



## **PROFESSIONALISM**

Etiquette is a set of social rules that governs relationship behavior in a particular circumstance or occasion, like a wedding or traveling. Professionalism is the etiquette related to work and governs your behavior (“character, spirit or method”) in your occupation. Everyone has such rules they are required to follow when interacting with either their coworkers or the customers--whatever they are called. Using the correct name for customers--clients, patients, guests, etc.--is part of professionalism.

Professionalism rules vary so widely between jobs and corporation cultures that it is impossible to know them all. However, if you assume there are *always* rules, you can watch, ask, and learn them in every new situation. Then you will be prepared to meet the professionalism challenges you encounter in that environment, and be able to deliberately choose when to comply or breach the etiquette.

Most difficulties arise when your emotions, desires or values conflict with the required professional behavior. Here are a number of concepts, principles and ideas that relate to situations that challenge professionalism.

- ***Clothes are nonverbal communication***, not just an expression of your own personality, and they have an impact on other people. Breaching the etiquette of your workplace in regard to dress is likely to cost you--sometime silently, and you may be the last to know what it cost.
- At work, ***professionalism trumps personal needs***. Some people choose to make friends at work which can add support, but also raises issues of boundaries and the laws that govern them (touch, sexuality, hostile work environment, etc.).
- ***Some jobs require socializing with coworkers***. Treat this as an extension of work and you are unlikely to breach etiquette unwittingly, e.g don't drink too much.
- ***Breaching professionalism is done at your own risk*** and the consequences can be severe, especially when conflicts arise in those relationships.
- Limiting relationships with coworkers to work can be less rewarding but safer. You have to ***choose your trade offs***, using good judgment about those you pick to befriend and keen self-awareness about your own skills and limits to manage relationships. [See JUDGMENT download.]
- Silent and unresponsive behavior is not neutral [***“I didn't do or say anything!”***]. Such behavior is often seen as provocative, hostile unpleasant or uncooperative.
- ***Clear communication*** in a pleasant, polite and courteous manner can be used to successfully negotiate conflicts with coworkers and customers alike.
- If you tend to shout when you get mad, ***speaking at the usual conversational volume of your workplace when angry*** is a good skill to practice and master.
- Employees are always subject to pressures conflicting with professionalism, e.g. personal phone calls, collusion with others' unprofessionalism. If you decide what's best for you – now and later – you can always follow that course.
- ***Journaling*** about work can be very beneficial to sort out facts and feelings.