professionally in the workplace? Demonstrating your professional behavior, showing them what you expect from them and letting them know the small things if you notice is always great feedback. Not hitting them with everything but pulling them aside and letting them know if you noticed something.

>> DENISE: And providing feedback, it can be helpful to give positive feedback and then say here is an area where I see you have opportunities to improve can be a helpful way to frame it.

>> KATY: One person asked if there is a conflict with a colleague should you try to talk to them or get a third party involved such as a boss or supervisor? I think you should first attempt to resolve the conflict yourself but if you are not able to resolve it then bringing in a third party can help.

And if you have specific questions that relate specifically to you or to other career topics, please reach out to us in career services. You can see our contact information here.

What if the conflict is with a supervisor or boss? I would consider maybe reaching out to your human resources department or if there is another person above that person that you can go to, see who you feel more comfortable going to.

>> DENISE: And if there is a conflict, go into those conversations with the hope of resolution rather than just complaining.
>>KATY: And we do invite you to stay in contact with us. You can join the career services linked in group, follow us on Twitter, subscribe to our YouTube channel, join us on Facebook, read the Walden student success stories on our blog and use the features on the optimal resume system. You can also access all of our resources on our website and remember we are here to support you. And I do want to bring up the last slide with our resources. There it is. Here are links to the resources that we mentioned during the webinar. The presentation will be archived in approximately one week but we will stay on to answer additional questions if you have any but we do want to thank you so much for joining us today.

Yes consistency is an important tip that can help build professionalism. Absolutely.

Thank you for joining us. Have a great day.

[End of webinar]