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## *Debunking the 6 Myths of Professionalism*

"You are professionals!" I have heard that phrase announced several times while I've been here, and I'm sure you will too. Although I am not entirely convinced that anyone (including myself) really knows what it means. This blog post is my effort to offer a more general understanding by debunking six common myths of being a professional.

### Myth #1: Being professional is "dressing to the tens" (or whatever numerical representation) because it prepares you for success.

Folks, professionalism does not begin when you slip a blazer over your shoulders, and it does not stop when you shrug it off. It is a mentality that you carry with you throughout the day. The above way of thinking is a bit capitalistic (and if that is something that you like, I'm not trying to condemn you, promise). My point is that regardless of whether you have a suit from Calvin Klein, it has no bearing on how well you can do your job, and that is what should matter the most. If what you wear seems to bear the most weight in your field, I personally would look elsewhere.

### Myth #2: Being professional is having formulaic answers for employers.

Because professionalism is a mentality, it also means that it is yours. It is a result of your experiences personally and academically that have shaped how you navigate an occupational space. So, when you are going in for interviews, remember that. It's great to prepare yourself for potential questions. But just think, if someone is giving you the advice to give "A-type of answers for B-kinds of questions," how many other people do you think might be doing the exact same thing? Always remember you are the most authentic source for professional questions. It's okay to show that you are human being with thoughts and questions.

### Myth #3: Being professional is thinking of yourself as product that needs to be sold.

Again—similar to my thoughts on "dressing to the tens"—you are not a product to be bought and sold. You are a person with personality quirks, bad days, and worries. Your selling points are not just what you have overcome, but what you are continuing to learn from. That's okay, there's no need for a performance.

### Myth #4: Being professional is relying on small-talk to make (networking) connections.

My best advice for networking is to ask questions. Be curious. If you don't know something, say you don't know. Small talk can be a good tool for getting a foot into a conversation with someone, but after a while, begin thinking of ways to actually converse. Anyone can chatter—say everything without saying anything at all. Be intentional about what you say and what you ask. Don't be afraid to take your time; you will be more memorable that way. There's only so many times the question "What school did you go to?" can be interesting.

### Myth #5: Being professional is doing your best to blend in.

It's not and some people may try to pitch that this may not work for more "creative" people, but honestly it doesn't work for anybody. The more concerned you are about blending in, the less likely you are to take chances in the workplace and outside of it. This is not to say you always need to draw attention to yourself, but there is nothing wrong with taking the road less traveled. Chances are there will be several people who want to do the same.

### Myth #6: Being professional is simply being nice.

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## Debunking the 6 Myths of Professionalism

Endeavor instead to be kind. Anyone can crack a smile and ask "How are you?" Practice asking the same question to someone who looks like they are actually having a bad day and listen to them. Emotional intelligence may not be emphasized much while you are here, but it's not just for therapy. It is helpful for reading situations and it helps to show that you are cognizant of the sort people you work with.



Professionalism is not just about what you are with a suit on; I think it's mostly about what you are when the suit is off. However, reader, despite my utopian fantasy that most work environments would subscribe to this sort of professionalism, I must be realistic for a moment. Professionalism is subjective, it varies from place to place and person to person. There is no "correct" way to become a professional. But I trust that some of the aspects I outlined will hopefully take the pressure out of your mind about what that image may look like for you.

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