

***Professionalism:
Ethics in the Everyday Business Workplace***



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Professional Values

Striving to be a professional opens up a certain way of being and conducting oneself in which a high level of performance ("excellence") is combined with a respectful and dignified way of treating others. The kind of work environment which results is captured in the following list, adapted from: Michael Bayles' book, *Professional Ethics* (Wadworth Publishing Company, 1989). Think of each of these as a desired outcome--an echelon of quality which can be achieved by approaching one's work, and one's colleagues, in a truly professional manner. In the list, each of these values is coupled with qualities (*in italics*) which would violate or fall short of realizing professional excellence. An everyday illustration of such "vices" is also provided.

- *Protection from injury (non-maleficence)
vs. recklessness, irresponsibility, short-sightedness
everyday example: not leaving a sharp-cornered file drawer open
- *Competence and diligence
vs. incompetence, negligence, waste, being a slacker
everyday example: promptly returning a phone call in response to a message
- *Honesty [and, in some cases, candor/full disclosure]
vs. misrepresentation, lying, theft
everyday example: paying for personal photocopies and calls
- *Discretion/confidentiality/respect for privacy
vs. gossip, personal violation, idle chatter
everyday example: not asking a job candidate about her spouse
- *Respect for autonomy, consent, collegiality
vs. harassment, coercion, tyranny, paternalism
everyday example: asking before borrowing a folder from a colleagues desk
- *Equality of opportunity, fairness, empowerment, justice
vs. unfairness, discrimination, partiality, favoritism
everyday example: giving the new employee a valued assignment
- *Loyalty and promise-keeping
vs. disloyalty, betrayal, breach of contract, lying
everyday example: working overtime to meet a promised deadline
- *Conditional obedience, whistle-blowing
vs. insubordination, blind obedience, excessive loyalty

everyday example: trying out the new sales strategy before vilifying it
*Empathy/grace/mercy/compassion
vs. insensitivity, rigidity, perfectionism
everyday example: bending the schedule to allow an employee to work around a family situation

Three Goals of a Professional

Another way of thinking about being a professional is to set out three primary goals related to the quality of one's work, self-discipline, and one's way of treating others. In the following list, each of these goals is illustrated by forms of action which would help to meet those goals, and by activities which would detract from meeting them. Think of these not as commandments, rules, or obligations, so much as ways of acting which are helpful in reaching a high standard of professional excellence. How can I achieve my very best, while simultaneously bringing out the best in those who surround me?

1. Maintaining and operating out of your expertise

Competent individuals can be relied upon to do their job well; they maintain a professional edge, take responsibility for the quality of their work, and work within their limitations.

Acting ethically

being careful to do a good job
double checking work and sources
keeping up to date
remaining aware of alternatives and new approaches
staying with it until its right
protesting faulty and dangerous decisions

To be avoided

negligence (= neglecting duties or problems)
turning in shoddy, incomplete work
volunteering for what is beyond your ability
laziness and continual postponing urgent tasks
letting somebody else do it (all the time)
excessive reliance upon shortcuts
taking on too much ("oh yeah, I can do that")
gambling with the company's resources on shaky

ventures

coming to work high or hung-over
cheating on a resume about experience,
certification, qualifications
reliance upon outdated methods and techniques

2. Self-control and respect for oneself

Self-controlled individuals know themselves, know their limits, and seek help when things get out of control in their lives. They work to establish a pattern of self-discipline which allows for productivity and satisfaction while avoiding self-destructive and obsessive tendencies.

Acting ethically
excellence maintaining a set of personal standards of
keeping cool, but focused
knowing yourself & your limits
delegating when necessary or helpful
showing up for work (and actually working!)
keeping a schedule
taking a day off when needed
avoiding the "appearance of evil"
resisting compulsive or obsessive fascinations
getting help when things are getting out of
control
To be avoided
deserve it) "going off" on others (even when they seem to
sexual harassment
relying upon intimidation
spending the afternoon cruising the porno, sports,
or gambling websites
likewise) being a workaholic (and expecting others to do
moving too fast
looking good by making others look bad
person being a sleaze, a whiner, a slacker, a missing



3. Respecting others

Professionals treat other people as if they really mattered, rather than as tools, statistics, or mere opportunities for

profit or labor. Through empathy, they put themselves on the receiving end of their actions, creating a climate of respect and dignity which allows everyone a meaningful measure of satisfaction and success.

Acting ethically

- keeping appointments & being punctual
- keeping good records
- returning calls & passing on messages
- reimbursing the company for use of facilities
- giving warning of what's coming to those affected
- returning what you borrow
- refilling the coffee pot and the copy machine
- giving credit to others for their ideas, work
- exercising patience with others' occasional bad

days

- taking the blame for mistakes you made
- respecting others' private lives and personal

preferences

- speaking up when a blatant injustice is being done

to another

- taking a "no" as a no

To be avoided:

- harassing (demanding a sexual *quid pro quo* for promotions, job security)
- stealing, embezzling
- using company resources for personal profit
- deceptive marketing practices
- sharing company secrets with competitors
- distorting or inventing expense records, sales figures, hours worked
- requiring excessive overtime of subordinates
- relying upon force and coercion to get the job

done

- using others' ideas without giving credit

(plagiarism)

- finding entertainment in others' conflicts
- shifting the blame, backbiting
- upbraiding a subordinate or colleague in public
- damaging racist or sexist humor
- being a cheat, a gossip-monger, a tyrant, a

manipulator

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