

# Career Readiness: Professionalism and Workplace Expectations

## **Career Development**

Room M120

Appointments Available Upon Request

[careers@mcad.edu](mailto:careers@mcad.edu)

**Becky Bates**  
Director of Career Development  
[bbates268@mcad.edu](mailto:bbates268@mcad.edu)  
612.874.3796

**Sam Wencil**  
Senior Career Development Advisor  
[swencil@mcad.edu](mailto:swencil@mcad.edu)  
612.874.3840

# Professional Etiquette and Adhering to Workplace Expectations

## What is Professionalism?

Professional etiquette is an unwritten code of conduct surrounding interactions in a professional setting. It is dynamic and can change depending on the type of professional environment in which you are working, as well as the cultural norms of the organization.

Overall, professionalism can be broken down into three key areas: communication, respect, and conduct. These areas are equally important, and mastering all three is vital to maintaining a professional image, a positive reputation, and functional working relationships with coworkers and clients alike.

## Three Key Areas: Communication

### General Communication

- Ask your supervisor what their preferred method of contact is and use that method to communicate with them.
- Respond to all communications in a timely fashion, ideally within one business day. Business days are generally considered to be Monday through Friday, around 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Weekends and government/bank holidays are generally not considered business days.
- Communicate time off and sick requests in a timely manner; be sure to request time off as early as possible and communicate about potential attendance changes as soon as you can. Never no-show for a shift or 'ghost' an employer.

### Email Communication

- Professional email communications should not look like texts or online/social media comments. Instead, they should feature full sentences which articulate the intended point and/or convey the necessary information, in addition to exhibiting proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
- Maintain a consistent voice in all of your communications, both in emails and in-person. Don't write something in an email which you wouldn't say in person.
- Avoid overly familiar/informal language in professional communications.
- Proofread every email before sending it to ensure there are no typos or other errors.
- Respond to emails in a timely fashion, ideally within one business day.
- Keep emails contextualized by sticking to established email chains and threads, if possible.
- Always closely read the entire email message; don't scan or skim the content, as this can result in missed or misunderstood information. Take the time to fully comprehend the communication and confirm the details before responding.
- When responding to an email, clearly respond to each point or question posed

within it. Don't leave individual points unaddressed, as this implies a lack of attention to detail, in addition to necessitating clarifying communications from the original sender.

- Be sure to include a subject line and add a signature to each email you send.
- Be sure to enable an 'out of office' auto-reply message during periods when you are out on vacation or using PTO.
- Use "cc," "bcc," and "reply all" functions appropriately.

## **Phone Communication**

- Ensure your voicemail greeting is clear and professional, and make sure you frequently check and clear your voicemail's inbox.
- Always ask before putting someone on speakerphone.
- If a coworker or professional contact calls and you aren't able to speak on the phone at the time, let the call go to voicemail and return the call later when you are available.

## **Three Key Areas: Respect**

### **Respecting the Time, Space, and Feelings of Others**

- If you are experiencing a conflict or have work-related concerns, ask your supervisor if it's possible to schedule a time to discuss these subjects one-on-one.
- Come prepared for any meetings; ensure you are aware of the time and place and have brought any and all required materials.
- Come to work prepared and on time; if you must be late, make sure to communicate this with your supervisor as soon as possible.
- Respect the time and personal space of others in your workplace. Don't make others wait for you or clean up after you in the workplace.
- Many individuals prefer to keep their work and personal lives separate. Respect their decision and keep discussions focused on work matters.

## **Three Key Areas: Conduct**

### **Understanding the 'Norms' of Having and Maintaining a Job**

- There will be challenges, discomfort, dislikes, and compromises associated with every job. Learn to accept this as part and parcel of existing within the professional sphere. No job is ever perfect, and everyone with a job must adapt to a certain extent from time to time.
- Accommodations have limits; most workplaces will only go so far to facilitate accommodations pertaining to employee performance/comfort/preferences. This is not 'toxic', this is just the reality of being an adult with a job.
- There is a distinct difference between asserting yourself in an appropriate manner in regards to reasonable topics/requests and appearing overreactive and demanding; 'pick your battles', so to speak, and always act, as well as react, in a thoughtful, measured manner.

- Showing up to work consistently, getting along with others, and performing your assigned duties competently and efficiently are all basic expectations associated with being employed.
- When you accept a job offer, you are acknowledging and accepting the job duties as outlined within the written job description. Keep in mind that an employer will not alter the scope of your job duties/assigned tasks just because your personal circumstances and/or preferences may change over time.
- Federally-protected disabilities and health conditions must be responded to within reason; nothing beyond that is required of an employer, nor are employees entitled to having every workplace request or preference approved.

## **Maintaining Professional Standards and Exhibiting Appropriate Behavior**

- Dress appropriately for your position and for the company/workplace culture. If you are unsure of how to dress for a particular role, ask your supervisor.
- Actively maintain personal hygiene standards and self-care. Avoiding offensive smells and/or exposing others to potential unpleasantness is a part of respecting your coworkers, clients, and workplace.
- Pay attention to your actions while at work, including when working remotely (Zoom calls/work phone calls). Avoid turning away from people you're communicating with/picking or blowing your nose/biting your nails/improperly using mute and video functions/carrying on conversations with unannounced third parties/etc.
- Always prioritize being productive within your role and show initiative to complete tasks; if you are unsure of what to do next, ask a supervisor. It is important to fully focus on your assigned tasks and complete them in a timely fashion.
- Pay attention to your surroundings and keep all work areas clean and orderly.
- Ensure all company-provided equipment and work materials are well-maintained and organized.
- Watch your language in the workplace. Different workplaces and individuals have varying opinions on using foul language/cursing or swearing within the workplace, and some people may be offended by hearing it.
- Avoid engaging in 'workplace drama' or gossip, as it generally contributes to a negative work environment, in addition to potentially leading to interpersonal conflicts or even disciplinary action being levied against you by management.

## **Best Practices**

### **What are Best Practices?**

As you enter into the workforce, you may hear the term “best practices” being utilized across varying circumstances and within different environments. In business, “best practices” refers to the most efficient and effective ways of operating. Utilizing best practices leads to improved performance and positive results, increasing the likelihood of successful outcomes. These practices can be industry-specific or universally applicable, and involve strategies, standards, and methods for everything from strategic planning and communication to employee engagement and ethical conduct. Best practices may vary

between employers and sectors, but are generally those processes which have proven successful for each employer in the past, and thus their implementation will likely lead to ongoing success for the employer's current and future initiatives as well.

By implementing and sharing best practices, businesses and organizations can improve overall performance, increase efficiency, and achieve sustainable success.

## **Best Practices: Examples**

### **Communication and Respect**

- If you're running late, be sure to immediately communicate the circumstances to your supervisor.
- Diligently enable your email's 'Out of Office' auto reply during periods away from work, taking care to provide the date upon which you will return to your duties.
- Quickly acknowledge communications from colleagues in order to make sure people feel heard.
- No one likes to be blind-sided. If you intend to refer a contact to a colleague, be sure to contact the colleague in advance in order to fill them in on the particulars of the referred situation.

### **Colleague Appreciation and Positive Engagement**

- If a coworker assists you or goes out of their way to streamline something for you, be sure to send them a quick 'thank you'.
- Recognize the successes and contributions of others; small gestures mean a lot.
- Everyone deals with heightened emotions at times: be quick to apologize if you overreact or speak out of turn. People tend to be understanding towards those who recognize their mistakes and make efforts to address them.

### **Thoughtful Planning and Problem Solving**

- Approach each initiative or hurdle with an open, analytical mindset. Take your time in order to fully assess and understand the whole situation and then respond strategically, rather than rushing ahead and acting impulsively.
- Avoid procrastination: plan ahead and use your time wisely to ensure the timely completion of all duties and avoid undue stress later on. You should always aim to provide your final results prior to any established deadlines.

### **Flexibility and Collaboration**

- When working with others, be sure to practice active listening; do not just wait for your turn to speak. Give others the time and space to make themselves heard, and never interrupt or speak over them.
- Examine your preconceptions or assumptions, and be willing to adapt your ideas, plans, or strategies if new information is brought to your attention which alters the initial situation. No one should ever be so 'set in their ways' or inflexible that they can't shift their viewpoint if a change in circumstances warrants it.
- Collaboration requires all involved parties to actively and consistently contribute. Ensure you follow through on your commitments and efficiently manage your own

workload. People quickly grow to resent underperformers who regularly force their colleagues to 'pick up the slack'.

- Accept feedback and constructive criticism from colleagues and supervisors alike, avoiding becoming defensive. Continuously assess your own performance and make adjustments if needed.