

CAREER SEARCH AMERICA

CAREER TRANSITION TOOLBOX WHITEPAPER

CREATING A PROFESSIONAL IMAGE: IT'S MORE THAN DRESSING FOR SUCCESS



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INTRODUCTION

Your professional image is an essential part of your career search and your subsequent career. Even in an era of largely informal business settings - coffee shop meetings and video conferences - and informal business dress codes - “business casual” and casual Friday - a professional image is still expected.

Your professional image isn't simply about how you look, however. When you exceed expectations and hit your deadlines, you build up your image. When you miss work, take phone calls during business meetings or gossip about fellow employees you tear it down.

In other words, it's the entire set of impressions that people in the workplace have of you, and it affects how well you will be treated, the responsibilities you will be entrusted with, and your chances for promotion.

TAKE STEPS TO BUILD A POSITIVE PROFESSIONAL IMAGE

Because your professional image is so important and is affected by so many of your actions, it's worthwhile to know what you can do to create and maintain a great professional image. As you read through these suggestions, it's helpful to think of the process of building your professional image as personal branding. You're building your brand, and it's an important investment in your career.

REMAIN POSITIVE

People as a rule respond well to positive people. Always see the glass as half full no matter how negative the environment may be. Maintaining a positive attitude is part of emotional intelligence. Staying positive, and for that matter forward-thinking, lays the foundation for you to build powerful and strong relationships at work.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS

Dress for the job you want, not the one you have. This is the standard adage, and it's still true. Even on casual days, you don't have to be a slouch, you can still present an image of someone your colleagues can depend and rely on.

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY AND HOLD YOURSELF ACCOUNTABLE

Don't be too shy to take credit for successes. In the same manner, you should step up to claim responsibility for any mistakes. It can be a little challenging and it's probably easier to hope that it will be missed, but you show yourself as a trustworthy candidate for future opportunities if you take responsibility for mistakes, particularly before they're discovered at a later date.

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY

Be concise and clear, not just in writing, but also verbally. The way you communicate says a lot about how you interact, how you think and how effective you are at problem-solving.

KEEP A COOL HEAD

There are times at work when emotions, frustrations and stress get the better of us. It may feel easier to vent, but keeping a cool head works better in both the short and long run. Use your emotions constructively to arrive at solutions, not to destroy options.

SUMMARY

The phrase “professional image” can be misleading. It sometimes makes people think that appearance is the only part of professionalism. While a neat appearance is a key part of professionalism, a professional image goes beyond wardrobe. Though it has been said many times before, actions do speak louder than words. Because of this, your professional image will be built in large part upon your positive outlook, collected demeanor, and overall high personal standard. Keep this in mind and remember the steps we’ve just identified. If you do, you’ll be well on your way to establishing a professional image that will even take you beyond your career search phase.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- Remember that image is more than appearance. It’s the whole set of impressions others have of you.
 - Remain positive. It’s the key to successful working relationships.
 - Dress for success. A professional wardrobe is a key part of your professional equipment.
 - Take responsibility and be accountable. Who knows? It may catch on.
 - Learn to communicate effectively.
 - Stay cool and focus on solutions.
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