

**DOCTORAL COLLOQUIUM KEYNOTE ADDRESS:
BEING A PROFESSIONAL**

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ABSTRACT

Various aspects of being a professional are discussed in this paper. These include personal qualities, lifetime professional development, professional responsibilities, job responsibilities, service, and a balanced life style.

1 INTRODUCTION

It is important as you begin your professional career to consider the different aspects of being a professional. One's reputation is usually established early in one's professional career and, thus, it is important to get started properly. In this paper, I discuss those aspects of being a professional that I believe are important. I hope that you will consider them as you begin and progress through your professional career.

I discuss six aspects of being a professional. In Section 2, I present the personal qualities that I believe a professional should possess. Then, in the following three sections I discuss the aspects that directly relate to being a professional: lifetime professional development, professional responsibilities, and job responsibilities. In the last two sections, I discuss providing service and having a balanced life style.

2 PERSONAL QUALITIES

I believe the most important attribute that a person should possess is integrity. Without integrity, one's word and work are meaningless. Honesty, morality, respectfulness, caring, and helpfulness are other important personal attributes that I believe a professional should have. Also, professionals should be service-oriented individuals.

3 LIFETIME PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Each professional should have a lifetime career plan that he or she updates regularly and *follows*. You are now in the process of finishing up a major degree. Hopefully, you have

decided what type of career you desire; if you have not, you should decide soon. You should set short, intermediate, and long-term goals for your chosen career. Next, you should establish measures that you can use to determine how well you are progressing towards achieving your goals.

Your career plan should also include ways to regularly invest in oneself for continuous professional development that tie into your career goals. I believe each professional should follow my five percent rule:

FIVE PERCENT RULE: Professionals should spend at least five percent of their income and their work time (the amount of time they work) on continuous professional development.

Five percent of one's time will give at least 100 hours a year to learn from professional books and journals and to attend short courses and conferences. Five percent of one's income provides for buying professional books and journals, paying professional societies dues, and covering expenses to attend short course and conferences. I sometimes hear a professional say why should I spend my own money to attend a conference or pay professional society dues. I point out to these individuals that they have already spent considerable time and money obtaining one or more degrees, and that they should continue to invest in themselves. I also point out to them that cars need regular maintenance to remain operational and, similarly, professionals need continuous education to keep their technical knowledge current.

You should obtain guidance and have mentors throughout your career. Also, you should network with other professionals in your field.

4 PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Professionals should support their professions. You should belong to at least one professional society. Belonging to a professional society supports that society and one usually

obtains a journal or professional magazine with membership (or with subscription) that can be read for continuous professional development. You should also consider supporting your professional society in some additional ways. This might be through refereeing papers or volunteering to work at conferences. For those people whose professional interests include discrete-event or combined discrete-continuous simulation, volunteering to help with the Winter Simulation Conference is one excellent way to support your profession.

Each professional needs to live up to the accepted code of conduct for his or her profession. When we perform a simulation or operations research study, we must do each step of the methodology properly. One does not skip the validation step or give unsubstantiated results. If a study or project is not performed correctly, it is the duty of a professional to report this to the appropriate parties.

Most professional societies have a code of ethics. Ethics are extremely important and *must* be followed. Some codes of ethics are long such as the code of ethics of American Statistical Association (see the web address <www.tcnj.edu/~ethcstat/>) and some are short such as the code of ethics of The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Inc. (IEEE) (see the web address <www.ieee.org/about/whatis/code.html>). I advise you to read some codes of ethics so that you are very familiar with them. Collections of codes of ethics can be found at the web addresses of <csep.iit.edu/codes/codes.html> and <onlineethics.org/codes/codes.html>. (Also see the 1997 Doctoral Colloquium Keynote Address by Wilson (1997) for a discussion on ethics.)

Professionals must accept individual responsibility. Professionals are responsible for the quality of work that they are involved with. If you are involved with work that is not being performed correctly or incorrect things are being said about this work (whether by an individual or an organization), you must notify the appropriate and affected parties. Taking individual responsibility may be difficult at times and may even require personal sacrifice, but individual responsibility is a part of being a professional.

Professionals are responsible for advancing and sharing knowledge and ideals of their profession.

Professionals should avoid conflicts of interest and if any conflict of interest does arise, this should be reported promptly to the appropriate parties.

Also, professionals do work only in areas of their competence.

5 JOB RESPONSIBILITIES

Every job has at least one job environment. Job environments are important and need to be considered when accepting a job because they can be supportive of your career or have a negative impact on it. If you find

yourself in a job environment that is having a negative impact on your career, you need to decide if you can take some (reasonable) action to cause that job environment to improve. If you cannot cause that environment to improve, then you need to change your job.

When a professional takes a position (job) with an organization, he or she needs to perform in that job to the best of his or her ability. The reputation you develop for yourself, as a professional, is very important. Your initial job performance plays an important part in developing your reputation. In your job you should be a team player, be helpful to others, and carry your share of the load. Be generous with credit to others for the work that they do.

A professional becomes a “pro” by (i) being very knowledgeable about his or her field, (ii) doing his or her work extremely well, and (iii) going the extra mile in everything he or she does related to his or her profession. You should strive to become known as a “pro.”

You may become a practicing professional in industry, a researcher at a research laboratory, a government employee, an entrepreneur, or a faculty member at some college or university. I am going to give some comments about being a faculty member in a research-oriented university since this is what I have been doing most of my professional life. In research-oriented universities, faculty members are expected to both teach and conduct research. The term *teach* refers to teaching courses and advising students. Every department within a university has a job environment, as does the university itself. It is important that you understand this. Prior to accepting a faculty position, you should make sure that these environments will be supportive of you. Often, junior faculty members receive little guidance. One should seek guidance and mentors.

To be successful, you will need to excel in many things. First, you should be a good advisor to all students—both undergraduates and graduates. The students are the primary reason that there is a faculty. Your advice affects the lives of the people you are advising. Advise them like you would like to be advised (or how you would like your children to be advised). Second, you need to be a good teacher in both undergraduate and graduate courses. To be a good classroom teacher takes hard work. Find out who the good teachers are in your department and ask them to sit in some of your lectures to give you advice. Also, sit in their classes to learn how they do it. Encourage the students in your courses to come to your office during your office hours and take a personal interest in them.

Third, you need to do research. One of your long-term goals should be that you want to be known as a scholar. Junior faculty should focus their research efforts on a specific topic. One of your short-term goals should be to become known as an expert in, and a research contributor to, a specific topic, e.g., transient analysis or multivariate output analysis. This is important when tenure and

promotion time occurs. You should strive to have a reasonable percentage of your papers published in the top journals. Most academic professionals have some papers in conference proceedings and in different quality journals. You need to be careful of the mix and the quality of the conferences. When you are evaluated, senior people are asked what you are known for and what is the quality of your work. It is not the total number of publications. Too often, a junior faculty member focuses on the number of publications. If one's publications are scattered across several topics, then one may not become known as an expert in, and a contributor to, a specific topic.

Most research universities expect you to write research proposals and obtain grants. This is not one of the most pleasurable duties, but it is required. Try to get a senior faculty member to assist you. This assistance can take different forms such as writing joint proposals or evaluating your draft proposals.

Lastly, you need to do some service. There is service at the department, college, and university level and service to your profession. I suggest that junior faculty spend most of their service time on refereeing papers. Refereeing of papers should be done carefully, thoroughly and without bias. Through the refereeing of papers, you should get to know the departmental and associate editors of the professional journals who are in the areas of your specialties. When tenure time comes, these are among the types of people that you want to use as references. I suggest that junior faculty members perform limited departmental service and no service at the college or university level.

Faculty life is enjoyable. You work hard, have considerable freedom, have the satisfaction of seeing people become educated, but do not count on becoming wealthy.

6 SERVICE

Everyone should do service work. I define service work as work that one is not paid for, is not part of one's job responsibilities, and is primarily for the benefit of others. You can do service work in your community, your profession, and often where your work. I believe every professional should do some service work at least in his or her community or for his or her profession.

7 BALANCED LIFE STYLE

Perhaps the biggest challenge that you will face as a professional is to have a balanced life style. The demands for your time will far exceed the time that you will have available. Discussed above were one's job, lifetime professional development, and service. One also needs to be physically fit, which requires working out or participating in physical activities. I believe you should

dedicate one day of each week to enhancing your relationships with your family and friends. A professional should also be active in at least one hobby, activity, or interest (outside of work). You need to determine how you are going to allocate your time among these activities. This requires establishing priorities and making trade-offs. You need to have good time management skills. I urge you to strive to have a balanced life style and not devote your life to only your job.

8 SUMMARY

I have presented various aspects of being a professional that I believe are important. If you incorporate these into your professional career, then you should have a much higher probability of being a first-rate professional, reaching your career goals, and having an enjoyable life.

One way to view life is as a train ride. The ride is what is important, what should be enjoyed, and where the time is spent. While reaching a station, i.e., obtaining some goal, position, or status, is important and satisfying, one is usually not content to remain there. GO AND ENJOY YOUR TRAIN RIDE.

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