

Professional Conduct

Professional conduct is a set of standards and obligations to your employer and includes:

- How you present; style of dress and personal hygiene in relation to your role and type of organisation you work for
- How you behave, relate to others, and communicate
- Your approach to work, work ethic, and results

Some work environments have very different expectations to what is expected and acceptable in a social or family situation. It's a good idea to understand what the expectations are so you can meet your contractual obligations.

Why is professional conduct important?

Positive professional conduct is known to influence the success of a brand, culture, current and potential customer perceptions, the ability to recruit and retain people, and even how the local community or broader business community regards the company. It's often a significant factor in the ongoing success of the company, e.g., Virgin, North Western Airlines, Google, Apple.

It's most likely it will also influence your success in working relationships, your development and pay increases (or not), your reputation, your involvement in new opportunities, and your ability to move on to other jobs and companies with a great reference and reputation.

How professional are you?

There is no one standard for professional conduct which fits every business and work environment. Determining exactly what is appropriate will require self awareness and observation of your workplace.

Ask yourself:

What reaction am I getting from those I work for and with?

How does my presentation, behaviour, and language compare/differ to other highly regarded and successful people at my work?

What feedback, direct and indirect, am I being given?

Things to consider

Presentation and hygiene

People more often than not base their first impression on the way someone looks, the appropriateness for the situation, their greeting, and their first few sentences. It's important your dress is a match for your role and environment.

In offices, factories or shops a tidy appearance is usually required (ie, no rips or holes in your clothes, well fitting but not gaping, clean, not too revealing, etc).

In some manual/outdoor roles you may be required to wear overalls or a uniform. These should still be clean at the beginning of the day and in good repair. Where you are required to wear safety equipment (ie, glow jackets, protective shoes, etc), it's important that you do so to protect yourself from harm and your employer from Occupational Safety and Health issues.

Hair, make-up, jewellery, tattoos and piercings need to be looked at in the context of the role and expectations of your employer. If you are working in a professional services office, clean, well-groomed hair, no facial piercing or tattoos, moderate make-up, and minimal jewellery could well be what is expected. If you are a truck driver, landscape gardener or musician your look could be considerably different and appropriate for the role.

Personal hygiene applies universally whether you work indoors or outdoors. Basic cleanliness, clean clothes, daily showering, wearing deodorant to avoid body odour, and brushing your teeth to avoid bad breath are a good place to start.

Behaviour, relationships and communication

A positive attitude, willingness, co-operation, honesty, good questioning and great listening, discretion, respect for all those you come in to contact with, along with being proactive and keen to take on new challenges is likely to result in faster progression, higher earnings, and new opportunities.

Your choice of language and the tone it is delivered in is very important if you are going to create a positive impression. Swearing and blasphemy can offend a colleague or customer. In a home or social situation you can think, 'that's their problem', but in a work setting, it is definitely your problem. Consideration of your audience and appropriateness of your comments should show maturity and good judgment if you want the respect of others.

We all relate to and like some people more than others. Professional conduct means having a minimum standard of communication that is respectful and constructive regardless of your audience. The quote, 'People matter more than tasks or things' is well worth thinking about when it comes to work relationships. Professional conduct means you have clear boundaries and become known as someone who has recognised values and standards.

Values and ethics

Some companies and industries have codes of conduct and strict requirements while in others it is less clear. At the core of professional conduct is the question of whether your own values and ethical beliefs align with the company you work for.

It's ideal if you can take the time to establish if there is a values match prior to joining a company so you can enjoy working with likeminded people. A poor values match can be a recipe for an unhappy employer and employee and may result in significant issues. Open communication will clarify or resolve concerns. Waiting until something has become a problem is not the best way to work through a situation.

Once you're part of a company culture, it's a good idea to find out pretty quickly what the expectations are so you can assimilate into the organisation.

If you are struggling with ethical questions you might like to ask yourself how you would feel telling your friends and family or a past employer what you have been doing? If you think something is wrong with the way a job or customer is being handled, the chances are that it is and you need to speak up and then, with more information, evaluate your position.