

What 'Professionalism' Means at Ward and Smith

Written By **Stephanie C. Crosby** (scc@wardandsmith.com)

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Ed. Note: Stephanie Crosby, our Paralegal Supervisor for the Business Section, recently gave an in-house presentation about professionalism. She nailed it. We are proud of her, and asked her to share it on our site.

Our Ward and Smith mission statement is to 'exceed client expectations by providing exceptional service.'



That mission statement applies to all aspects of Ward and Smith, whether you are working with an internal client— an attorney or a finance staff member— or one of the firm's clients. Our core values are "Clients First, Quality Service, and Teamwork."

All of those things come together, in my mind, to create our unique brand of professionalism.

What Professionalism Means to Me

I'm heavily involved in the North Carolina Bar Association's Paralegal Division. I usually present to several paralegal programs during the year. One of the things I frequently discuss is professionalism. Over the years, I've tried to capture what professionalism means to me and others and would like to share my insights.

Professionalism Matters:

Professionalism is about appearance. Law firms are more formal than most places. Even now that we have relaxed our dress code to "business casual," we are still more formal than most. No one ever mistakes our team for people who are going to the beach or on a picnic. Dressing in a professional manner inspires trust, and professionals are trustworthy.

Professionalism is about behavior. We behave appropriately for the office, and as an employee representing our employer. This includes using formal English in oral and written communications; keeping a polite demeanor even during stressful times, and treating people with respect.

Professionalism is about demeanor. It means being reliable and trustworthy. Do you listen and ask questions? Are you detail-oriented? Do you genuinely care that something is done correctly and on time? Do you keep people informed of your progress on a project? Do you follow through and show appropriate initiative? Do you try to understand the big picture and how your role fits into it? Do you radiate calm and confidence in a crisis, able to handle not just the emergency itself, but also able to reassure teammates and

clients?

Professionalism is about helping clients achieve their goals . A professional has good, sound judgment. A professional thinks through complex situations and understands the big picture as well as the details. A professional anticipates problems, thinks through the situation, and provides clients with advice they can understand and put to use. A professional isn't satisfied with second-rate work and half-efforts; a professional strives for more.

Professionalism is having the respect of all of your colleagues . How you treat the mail room person/runner is just as important as how you treat the managing partner, as professionals don't predicate their communication based on status.

Professionalism is all about teamwork. Professionals know that everybody must work together to produce the best product for the client. Who gets the credit is unimportant to the professional.

Professionalism is going above and beyond. It's doing more than showing up for work. It's staying to get it done. It's also getting involved in trade organizations and participating in the life of your community.

I think that the relationships we build with our clients, and the professionalism that we demonstrate to our clients, are the keys to our success. I'll end with two quotes that I think capture what it is to be a professional at Ward and Smith:

"It's amazing what doors can open if you reach out to people with a smile, a friendly attitude and a desire to make a positive impact." – Richard Branson

"If you work just for money, you'll never make it, but if you love what you're doing and you always put the customer first, success will be yours." – Ray Kroc

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