

Traits of a Professional

By

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The classical definition of professionalism encompasses self confidence, courage, knowledge and expertise – skills of the head and hand; however, virtues of integrity, trustworthiness, and altruism attributes of the heart are far more important traits of a professional.

It has been said that people decide ten things about us within ten seconds of our first encounter based on our appearance and behavior. Our subconscious mind acts far more quickly than our conscious mind. A professional that exudes integrity instills an aura of fairness, achievability and confidence. That person is able to draw me into the conversation not only by their words, but through their acts and appearance. A professional sends messages by their outward appearance fitness, posture, handshake, facial expressions, eye contact, and use of space and time. Professionals speak volumes without speaking a word.

A professional must be trusted at all times. They must know when to be silent and when to listen. Their mannerism, speech, standards of practice and leadership should emanate empathy and trustworthiness. We expect that a professional who is trustworthy has the best intention for their organization, subordinates and peers. We expect that they will correct ill-conceived behaviors and agendas. We expect them to tell us the truth at all times irrespective of the fact that we may not want to hear it. The professionals can be trusted to use their talents and ethically devise ways forward from adverse situations detrimental to their organizations. The professional does not engage in play to “win” others trust, but rather, they are trusted because of who they are.

Much has been said about an altruistic character; however, of all the traits, this is by far the most important. A professional is not a professional because of accolades and degrees hanging from the wall. The professional is so considered because of selflessness in caring for the welfare of others, without being pretentious or having ulterior motives. Although not a traditional virtue in many cultures; altruism is expressed daily in our military. We see this everyday as our men and women enlist to protect the freedoms of America. We hear about it when a Soldier sacrifices himself/herself for the survivability of a unit. Altruism is distinguished from duty and honor by the motivating factor of sacrificing self for others, not as a moral obligation toward an individual or government but providing *value* to anyone except self.

Lastly, attributes of the heart are oftentimes considered un-military like. We hear that Soldiers should be hard and tough, and they should not cry. On the contrary, a Soldier, who is a professional, oftentimes cries which shows humanity. Likewise, all professionals should have the

characteristic of humanity. This keeps the professional grounded in who they are. It enables the professional to see others as human beings and not subjects, pawns or unequals. This way the professional can assist in the vertical or horizontal transmittal of educational information among each other. Attributes of the heart invariably include sympathy, empathy, and love.

Although the definition and character traits of a professional can be vast, the core traits of an admired professional are attributes of the heart - integrity, trustworthiness, and altruism. With these traits, a professional is not only admired for their technical expertise and achievements, but they are respected by their peers, subordinates and superiors.