

Professionalism

Author: Larry Flaxman & the Norton eZine

Paranormal investigation is the current “IT” hobby, and, as a result, it seems that the paranormal community is rife with less-than-professional organizations (or, as we like to refer to them - “social clubs”) that have seemingly all come out of the woodwork. Few of these groups offer any substantive value to the paranormal community.

These pseudo-scientific groups generally lack the professionalism, training, equipment, and structure of legitimate research organizations - and as a result are the ones who truly give all legitimate paranormal investigators a black eye.

We have seen some of these groups perform extremely immoral and unethical activities. Examples of such reprehensible actions include slandering respected individuals in the paranormal community, fabricating evidence, lying to property owners to gain entrance to a location, taking “souvenirs” from their “investigations”, taking credit for other’s research and work, trespassing, and more.

We believe that professionalism is extremely important in our field of research - probably more so than in any other discipline due to the stereotypes and perceived reputation which have already been laid by those groups.

ARPAST strives for the highest levels of professionalism and integrity by maintaining the highest ethical and performance standards. We urge all members of the paranormal community to follow suit.

The following article addresses professionalism - what is it, and how to achieve it.

What is Professionalism?

from the Norton eZine

If you talk to a lot of different people, you’ll find that the word professionalism has many definitions—or, rather, interpretations. But whether your job is mowing lawns, driving a truck, managing a store, or running a large company, there are common on-the-job traits that define any working person as a true professional. In other words, the job doesn’t make you a professional, but your attitude does.

Even though everyone recognizes a true professional in action, there are many misconceptions about what constitutes professionalism. If you don’t take the right approach to this important issue, then rest assured: your customers, colleagues, and managers won’t see you as a professional, no matter what you think about yourself.

Let’s look at some popular interpretations of professionalism, and some traits that all true professionals exhibit, regardless of their occupation.

FIRST, WHAT IT ISN'T

What's the greatest misconception about professionalism? It's probably the notion that professionalism is all about money.

"There are lots of people who think 'I'm getting paid, so that makes me a professional.' But that just isn't the case," says Wendell Lamb, a certified public accountant who now runs a thriving mortgage company. "They think they're professionals because they're getting a paycheck. But they continue to act like real amateurs in the workplace."

Steve Gregg, a retired human resources director, agrees. "It takes a lot more than compensation to make someone a professional, no matter what kind of job they have. It doesn't matter if you make a million dollars a year and have a corner office. Professionalism is about a lot more than money." Gregg says there are many highly trained, highly paid workers who are considered anything but professional, for lots of different reasons.

Like money, many people believe that credentials—such as diplomas, degrees, and specialized certifications—contribute to professionalism. But while credentials can help, they don't mean a lot if a worker doesn't know how to act.

"Think about a furnace repairman who comes to your home," says Gregg. "He may have patches all over his truck, showing that he's certified and authorized in this and that, and he may really know furnaces better than anyone else. But if he treats you rudely or leaves a big mess in your house, you probably won't think of him as a professional. You probably won't want him to come back."

Lamb offers a similar example from his own experience. "We rely heavily on our computer systems," he says, "so we sent our IT manager to school to get all sorts of certifications...in networking, routers, security, you name it. He kept the computer systems running great, but everyone around here hated the guy because he was arrogant and rude. He worked well with technical stuff, but he had no idea how to interact with people." Lamb eventually had to let the person go, because his behavior was consistently unprofessional.

SO WHAT MAKES A PROFESSIONAL?

Money, training, and status aside, many long-time workers and managers will tell you that professionalism is a matter of attitude and behavior. It means not just knowing how to do your job, but demonstrating a willingness to learn, cooperating and getting along with others, showing respect, and living up to your commitments. It also means avoiding many kinds of behaviors that cause trouble in the workplace.

"It doesn't matter whether you're a ditch digger or the president of a university," says Gregg. "If you behave the way people expect a professional to behave, you'll be accepted and treated like one."

The benefits of acting professionally, he advises, can be substantial.

“Your managers will take you more seriously if you behave the way they expect you to on the job,” he says. “Otherwise, you’re less likely to be considered for promotions or important assignments. It’s the people who exhibit amateurish behavior who spend their career at the bottom of the totem pole.”

Of course, like other life skills, professionalism is something you learn; you don’t just “become” a professional overnight. The keys, according to Gregg, are practice and self-awareness.

“Pay attention to your own behavior at work,” he advises, “as well as the way others behave. Whom do you see as real professionals? How does your behavior differ from theirs?” Take notice of your colleagues who are most respected and whose work or opinions are most valued by others, then emulate those people.

Gregg also suggests that workers take a professionalism quiz, by answering questions such as the following:

* Do you truly have all the skills required to be successful at your job? If not, are you in the process of learning them? A key trait among professionals is knowing what to do and when to do it. Just as important, they know what not to do. Avoiding incorrect or inappropriate actions is crucial to your success.

* Do you communicate well with others? This means more than just conveying your own thoughts and ideas. It means being able to listen thoughtfully and respecting the thoughts and ideas of other people.

* Do your managers see you in the right light? “This is tough for anyone,” says Gregg, “but you need to look at yourself through your boss’ eyes.” Does your boss approve of your attire, the hours you keep, the way you conduct yourself in general? Does the boss seem comfortable coming to you with special projects or to discuss problems or ideas? If not, you may need to make some changes. “If you think your manager has a problem with your level of professionalism,” says Gregg, “by all means, talk it out. Ask for advice. Let your boss know you want to improve, and ask for mentoring if you think it’s needed.”

* What’s your integrity level? The workplace can be cut-throat, but if you are seen as conniving or a cheater, your image will suffer. And “never, ever tell a lie, especially to the boss,” says Lamb. “I don’t want my employees to lie to me, even if they think they’re telling me something I want to hear.”

* Do you practice the golden rule? “A true professional treats others with respect, and expects the same from them,” says Gregg. “This doesn’t mean you have to let people step on you, but it does mean showing concern for their feelings, respecting their opinions, and being honest with them. If you think someone else is mistreating you, deal with it and tell them you won’t tolerate disrespect.”

* Do you live up to your commitments? In any job, you agree to do certain tasks. Some tasks you must do routinely, without being asked, and management may ask you to take on other responsibilities. A real test of your professionalism comes in your ability to meet all these commitments while upholding the standards of quality and timeliness set by your employer. But it doesn't mean breaking your neck in the process. "We're all human," says Lamb. "Managers value workers who know when to ask for help, or who can admit when they're overloaded. If asking for help means that the work will get done, and that your commitments are being met, then that's a good thing. Good managers understand that the load has to be shared sometimes, and respect employees who are smart enough to ask for help."

About the author:

Larry Flaxman is the founder and President of **ARPAST** – the Arkansas Paranormal and Anomalous Studies Team, which is a member of the TAPS (The Atlantic Paranormal Society) family. He has been actively involved in paranormal research and investigation for over ten years, and melds his technical, scientific, and investigatory backgrounds together for no-nonsense, scientifically objective explanations regarding a variety of anomalous phenomena.

Larry has appeared in numerous newspaper, magazine, radio, and television interviews, and has authored several published articles regarding science and the paranormal. In addition to involvement with **ARPAST**, he serves as technical advisor to several paranormal investigation groups throughout the country.