



Are you a professional?

What does being professional mean to you? I am guessing that the answer to that question depends much on your age and level of experience. There are many valid definitions of professional behaviour but one thing is for sure – you know it when you see it!

A professional approach has numerous aspects incorporating amongst others: manners, etiquette, dress, style of approach, dedication, diligence, energy, determination and attention to detail. Let's look at some of the above in more detail.

Manners, etiquette & dress

I sometimes wish I had been working in the 1950's – the Cary Grant era of style and sophistication when business seem to conform to an accepted least in the movies.....Of course I rush out and buy antique suits and altogether too much smoking at from the smart-dressed approach calm, respectful manner that interactions. It was in many ways that is a key part of professionalism, even today. Business is a serious activity and we should always remember that and act and dress accordingly.



people were effortlessly stylish and code of etiquette and manners – at am not saying that we should all start to wear hats and there was that time. However, we can learn that was universally applied and the dominated most of the quite formal and it is this formality

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Dedication, diligence & attention to detail

Let's take a few minutes to consider professional sport. Modern sport requires a level of dedication that is to be admired and frankly copied in business. I am mainly thinking of the physically demanding sports such as athletics, tennis and cycling. To compete at the top of these sports athletes need to focus on all aspects of their lives to ensure that on the day of competition they are in peak condition and have minimised any deficiencies in technique that they may have. As the level of dedication has improved so standards have been raised and sports like tennis are transformed since the early days of the last century. Sports such as cycling have the added aspect of advances in the equipment used. Team Sky has broken records and has been responsible for creating the first British winners of the Tour de France in recent years and much of the success has been put down to Dave Brailsford's system of 'aggregation of marginal gains'. In a nut shell this involves analysing all aspects of the sport from the bike design and weight to the clothing used and even the positions adopted by the cyclists on the bike. By making improvements in all areas each often only improving the performance a fraction the overall effect was a Tour de France win. Dave Brailsford describes marginal gains as:

“the 1 percent margin for improvement in everything you do.”

Now the majority of the process of business is pretty rudimentary and unspectacular. We live for those success moments and they are what make it all worthwhile but the 9 to 5 is largely filled with small actions that slowly take the company in the right direction. This is where I think that a lot can be learned from the marginal gains approach. There is a tendency to adopt routines and procedures and not to question whether improvements can be made and this is a drag on business development. A true business professional will constantly question the approach in a proactive, constructive manner and analyse whether it is the best, most efficient way to achieve the goal.

Energy and determination

Finally, we come to energy and determination – in other words “Drive”. The business process can be tough and a project can suffer many setbacks along the way and therefore a professional approach demands resilience and drive to press on regardless. Professionals are always driven individuals and it is perhaps the easiest characteristic to spot but they also

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have the previously mentioned qualities that ensure that such determination is always presented in an acceptable manner that is not rude or aggressive. It is often exhilarating to be surrounded by a professional team. The energy is almost palpable in the room and the can-do attitude allows you to relax to a degree, safe in the knowledge that all bases are certainly covered and if and when challenges arise the team won't be short of potential solutions.

The whole package

So, next time you meet a true professional you will be able to recognize that he/she has all the key characteristics. They will have set up the meeting in courteous manner with written confirmation of the appointment; they will arrive on time and be smartly presented in attire entirely appropriate to the business that you are in; they will be well prepared for the meeting and will present their case clearly, succinctly and factually within the available time slot; they will demonstrate clear interest in your business and the service or solution that you require from them – they will be a good listener; they will probably leave you with some written material or promise to follow up within a short period of time with more details of their offer; they will not be desperate for the sale and put you under pressure to sign there and then; they are looking for a win-win solution that will benefit both companies and probably last for many years; they will not out-stay their welcome and will leave on time; they will send a thank-you email that same day, thanking you for your time and reiterating what they have promised to do by means of follow up; they will send the follow up material as promised which will be superbly presented, succinct and with all required details; you will have in fact enjoyed the whole encounter and will be keen if possible to associate with that person and that company going forward.

Success is a few simple disciplines, practiced every day; while failure is simply a few errors in judgment, repeated every day.

—Jim Rohn (American entrepreneur)

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