

Tips for Professionalism

How graduate students can become "true professionals"

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"Professionalism is knowing how to do it, when to do it, and doing it."

Sounds simple, right?

Graduate school is a time of growth. It is the time in our educational careers where we develop into the professional we hope to be in the future. However, many graduate students are stuck when it comes to knowing how to become a "true professional." Although there are many definitions of how to reach this goal, we are here to help lessen the stress and help provide graduate students in school psychology with some pointers on how to take full advantage of this journey.

Dress the Part

First things first, we are going to school to become professionals, so we need to start looking like it! Understandably, graduate students are on tight budgets, but it doesn't mean we can't look good. It's particularly important that we look the part when duty calls. Some things to keep in mind when considering your attire:

- Wear professional and conservative clothing. For men, this can be dress slacks in a neutral color, button down, collared shirts, and a tie to compliment. Women, can go a similar route with dress slacks and blouses, but be sure the blouse is not too low-cut or revealing. Women can also choose a skirt or dress, as long as it is appropriate in length and fit. Jackets are great pieces for both, and can help pull any outfit together.
- Ensure that clothing is clean, pressed and well-fitted.
- Wear appropriate, but comfortable shoes that are clean and polished. This can be especially important for women—you may love your pumps, but make sure you can walk in them!
- Choose accessories that complement your clothing rather than distract from it. Although big bags and chunky jewelry may be in fashion right now, it does not necessarily mean these are appropriate as part of your professional attire.
- Remove facial and body piercings and cover visible tattoos to avoid distraction.
- Keep fragrances, makeup, and jewelry minimal.
- Make sure your hair is clean and conservative in color and style.
- Less is more. Keep your look simple, but classic.

Know Your Manners

Now that you are looking the part, it's time to brush up on the do's and don'ts of professional mannerisms. Here, it's important to remember that how you express yourself shows the kind of person you are. Professional manners show respect to those around you. Here are some general manners to keep in mind regardless of your interaction:

Greet and acknowledge others

- Extend a simple greeting to everyone you encounter, and when you know the person's name, use it. Make eye contact and smile
- If you're meeting a person for the first time, give a firm handshake. This may seem obvious, but how often have you entered a situation and your presence has gone unacknowledged?

Don't use cell phones during meetings or conversations

- Technology is great, however, more than ever it is becoming difficult to set aside the phone and become truly involved in your interactions with others. It is rude to be constantly checking your phone. Be aware of this, and put the cell phone away!
- In situations when this cannot be helped, let others know you're expecting a critical call or message and only use your phone at that time. Be on time
- This is a simple matter of respect. Occasionally it can't be avoided, but don't make it a regular occurrence. Additionally, every effort should be made to inform whomever you are meeting that you will be late.

Use the basics

- Basic manners, including the use of please, thank you, and excuse me, never grow tiring, so use them regularly.

Keep your conversations professional

- Maintain confidentiality, avoid gossip, refrain from profanity, and use humor appropriately.
- Be aware of your volume. Loud voices can be disruptive, while those who are difficult to hear can be equally distracting.

Don't forget email etiquette

- Avoid sending from inappropriate email addresses (HoTmama99@hotmail.com). Instead, use your school email or email with a professional address (yourname@gmail.com).
- Use courteous greetings. If you're unsure how to address someone, always go for the more formal option. This goes for ending emails, too.

- Spell check, spell check, spell check!
- Read your emails aloud to ensure you are depicting the tone you desire.

Get involved

Once you're looking and acting like a professional, it's time to get out there! As graduate students it's so important that we become involved in the profession of school psychology as much as we can. We are the future of the profession. Therefore, it's important to surround ourselves by those who have been around the block, and can teach us the ropes outside of our everyday coursework and practicum experiences. Networking is a great way to do so! Here are some key points to remember when networking with others:

Bring Value to Others

Networking is a two-way street, so remember that it's not all about you. Successful networkers look for opportunities to help others. Others will want to be a part of your network if they know that you will find ways to help them. Be in the right Places Part of building a strong network is knowing where to be, and where to find others. You can spend all the time you want trying to build a network, but if you're not putting yourself in the right situations to meet key people, you're not going to get the best results. Some examples of these situations can include national and state conventions, professional organization meetings at your school or in your area, research groups, clubs, and other group activities associated around the field of school psychology. Know What You're Looking for Take the time to figure out the characteristics or skills of the ideal person who you would like to become associated with, and focus on those types of people.

Be Proactive

Don't wait for others to come to you. Find ways to get to know others. Reach out to others that you have identified as possible members of your network and get to know them. These tips are by no means exhaustive. Some may seem silly or obvious, but shouldn't be ignored. As always if unsure, ask! It's important to remember that as graduate students we are growing into professionals. It's okay not to know, and there are plenty of people in our field that will guide us along the way, so happy growing future school psychologists!

Further Readings

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Taken from: <http://www.apadivisions.org/division-16/publications/newsletters/school-psychologist/2011/04/student-corner.aspx>