**Campus to Corporate: Developing a Professional Image**

**Overview/Description**

Projecting a professional image is vital to career success. Knowing how to dress is part of it, but there's much more. It's about demonstrating your best qualities through the attitude you bring to your work. And it's about respecting yourself, your job, your organization, and your coworkers. This course explains how you can show professionalism by your appearance and by following rules of conduct – for example, rules about using cell phones at work or about what you publish on social networking sites, even on your own time. It also offers guidance on the basics of how to communicate in a professional manner. Finally, it helps you recognize and avoid e-mail blunders that could diminish your professional image.

**Objectives**

**The Importance of Appearances**

 recognize how to project a professional image

 recognize examples of dress choices that detract from professional appearance

**Communicate Professionally**

 communicate in a professional manner

 recognize examples of common e-mail blunders

**Social Media**

 recognize examples of following guidelines for using social media

**Though our workplace may not necessarily be “corporate,” this short guide to navigating a *professional* *workplace* has good little tips regarding how to navigate your clinical rotations, which can essentially be described as a “seven-month interview.”**

**Skill Brief**

The Importance of Image

Now that you're off campus and in the corporate world, your image should be a top priority. A professional workplace attitude and appearance are essential for the long-term success of a business. They show that you take pride in your work and set a positive example for others. So they can help your organization reach its goals and targets.

You can project a professional workplace image in several ways:

* **appreciate the importance of appearances** – People's first impression of you will often be based on the way you look. Looking the part is just as important as your attitude and behavior, and can send out a clear message about how seriously you take your job. The right dress code and good personal hygiene habits can both help you be seen in a positive light.
* **be a dependable member of your organization** – Professional workers are people others can rely on – they consistently do their fair share, and get their work done on time. They are also effective team players. Be prepared to collaborate in team meetings, take the initiative when appropriate, and share your knowledge and expertise willingly.
* **maintain a positive attitude** – Your thoughts and feelings often determine your actions or behavior, so it's crucial that you maintain a positive outlook in your work environment. A positive attitude can help you overcome even the most daunting of obstacles.
* **treat colleagues with respect** – In any corporate environment, you should consider what constitutes good manners at meetings and when speaking on the phone. There may also be specific rules when using e-mail and the Internet at work. Remember to smile and acknowledge colleagues in your daily interactions, and show respect for their personal space by not standing too close when speaking to them.
* **support your organization** – Keep in mind that you're a representative of your company. Your actions and behaviors, negative or positive, may also reflect on your organization. Supporting your organization also means being discreet. Keep any confidential business or personal information to yourself until you know it's safe to be made public knowledge.
* **communicate appropriately** – Using appropriate spoken and written language in your daily interactions demonstrates attention to detail, tactfulness, and consideration. Expressing yourself clearly and appropriately means focusing on your tone, style, and language, and can affect how others perceive you.

**Dressing Appropriately for the Office**

While more and more companies adopt a business casual dress code, you shouldn't confuse this with campus casual. There are a few basic guidelines to follow when dressing for the office.

* **respect the office dress code** – If your company has a written dress code, find out what's acceptable, and conform to it appropriately. It's important to adhere to the correct code. Always wearing a formal suit while others are wearing khaki slacks and polo shirts may give the impression that you feel superior to your colleagues.
* **ensure your clothes are always in good order** – Invest in good quality clothing that looks professional. Make sure that your clothes are clean and pressed, and free from wear and tear. Wearing clothes that are stained or wrinkled may make you look careless and sloppy, so take the time to inspect your clothes before leaving for work.
* **observe how your peers in the office dress** – Try to mirror your colleagues' dress code so that you fit in appropriately with your current employment level, as well as with your company's corporate culture.
* **make sure your clothes fit you properly** – You should feel comfortable while at work, so in general it's best to avoid very loose or tight-fitting clothing. When choosing your office clothing, you should combine comfort and functionality. If your job is a customer-facing position, you may want to consider your personal grooming to ensure that you're clean and neat.

When making the transition from a campus to a corporate environment, it's essential to know how to project a professional image to show that you're capable of handling new responsibilities. To establish a reputation as a professional, you must consider your appearance, and how to support your colleagues and organization in general.

Dressing appropriately for work is one way of projecting a professional image. You should make sure your clothes are always in good order, and are suitable for your current employment.

**Course:** Campus to Corporate: Developing a Professional Image  
**Topic:** The Importance of Appearances

**Job Aid**

How to Communicate in a Professional Manner

**Purpose:** *Use this job aid to learn appropriate communication guidelines for the workplace*.

The transition from college to the workplace can be a daunting one, especially if you're used to openly discussing personal issues or controversial topics. Knowing the right thing to say in the right situation, however, can help you project a professional image to your boss and colleagues in your place of work.

| **Appropriate communication guidelines for the workplace** | |
| --- | --- |
| **Guideline** | **Explanation** |
| Be calm and keep personal information private | When starting conversations with coworkers, approach them to see if they're busy. If they don't have time to talk, say you'll come back later, or leave a voicemail explaining what you want to discuss.  **In general, keep private information to yourself, as people you work with may not always appreciate intimate details about your personal life.** |
| Avoid potentially offensive content | Be aware of coworkers' sensitivities, and adapt the language you use accordingly.  **Avoid taboo topics of conversation such as sex, religion, race, personal finances, or politics. Swearing and off-color jokes or comments are also inappropriate in an office environment.**  Use tact when communicating with coworkers – think about what you're going to say before you say it, and try to remain positive. |
| Don't be dismissive of other people's ideas | Although you may occasionally disagree with your coworkers, you should never interrupt them while they're speaking. Listen carefully first, and think of an appropriate and constructive reply you can make. |
| Respect the confidentiality of your workplace and its customers | If you happen to overhear a confidential conversation, it's best to pretend that you didn't hear it. Moreover, you should avoid sharing any information that you may have overheard.  You should also take care not to inadvertently leak any confidential information that has been entrusted to you by a client. Not only could this damage your professional image, but it could also damage your organization's business interests. |
| Be proactive | When dealing with an angry boss or customer, focus on how the other person may be feeling, and think about how you'd like to be treated if you were in the same situation. Listen to the other person's side of the story, concentrate on the main issue, and try to offer a suitable solution. |

**Course:** Campus to Corporate: Developing a Professional Image  
**Topic:** Communicate Professionally

**Job Aid**

E-mail Etiquette for the Workplace

**Purpose:** *Use this job aid to review guidelines for using e-mail in the workplace*.

E-mails are a quick and efficient way of communicating with colleagues, friends, and family members. However, their misuse could damage your professional image. Use the guidelines provided to ensure appropriate e-mail etiquette in the workplace.

| **E-mail etiquette in the workplace** | |
| --- | --- |
| **Guideline** | **Explanation** |
| Never send offensive material | Sending offensive content may not only insult your colleagues, but can also get you into serious trouble in your workplace.  Remember that your employer may have the right to check your e-mail, and that even deleted e-mails may be archived and accessed later. |
| Avoid "flaming" | Wait until you've regained your composure before sending inflammatory e-mails which you may regret later. |
| Avoid e-mail where inappropriate | E-mail may not be suitable in all situations. For example, letting employees know of possible layoffs by e-mail is impersonal, and gives them little opportunity to express their feelings or concerns.  If possible, important or sensitive information should be delivered in person, or over the phone. |
| Use "cc" and "reply all" sparingly | Using "cc", or carbon copy, is suitable only when the secondary recipient knows why you're sending the e-mail, and is somehow involved in the matter at hand.  Likewise, "reply all" should be used only if you're sure that everyone in the recipient list needs to be aware of the contents of your message. |
| Mind how e-mail could be interpreted | It's best to avoid a humorous, sarcastic, or ironic tone that may come across ambiguously to others. When writing your e-mail, make sure that it's neutral and concise. |
| Edit work e-mails | Simple spelling mistakes can detract from your professional image. Take the time to proofread your e-mails, and use a spell checker before you send them. |
| Include relevant contact details | Your recipients should know how to get in touch with you. Always include relevant contact details such as your company's name, and telephone and fax numbers. If including your company web site, make sure it's hyperlinked. |

**Course:** Campus to Corporate: Developing a Professional Image  
**Topic:** Communicate Professionally

**Social Media in the Workplace**

Social media can be an enjoyable way of keeping in contact with friends and classmates on campus. It allows you to express feelings, and let others know what you're doing. In the business world, it enables companies to market their brands more cost-effectively. That's why it's important that you consider what you publish online; not only can it be traced back to you, it can also affect your and your organization's professional image.

When posting comments on a social media site, there are several important guidelines you should follow:

* **avoid publishing disrespectful information about your company** – Using social media to vent frustration against employers or colleagues not only shows a lack of professionalism, but can also be costly for the company involved. To project a more professional image, you should make sure to address any grievances to your employer in person and in a calm and polite manner.
* **keep confidential information private** – When using social media, it's easy to inadvertently disclose vital information that belongs to your company or its clients. Information leaks, whether intentional or unintentional, are potentially dangerous to the success of a company's products or services, and you could also be guilty of violating a contractual agreement.
* **be aware of the effect on your professional image** – When posting information online, always consider the impact on your professional image. While publishing information about your social life may be acceptable in college or university, your employer will hardly be impressed if you post questionable photos of your work night out. Any images you post should be tasteful and show you and those around you in a positive light.
* **make sure you avoid posting any offensive comments** – Anything you publish online may also be visible to your colleagues and clients, so try to remain calm before having an angry outburst you may later regret. Never fire off an irate message in the heat of the moment – wait until you've cooled down, and discuss your problem face-to-face with the relevant person.

To project a professional image, you should consider your use of cell phones and social media in the workplace. Show respect for your coworkers by turning your cell phone ringer off, and by avoiding unnecessary personal phone chats. Try to avoid sending private text messages during work hours, and find a quiet, private place to make calls from. And above all, make sure you turn your cell phone off during meetings.

Social media is another means of communication that should be used carefully. Important guidelines are to avoid publishing disrespectful information about your company that may damage its reputation. Respect confidential information that has been entrusted to you or your company, and don't post anything that may harm your professional image. Finally, if expressing your opinions, ensure that you refrain from making personal or offensive remarks.

**Course:** Campus to Corporate: Developing a Professional Image  
**Topic:** Cell Phones and Social Media

Campus to Corporate: Developing a Professional Image  
References

**Books**

**Business Protocol: How to Survive and Succeed in Business**

2001, Jan Yager, Hannacroix Creek Books, 9781889262239

**They Don’t Teach Corporate in College: A Twenty-Something’s Guide to the Business World**

2004, Alexandra Levit, Career Press, 9781564147653

**Etiquette for Dummies**

2007, Sue Fox, John Wiley & Sons, 9780470106723

**Don’t Take the Last Donut: New Rules of Business Etiquette**

2007, Judith Bowman, Career Press, 9781564149299