



Professionalism: What Is It?

The dictionary definition of professionalism has two dimensions:

1. Something related to a job or profession
2. A person who is well-trained and demonstrates excellence in their work.

But what qualities do employers look for when hiring a professional? They look for someone who will be committed to the profession they have chosen and will excel in the work they are given. The following areas represent a professional attitude:

- **Planning** – Any project demands a certain amount of planning so that overruns are avoided and the work proceeds smoothly. Planning in our everyday lives is a skill that will transfer into becoming professionals.
- **Decision making** – Rather than making decisions based on whims and intuition, a professional is someone who demonstrates foresight by pausing to thoroughly analyze the situation.
- **Communication** – Good communication is intentional and takes practice. It involves taking time and adapting our language to articulate something to our customers, subordinates or superiors. A doctor who explains a point to a worried patient is much better than one who simply writes out a prescription. The end result of both doctors is similar, but a sick person wants the more thorough explanation.
- **Doing a thorough job** – Our attitude is represented in the work that we do. Does it reflect our care and ability? Or are we content in doing a half-baked job hoping that someone else will correct our mistakes? A journalist can give a story full of mistakes and these will no doubt be corrected at the proofing stage. But professionalism means that the journalist thoroughly proofs their own work first before passing it along in the process. It also means taking responsibility for details, however minute they may be.
- **Doing what is right** – A company that does not treat its workers well can hardly be called professional, no matter how many professionally qualified people it employs. Similarly, companies that do not pay taxes or fail to take note of their social responsibility are unprofessional. Unfortunately, sometimes we want to be 'yes-men', accepting orders from above which may or may not be right. The moment we do something that we believe is wrong, we have stopped behaving as professionals, no matter how many degrees we may have.
- **Related Resource:** <http://www.tipsforsuccess.org/professionalism.htm>

Interviewing Tips²

Job interviews are a great opportunity to showcase your skills to employers and to allow them to get to know your personality. As a result, this is often one of the most stressful parts of the job search processes for job seekers. Many individuals think that you cannot prepare for a job interview because you don't know exactly what will be asked. This is false! There is a lot you can do to anticipate questions and prepare answers. This section will highlight many steps you should take in preparation for your job interviews.

FOUR THINGS MOST EMPLOYERS WANT TO KNOW:

- *What makes you qualified for the job?* *Why do you want the job?*
- *What prevents you from being qualified?* *Why should they hire you over other candidates?*

Successful Interviewing: Three Key Strategies³

- 1) Prepare thoroughly.
- 2) Make a good impression.
- 3) Make a lasting impression – follow up!

1) PREPARE THOROUGHLY⁴

- Research the employer.
- Assess how to communicate your qualifications and skills for a position.
- Prepare a portfolio of items to showcase your projects and evaluations of your work.
 - A hard / paper copy for review during the interview
 - <http://portfolio.umn.edu> (available to all students) or <http://www.efoliominnnesota.com>
- Seek formal and informal practice opportunities.
- Prepare answers for behavioral-based questions. Behavioral interview examples:

HOW TO HANDLE BEHAVIORAL-BASED QUESTIONS:

- Tell me about a time that you had to motivate a group to accomplish a common goal.
- Describe a time when you exhibited creative problem solving.
- Give an example of a time when you experienced a conflict with a co-worker. How did you handle it?

2) MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION:⁵

Don't underestimate the power of a first impression. When you present yourself, employers take in multiple types of information about you. Informative data for employers includes: words you use, body language, voice intonations, appearance, documentation of experience (resume, portfolio, past evaluations), description of qualifications and transferable skills, and references.

Before

- Avoid being late at all costs, but if you are late notify an employer in advance of your arrival.
- If you decide you no longer want to be considered for a position, call and withdraw your name immediately so that another candidate can be considered.
- Always be 100% honest on your application materials – employers do check.
- Dress appropriately. If unsure, err towards conservative dress.

During

- Stand, smile, make eye contact and use a firm, comfortable handshake when meeting individuals at an interview.
- Always be polite and courteous in an interview – especially to administrative assistants and support staff you may encounter when arriving.
- Let the interviewer take the lead showing you where to go and where to sit.
- Come prepared with questions for the interviewer, copies of your resume, work samples and references.

3) MAKE A LASTING IMPRESSION

After the interview

- Send a thank you note to those with whom you interviewed within 24-48 hours of the interview. At a minimum, be sure to thank your main interviewer. If you met others during the day, refer to them in the first sentence or two. For a sample Thank You Letter see: <http://www.stpaulcareers.umn.edu/jobsearch/interviewing/etiquette.html>.
- Follow up with a phone call after a week or two (unless otherwise instructed). This will demonstrate your enthusiasm for the position and reflects your ability to be proactive.
- If you are notified that you did not receive a position, be positive and respectful. You want to end on a positive note in case another position becomes available in the organization.

The Offer

- Do you research to determine your market value (this may involve discussions with other professionals and/or researching Career Services resources).
- Be aware that salary will be contingent on the amount of your experience, geographic location of the position, etc.
- Accepting a decrease in pay may be reasonable when starting a different career.
- See these resource for additional advice: http://www.stpaulcareers.umn.edu/jobsearch/jobsearch_links.html (salary negotiation) OR <http://hotjobs.yahoo.com/interview> (general interviewing tips).

Interview Pitfalls to Avoid

- Being late.
- Wearing inappropriate attire.
- Doing no market research.
- Assuming your resume will get you the job.
- Believing best qualified candidate *always* gets the job.
- Failing to prepare.
- Failing to inspire confidence.
- Failing to demonstrate skills.
- Appearing desperate or highly stressed out.
- Mishandling supplemental questions or tests.
- Believing that last 5 minutes are the most important.
- Thinking that all references are created equal.
- Lying on the resume or application.
- Appearing uninterested in the job.
- Bragging.
- Giving lengthy answers when short ones will do.
- Showing an inability to tolerate pauses or silence.
- Thinking your major goal is to get the job.

Job Shadowing: Why Do It?

- Always show up unless you have a very good reason for not doing so – People often rearrange their schedules to accommodate you and may even plan special events for your visit. This is one of your first opportunities to project a professional identity, so you want to show that you have your act together.
- Dress appropriately – If the shadowing is arranged through your school, someone there may be able to give you suggestions for what you should wear. If not, it's OK to ask the person you'll be shadowing. Your attire should be appropriate for the environment.
- Be considerate and courteous – Though you are there to observe, give the person you're shadowing some space from time to time throughout the day. Use your common sense and offer to excuse yourself if it sounds like the person you're shadowing could use some privacy for a phone call or meeting.
- Bring several copies of your resume, but don't force them on everyone you meet – Just have them on hand in case anyone asks for a copy. If you reach the end of the day and no one has requested one, leave a few copies with key people before you depart.
- Introduce yourself with confidence – You will most likely meet a number of people on your shadowing day. Always give a firm but comfortable handshake, look the other person in the eyes, and state your name clearly. Also, get in the habit of asking for business cards from people you meet (when appropriate) so you can contact them in the future. If you say you're going to contact them, be sure you do.
- Follow up with a thank-you note to everyone who spent any time with you – It is helpful to take notes during the day to keep track of who discussed or did anything with you. Also, thank whoever coordinated the shadowing day.

Sources:

¹<http://www.competitionmaster.com/pages/career/professionalism.html>.

²<http://www.stpaulcareers.umn.edu/jobsearch/interviewing.html>.

³<http://www.stpaulcareers.umn.edu/img/assets/14461/Effective%20Interviewing.pdf>.

⁴<http://www.stpaulcareers.umn.edu/jobsearch/interviewing/preparing.html>.

⁵<http://www.stpaulcareers.umn.edu/jobsearch/interviewing/etiquette.html>.

⁶Ryan, R. (2000). *60 Seconds and You're Hired*. New York, New York: Penguin Books.

⁷<http://content.monstertrak.monster.com/resources/archive/jobhunt/observations/>.