

Professionalism: A smart business imperative

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By: Becky S. Cornett and Barb Smoot

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Many tips offered in articles about the importance of professionalism in business focus on appearance and demeanor.

The dictionary definition — “the conduct, aims or qualities that characterize or mark a professional person” — is broad, leaving plenty of room for interpretation.

Peter Barron Stark’s 2015 blog post “The New Definition of Professionalism,” however, is thought-provoking. He contends: “You may be the very best at executing on the technical competencies of your job, but totally lack any semblance of professionalism. Professionalism has less to do with *what* you do in your job (the results you produce) and a lot more to do with *how* you produce those results.”

Stark emphasizes that traditional notions of professionalism in today’s rapidly changing workforce and culture are giving way to Generation Y and Z views, which are more relaxed about attire and desk time and reject the notion that one must choose between family and personal life and commitment to work. However, Stark says that accountability, maintaining focus, respectful and clear communication, and demonstrating a positive outlook are characteristics of professionalism that should be common to all generations in the workforce.

Janet Smith Meeks, co-founder and CEO of Healthcare Alignment Advisers LLC and author of the book “Gracious Leadership: Lead Like You’ve Never Led Before,” was recently elected to the board of Capitol Series Trust, sponsored by Ultimus Fund Solutions® LLC. Meeks’ describes succinctly the core of what professionalism means today in her comments:

Professionalism means to show uncompromising respect in all interactions including circumstances in which dissent is center stage. Professionalism is demonstrated when individuals speak with kind candor while seeking common ground with a goal of optimizing organizational performance. These individuals put the needs of the greater good above their own preferences. Leaders and employees at large show professionalism by being consistently prepared so they can make meaningful contributions to any discussion. And, they listen with purpose while consistently maintaining an open mind.

Individuals who are role models of professionalism embrace the reality that they are never really ‘off the clock’. They know their reputations are directly impacted by how they show up in all environments and not merely by how they act in the office.

Lori Kaiser, CPA, is the founder and CEO of Kaiser Consulting. She was also elected to the board of directors of CST.

Asked how she would define professionalism, Kaiser said “professionalism for me is showing up at work with my best self and executing on my promises to both employees and clients. Our clients know at Kaiser ‘our goal is your success.’ We keep this focus as we help clients’ businesses grow and support our employees as they balance careers and personal lives.”

Although elements of professionalism may be evolving, the characteristics discussed here offer lasting guidance and are key components of a smart business strategy.

Janet Smith Meeks (2012) and **Lori Kaiser** (2015) were Women WELDing the Way® calendar honorees and are residents of Central Ohio.

Becky S. Cornett is a member of WELD Impact Committee and **Barb Smoot** is the president and CEO of WELD. Women for Economic and Leadership Development desires to increase the number of women in business and government leadership in Central Ohio.