Professional Business Associates

Ethics and Professionalism Resources Manual

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Welcome to Professional Business Associates

Professional Business Associates is an organization that values ethics and professionalism throughout the organization. We value ethical behavior and professional business practice above all else, including profit.

We believe that, as a new associate of our organization, you have the ability to make a great contribution to our company as well as our industry. We look forward to working together to create a more successful company and hope that your employment with Professional Business Associates will be beneficial and gratifying.

You have joined an organization that has established an outstanding reputation for honesty, professionalism, and ethical practices. We credit this reputation to everyone in the organization. You are now an important member of that team, and we want you to take pride in your work here. As a member of the Professional Business Associates' team, you will be expected to contribute your talents and energies to further improve the culture and quality of the company.

This Ethics and Professionalism Resources Manual is designed to expose you to our basic philosophy with respect to this topic. You are responsible for reading and understanding this Manual. If anything is unclear, please discuss the matter with your manager.

I wish you much success at Professional Business Associates.

Sincerely,

Nancy Wells

Nancy Wells, Chief Executive Officer
Professional Business Associates

Professional Business Associates
Ethics and Professionalism Resources Manual

The Ethics and Professionalism Resources Manual for Professional Business Associates is designed to provide our associates with a basic understanding of how ethics and professionalism are exhibited in business today. All those conducting business on behalf of, or with Professional Business Associates, are expected to exhibit the highest level of ethics and professionalism.

The Ethics and Professionalism Resources Manual should be considered a blueprint for the principles we value. The core principles of conduct and ethical behavior lie in our foundation for success including: Open Communication and Equal Opportunities.

- Open Communication is conducting professional business with transparency and dual freedom to exchange information.
- Equal Opportunities is ensuring those around you and those you engage in business transactions are given the respect, honesty and fairness needed to conduct opportunities in the workplace.

As an employee/partner/vendor of Professional Business Associates, I agree to uphold the following standards for conduct and professionalism:

- *I will take responsibility for my actions, decisions and obligations*
- *I will make honest and transparent decisions which are good for all involved*
- *I will present information in a clear and timely manner to all parties*
- *I will encourage actions, policies, and procedures which promote high standards for conduct and professionalism*
- *I will uphold and respect the laws that govern my work*

What You Can Expect From Professional Business Associates
Professional Business Associates believes in creating a harmonious working relationship between all coworkers, clients, and customers.

What Professional Business Associates Expects From You
Professional Business Associates needs your help in making each working day enjoyable and rewarding. Your first responsibility is to know your own duties and how to do them promptly, correctly and pleasantly. Secondly, you are expected to cooperate with management and your fellow employees and to maintain a good team attitude.

How you interact with fellow employees and those whom Professional Business Associates serves, and how you accept direction can affect the success of your department. In turn, the performance of one department can impact the entire service offered by Professional Business Associates. Consequently, whatever your position, you have an important assignment: perform every task to the very best of your ability.

We strongly believe you should have the right to make your own choices in matters that concern and control your life. We believe in direct access to management. We are dedicated to making Professional Business Associates a company where you can approach your manager, or any member of management, to discuss any problem or question. We expect you to voice your opinions and contribute your suggestions to improve the quality of Professional Business Associates. Remember, you help create the pleasant and safe working conditions that

Professional Business Associates intends for you. The result will be better performance for the company overall and personal satisfaction for you.

General Considerations Regarding Ethics & Professionalism

Ethics

Business ethics is one of the hottest topics in the business world today. Many believe that businesses acting in an ethical manner is a thing of the past. However, there is a strong movement today to educate current and future business people as to the inherent value of ethical business practice. Business ethics simply stated is trying to do the right thing in every situation. It means profiting through integrity and hard work, not deceit and manipulation.

Merriam-Webster's Definition of Ethics:
1. The discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation
2. A set of moral principles: a theory or system of moral values
3. The principles of conduct governing an individual or a group
4. A guiding philosophy

"Business Ethics" can be generally defined as the critical structure of how people and institutions should behave when engaged in business. In particular, it involves examining appropriate limits in the pursuit of glorified self-interest, or the profit-at-all cost business model. It is the study of the standards of business behavior which promote human welfare and noble commerce.

Business ethics are manifested both in written and unwritten codes of moral/ethical standards that are essential to current operational successes and future aspirations. They differ from one company to another because of the inherent differences in organizational culture, operational structures, and strategic orientations.

The guiding framework of business ethics should be introduced at all levels of the business. Focusing on creating the wisdom to determine the difference between right actions and wrong decisions. They should stipulate the morality standards and behavioral patterns expected of every individual and the business as a whole. A person reading or hearing them should come away with the basic precepts within which to conform. A good code of ethics should be written to be durable and timeless, but should allow for occasional updates allowing for the ever changing business and social environment.

Business ethics are often illustrated via example. For instance, an ethical dilemma may occur when a person has to make a choice between right and wrong or good and bad. Personal values versus company profits are often a source of conflict as are dilemmas triggered by breaches of confidentiality, personal bias, or illegal activity.

Like professionalism, ethics exists in a higher plane. An organization that is known for strong ethical practices is held in high esteem in the minds of the public. However, those companies that are involved in continuous scandals and known for unsavory business practices are viewed by the public with much skepticism.

Setting an ethical tone with colleagues, clients and customers

Personal Ethics: A person's ethics in their personal life will undoubtedly affect how they conduct business.

Business Ethics: Prevent exploitation, harassment, and intimidation in the workplace. It ensures that the organization abides by the law of the land.
[It is easy to take short-cuts that seem innocent, but are really against the law. It's hard to break laws when your business practice is above-board and honest. Conversely, it is difficult to remain innocent if you make a habit of deceiving and exploiting people.]

Fairness: Fairness is an important component of ethical business.
[How you are treated by a superior or how you treat a subordinate directly impacts the quality of, and how work is performed. How fairly you treat others in negotiations or contractually will ultimately affect who is willing to deal with you in the future.]

Integrity: Integrity is generally the term that is most associated with business ethics and is the foundation on which good commerce is built. Integrity simply means holding to your principles even when it would be easier or more profitable to compromise them.

Dependability: Dependability is considered an admirable business ethic. Just how dependable are you? Do you arrive to work on time? Can people trust that you will do what you say?

Trustworthiness: Good business practice requires trust. Neither you nor your business can succeed with a reputation for untrustworthiness.

Internal + External: Good business ethics requires that ethical behavior be practiced both internally as well as outside of the business. In simple terms you must; “practice what you preach”.

Leadership: Ethical behavior more often than not trickles down from the top. If the leaders of an organization practice good business ethics, chances are better that employees will follow the example.

Values: A person's moral code is integrated into his/her business ethics. A person uses his/her own personal values in the context of his/her business dealings. Being able to determine right from wrong is instilled in us as children and is difficult to change as we mature into adulthood.

Professionalism

Many people consider ethics and professionalism to be basically one in the same. While understandable, this impression is fundamentally flawed as sound ethical practices should only be considered a characteristic of true professionalism. Paying respect to co-workers, oneself and clients, being honest during any type of transaction and taking responsibility for one's own actions is both ethical and professional. Further, today’s employees are looking for a workplace that exhibits positive ethical and professional values.

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary broadly defines “Professionalism” as "the conduct, aims or qualities that characterize or mark a professional or a professional person."

Professionalism plays an important role in how a person is perceived by his/her employer, his/her co-workers and casual contacts–actually, by every person with whom he/she interacts. It can have a profound impact in only a matter of minutes. The way that a person is first perceived in a meeting, whether casual or professional, can determine the final outcome of the engagement.

The greater the degree to which a person exemplifies professionalism, the easier it will be for him/her to be set apart from those around him/her. This outstanding characteristic will cause his superiors to take notice.

The following qualities are but a few examples for what society views as professional behavior in accordance with acceptable workplace standards.

1. Whether we dress "appropriately"
2. How we interact with others
3. Whether we respect timeliness and deadlines
4. How a person handles situations with others

Dressing in appropriate attire for whatever a situation requires, showing respect for others, always arriving on time (or early) for meetings, acting in a fair, consistent, and honest manner while controlling emotions when things are not going your way, are all marks of a professional.

The professionalism of an individual reflects on more than just him/herself. Not only can it build an individual's self-esteem by gaining respect from others, it also reflects well on the company.

Professionalism allows for heightened respect from clients, thereby, opening greater lines of communication and potentially increased trust. A company known for maintaining a level of high ethical and professional standards is typically valued above its peers when competing in the same market.

Professionalism can (and should) be applied in every business setting throughout all industries. The more a person or organization displays professionalism, the more opportunities will be revealed, thereby leading to future success.

Setting a professional tone with colleagues, clients and customers

For organizations and employees alike, recognizing the critical link between professionalism and ethics in the workplace is key. Learning how to confidently interact with colleagues, clients and customers in a professional manner is the vital to future success.

The Handshake: Setting the stage for instant rapport.
A good, well-timed and executed handshake paired, with a genuine smile, is a sure way for you to exhibit your professionalism. You will stand out, whether you're at the company picnic or business function.

Research has proven that a prospective employee with the best handshake is more likely to get the job. Even if you're not a job-seeker, a good handshake will grant you instant rapport when meeting someone new.

Professional Communication Skills: Setting the stage for future success.
Communication skills are essential if you plan to cultivate your career. Effective communication skills will give you an advantage over most of your colleagues. Knowing how to efficiently communicate your message will enable you to increase the amount of influence that you will have in dealing with your peers, supervisors, and subordinates.

This may sound as though you are trying to manipulate or dictate behavior, but it isn't. With good communication skills, you can convey your perspective even in the most uncomfortable of situations.

Speaking loudly or angrily towards someone rarely solves an issue, but will always cause ill will.

Strong leaders exhibit appropriate professional communication skills. Think about it. What do real leaders do better than anyone else? Communicate!

Professional Dress: Dress appropriate to the situation.
Appropriate dress and grooming is one of the most common traits associated with professionalism. We form first impressions and overall judgments about people and companies by the way that associates dress, look and act. The way someone dresses affects the perception of your company's customers, clients, or business partners; it is important to maintain a standard of dress that creates a consistent and positive impression.

A dress code/standard can bring uniformity to the workplace. Never dress provocatively, a work place is comprised of all kinds of people, wear something that will help you fit in. A dress code/standard is not typically designed to make an employee comfortable, rather, the point is to make others feel comfortable.

Maintaining one's personal hygiene is also essential to the professional work place. Wearing clean, laundered clothes, keeping suitably clean and groomed hair, and always maintaining personal hygiene will leave a positive lasting impression on everyone you meet.

Punctuality: Fashionably late is never an option.
Being punctual is a very important aspect of professionalism. In a professional setting, people should always abide by the time and schedule prescribed by the organization. Individuals that arrive consistently late for work or appointments disrespect not only their peers, but their employer as well.

When unforeseen circumstances create unscheduled conflicts, a professional will immediately inform all necessary individuals of the issue and seek to reschedule as soon as possible and in the most appropriate manner.

Conversations: Your tone can make all the difference.
Every conversation gives you an opportunity to leave a good or bad impression. Both you and your organization's reputation can be reinforced by utilizing good manners and professionalism. Whether in person, or on the telephone, when you find yourself being attacked verbally, try these simple techniques:

1. Bite your tongue. When someone screams at you, your first thought might be, "What a jerk!" But that attitude will only poison an already-tenuous relationship with the individual. Instead, stay calm and listen.

2. Let them vent. Like a whistling kettle, angry people need to vent some steam. Don't interrupt—even with a solution—before they have had a chance to tell their story.
3. Take it down a notch. Instead of raising your voice to match the person's volume, speak softly. That will soothe the speaker and show him/her that you're interested in handling the situation in a calm, rational, and professional way.

Correspondence: Business Letters: The art of the personal note.
If you want to stand out from the crowd, learn to write personal notes to your colleagues and customers. Writing a great personal note is easy if you follow these three steps:

1. State why you're writing in a straightforward manner. *Example:* "Thank you for taking the time to meet with us yesterday in our office."
2. Elaborate on step 1. *Example:* "It was so valuable for our entire team to meet with you face-to-face. And, our meeting has sparked several creative ideas that we're excited to pursue."
3. Build the relationship. [This is perhaps the most important step.] In business relationships, you show great respect to someone when you take the time to write a personal note. You show that you are more interested in creating a long-term mutually beneficial relationship than executing a quick financial transaction.

Professional Dining Etiquette: Even during a meal you have an opportunity to prove your professionalism.

Whether you're lunching with peers or meeting with a vendor, dining etiquette can keep you from marring you or your company's image with a faux pas.

Here are a few rules to know when taking part in a business meal.

1. Never, ever talk with your mouth full. Be mindful, take small bites so that you can quickly swallow if somebody asks you a question. The meal is more likely about the relationship and not the food.
2. Come prepared with a few casual, non-business topics in mind. This helps you avoid awkward silences. Many people enjoy giving their thoughts on subjects like travel, sports and movies. Avoid political, religious, or divisive conversations of any kind.
3. Always be kind to the wait staff, no matter what happens. In general, a person who is nice to you but nasty to the server is not a nice person.
4. Know your lunch partner's business. This is especially key when your tablemate is someone you'd like to impress, but the rule holds true regardless. The fewer times you have to say (or think), "I didn't know that!" the more impressed the other party will be. [Take a few minutes to do a quick Google search before you leave for lunch].
5. Put some thought into choosing the right restaurant. Too casual or inexpensive and the person may not feel valued. Too expensive and they may perceive you as wasteful. When in doubt, suggest that the other person pick the place.

Office Space: Balance your personal and professional image.
Personalizing your office space is tempting because we spend more awake hours there than anywhere else, but, be sure to strike an appropriate balance by answering these questions about your office space/cubicle décor:

1. Who will see it?
2. What does it say about you?
3. Is it distracting?
4. Does it go overboard?

Office Party Etiquette: Special occasions with co-workers.
Office party etiquette is simple: Don't do anything that you don't want the entire company to be talking about for several years to come. Contrary to popular myth, an office party is not the place to wear a lampshade on your head. Keep your dignity, and respect the dignity of others.

Confidentiality: Learn when to share and when to keep a confidence.
Confidentiality is critical in many professional engagements. Whether dealing with employee investigations, or working with clients, confidentiality is key to organizational risk management, and both personal and professional liability. Maintaining a confidence can be particularly challenging when and if certain information is required to be shared among many people.

A true professional knows the importance of, and liability of, maintaining confidential information within the context of every business and/or personal situation. When in doubt, maintain the confidence and seek professional counsel.