



YOUNG PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP TIPS FOR GETTING AHEAD IN THE WORKPLACE

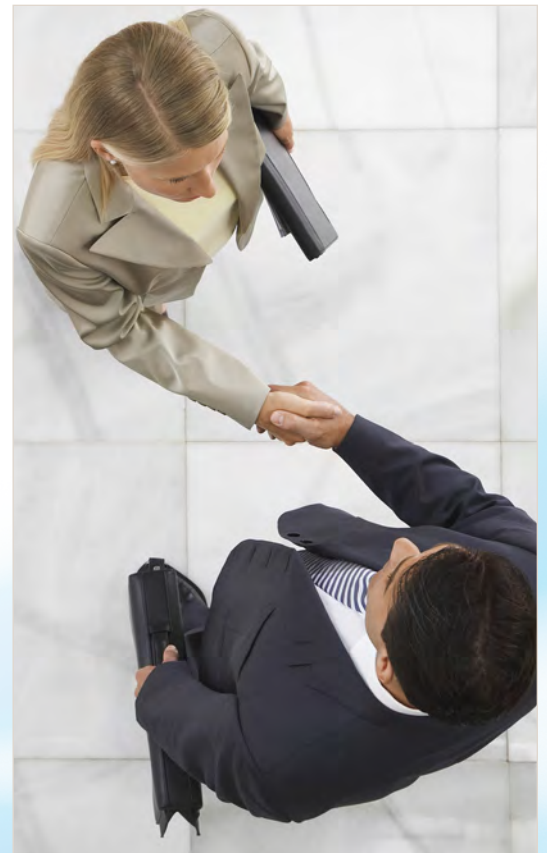
THE WIRE

Abstract:

Young professionals face a variety of obstacles that can impede their progress. Getting ahead requires knowledge and insights. In this piece we explore a variety of tactics new professionals can use to enhance their personal skills – and even emerge as leaders in their profession.

Contents:

Communication Excellence.....	2
Maximize Your Skills and Knowledge	5
Elevate Your Profile	7



Communication Excellence

In The Workplace

Good communication skills are essential for anyone who hopes to grow as a professional. Knowing what, when and how to express your thoughts and ideas – whether you're dealing with a colleague or superior – can be the difference between successfully getting your message across or failing to make your point. And the consequences, either way, can be significant.

As a young professional entering the workforce, you'll likely find yourself in many situations that require different forms of communication. While you don't have to be a master communicator to navigate them, knowing the basics can help.

In this section we'll review some best practices that you can use immediately to enhance your reputation as a good communicator. We'll also highlight additional steps you can take to further improve your skills. By taking these to heart and putting them into practice, we guarantee your skill as a communicator will increase significantly.



"You can use these best practices immediately to enhance your reputation as a good communicator."

Communication Best Practices

Establishing good communication habits early in your career will serve you well in any profession. By instilling the following six best practices you can set the groundwork for a lifetime of positive and productive professional communication.

1 OBSERVE AND ADAPT

Some people like to get on the phone and talk through workplace issues. Others send emails. Still others drop by to settle things in person. For as many different types of people you'll deal with in your line of work, there are just as many communication styles. Good communicators observe these styles and adapt theirs accordingly. They're also not afraid to ask. Most people will happily tell you if they prefer one mode of communication to another. They may even respect you for asking and saving them time.

2 DON'T USE EMAIL AS A SHIELD

Is it easier to send emails than it is to meet face-to-face? Sometimes. And sometimes email is the right way to communicate. However, many young workers use email as a shield against direct communication. And while it may seem easier, it usually isn't. Email lacks context that face-to-face meeting provides. It's also interruptive. A good rule of thumb is if it would take three or more email volleys to solve an issue, than direct communication in person or by phone is in order.



3 RESPECT, REPLY AND RESPOND

When communicating with colleagues it pays to follow the golden rule. By treating others the way you'd like to be treated, you'll establish good working relationships that will endure. This means responding to emails or voicemails in a timely manner, usually within 24 hours. It also means letting colleagues know when you're not available and who to reach in your absence. Don't leave anyone in the dark, especially clients or supervisors.

4 PAY ATTENTION

In a world that rewards people for speaking up, it can be difficult to sit back and simply listen. However, listening is just as important in communicating with others as telling them what you think. Always pay attention to what others are saying so that there are no misunderstandings. Not only will listening ensure you have the information you need, but it also saves others from having to repeat themselves, and wasting their valuable time doing so.

5 SET YOUR EMOTIONS ASIDE

At some point in your career someone, somewhere will somehow make you angry. When this occurs, refrain from responding until you've cooled down and can do so rationally. Responding beforehand can lead to regretful confrontations or emails that can undermine your success. If you are unsure about how to respond ask a neutral colleague or supervisor. Think thoroughly about the circumstances and how your response might play out in the long run.

6 RISE ABOVE THE FRAY

Nothing can be gained by bringing personal conflicts into the workplace. If you're having issues with a colleague, try to resolve them and put work first. Steer clear of the office grapevine and stay out of workplace drama. Avoid warrantless complaining about co-workers and the company. By maintaining a professional distance you'll project good character and maturity.



Social Media

How you communicate in the digital spaces of online and social media can have a direct and permanent impact on your professional reputation. While outrageous comments and behaviors are often rewarded by platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, they seldom gain favor in the professional world. If you have an active social or online presence, know that it's visible by employers and colleagues as well as the rest of the digital community. By keeping the following three guidelines in mind, you can navigate the line between your social and professional reputation.



1 CREATE AN EMPLOYER FRIENDLY PRESENCE

Do a thorough audit of your social media sites, making sure there's no activity that might cast you in a bad light to a current or future employer. Ask yourself, "what would the boss think" if he or she could see the images from your trip to Cancun or your comments about a co-worker. If they're negative or cast doubt about your character in any way, it's best to remove the content. To prevent future postings, ask yourself the same question before you post. It could save you trouble down the road.

2 MANAGE YOUR ONLINE REPUTATION

Ever Google yourself just to see what comes up? Sometimes the results can be surprising. If you come across something that's detrimental, chances are your employer can, too. Create a plan to help mitigate issues that could arise if an employer came across, let's say, an arrest for driving under the influence or a bankruptcy declaration. How would you respond to turn a negative into a positive? The more you prepare, the better off you'll be if something really does come up.

3 ASK FOR AND UNDERSTAND THE COMPANY SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Some companies have very stringent social media guidelines and restrict or block access to sites like Facebook and Twitter. Others are more relaxed in their approaches to social media usage in the workplace. While attitudes may vary by company, it's your responsibility to know your employer's policy and to abide by it. Ignorance can lead to infractions, penalties and even termination.



Maximize Your Skills and Knowledge

While it may sound cliché, being a “go-getter” is one of the most effective ways to get ahead in business. By constantly cultivating your knowledge and understanding of how businesses run at each level, you’ll improve your ability to make good judgments and quick decisions. These skills can also help you think outside the box about the challenges you may encounter and help you find the best solutions.

Developing your business acumen will also make you more valuable to the company. The key is exposing yourself to a wide array of experiences, education, and resources to support your growth and development. The following five tips will help you establish and continue a path for career growth.

1 STAY CURRENT

Thanks to the Internet, it’s now easier than ever to stay on top of business and industry trends that could advance your career. Search for content online daily and try to read at least one piece that’s business or industry related. Read books, magazines, news stories, blogs, and even social media sights like LinkedIn to help you better understand today’s business environment. The digital age has blessed today’s professional with access to a nearly infinite amount of data and information, so immerse yourself in it.

2 BE A JOINER

Make a point of joining at least one or more industry associations and groups. Not only will it help you stay on top of the latest professional and industry trends, it will also put you in touch with others who can serve as mentors, sounding boards or like-minded colleagues. By attending industry conferences and seminars you can keep your fingers on the pulse of your industry and learn valuable skills that can advance your career.

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3 KEEP LEARNING

The certificate or diploma you earned got you into your current job, so why not consider additional schooling that can take you even farther? Research community colleges and online courses that will help you develop professionally. Choose the topics and pace that work for you. Many employers will supplement your studies, so be sure to check with your company.

4 GET INVOLVED

Participate in company projects or on committees. The experiences will give you insights into how your company operates. Don't be afraid to ask if you can shadow or sit-in with a different team or department, so that you can get a better sense of how the business runs. Most employees enjoy the opportunity to show someone the ropes.

5 DEVELOP A PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT SYSTEM

Going it alone as a young professional can be difficult and at times discouraging. Which is why it makes sense to develop a personal advisory board – a group that's dedicated to your personal and professional success. Your board should consist of people you can learn from, confidants who can help when you're struggling – even people who simply make work more fun. The key is to choose individuals who can advance your progress as a professional by being there when you need them most.





Elevate Your Profile

When you're first starting out, it can be difficult to establish your identity and presence in the workplace. Like many young professionals you lack experiences and accomplishments that let colleagues and superiors know you're someone to be reckoned with. There are things you can do, however, to stand out. We explore six of them here.

1 THINK LIKE A BRAND

Consider the brands you like most and what trait emerges. Most likely, it's consistency. If it's McDonalds, you know that the Big Mac you get in your hometown will be exactly as it would be halfway across the country. When you think like a brand, think of the traits that are unique to you, and strive to stay true to them regardless of the circumstances. If you want to be known for being punctual, be on time anywhere and everywhere and always get your projects done on deadline. Decide what you want your professional brand to be, and let your actions define you.

2 GO ABOVE AND BEYOND

Want to stand out in a crowd? Giving a little extra effort can go a long way toward raising your profile. When you meet new people in work situations, collect their business card and follow up with a "nice to meet you" note. In an era that's dominated by digital communications, this throwback, personal response will be remembered. Consider other ways of getting noticed and building your reputation. Perhaps it's volunteering to help out a project team that's struggling or staying late to make sure deadlines aren't missed. While these small acts may seem inconsequential, collectively they'll portray you in a positive and memorable light.

3 NEVER STOP GROWING

Embark on a workout plan and you're likely to weigh yourself periodically and measure changes in body mass and shape. When developing yourself professionally the same premise holds true. Evaluate yourself every three months to gauge your professional accomplishments. Reflect on the skills you used that helped you grow or critique the ones that held you back. In doing these periodic self-evaluations you can measure yourself against the benchmark and continue your career on an upward tack.



4 BE ACCOUNTABLE

They say actions speak louder than words, and this holds true especially in the workplace. If you say you're going to do something follow through. If you're not sure whether you can, engage an "accountability cop" who will help you keep your word. Most likely a colleague you can trust – or even a significant other – this person will have your best interests at heart and won't be afraid to dole out a little tough love to help you improve.



5 KEEP UP WITH TECHNOLOGY

Technology is constantly changing in today's workplace. Having at least a working knowledge of the systems or programs you work with will help you excel. Whether it's wide-ranging or defined by the job at hand, establish the baseline technology knowledge that makes you an asset, not a liability. If possible, become certified in newer technologies so that you can add value to your business and enhance your personal brand.

6 DEVELOP A FIVE-YEAR PLAN

Imagine what your career might look like five years from now. Consider where you would like to be professionally. Though the details may be fuzzy, pin down the important parts, such as the salary you would like to make and the job title you envision. By visualizing your goals, you're improving your chances of succeeding. Don't stop here, however. Commit your five-year plan to writing, so you can review it periodically on your way to realizing your dream.



To get ahead in the workplace and demonstrate leadership potential, young professionals must develop their business and communication skills. The tips outlined in this piece will help them better understand what's required to evolve as a leader.

"Keep these key points in mind to establish good working relationships that will endure your entire career"
