The Thinking / Feeling / Doing Learning System

Did you know that within seconds of meeting someone for the first time, your appearance, body language and non-verbal communication will create a lasting first impression? Like it or not it's true, and your success in the work world is dependent upon your ability to manage other people’s perceptions of you. Your professional image is a critical element of your success. This learning module will help you to understand more about the elements of professional image, and learn how to positively influence the image you project to others.

**Thinking**

You’ll learn about four different things that influence a person’s professional image. You’ll also talk about the image you want to project.

**Feeling**

You’ll talk about how you feel about your professional image, and how prospective employers might feel about the image you currently are projecting.

**Doing**

You’ll identify opportunities to improve your professional image, and take actions on the ones that are most important.
Thinking

People are constantly observing your behavior and forming theories about your competence, character, and commitment, which are rapidly disseminated throughout the workplace.

It may seem somewhat unfair to judge an individual by appearance and behavior rather than exclusively on performance. But in most business environments, judgments are made about people’s competence, character, and commitment based purely on the professional image they project.

More specifically, there are four major elements that influence a person’s professional image:

1. **Attractiveness** – Dressing and grooming in a professional manner; Smiling and being relaxed
2. **Confidence** – Making good eye contact, using body language appropriately
3. **Credibility** – Maintaining consistency between words, body language and vocal tone
4. **Likeability** – Focusing on the needs of others and being expressive

Every professional should aspire to be viewed as attractive, confident, credible and likeable. But you may have other qualities you want to project. Place a check next to the adjective that you want people to use when they describe you in the workplace. Write in words that are important to you but don’t show up on the list. Talk about each one you marked.

- [ ] Competent
- [ ] Efficient
- [ ] Experienced
- [ ] Qualified
- [ ] Sharp
- [ ] Knowledgeable
- [ ] Polished
- [ ] Dedicated
- [ ] Other ______________________
- [ ] Other ______________________

Now, let’s take a closer look at professional attire and grooming. Generally speaking, there are two types of attire that are common to today’s workplace: formal business attire and casual business attire. The table on the following page summarizes how you should dress and groom yourself for both types of attire. Review the information and talk about whether or not you have the types of clothing and accessories listed there.
# Professional Attire & Grooming

## Formal Attire
When attending professional events such as career fairs or interviews, making a first impression is vital. For these events, wearing *formal business attire* is most appropriate.

### Men
**Dress** - Formal dress, for men, simply means a dark business suit, conservative dress shirt worn with a tie, and shined dress shoes.

**Accessories & Grooming** - Belts should always be worn and also match your suit and shoes. If wearing a watch, make sure it is conservative. Avoid wearing facial/body piercings. Carry a basic black or burgundy portfolio for resumes. Wear minimal cologne and have a neat and polished appearance. Make sure your breath is fresh.

### Women
**Dress** - For women, formal dress means a dark skirt or pants suit, conservative dress shirt, hosiery and pumps (closed toe with a heel).

**Accessories & Grooming** - If carrying a purse, keep it small and in a color that matches your attire. Avoid distracting jewelry and keep it simple. Stay away from flashy make-up and fingernail polish. Make sure to be well groomed and have your clothes freshly pressed. Carry a basic black or burgundy portfolio for resumes. Make sure your breath is fresh.

## Casual Attire
For less formal events, like employer information sessions, employees may choose to wear *casual business attire*. Business casual means neat and appropriate dress that is classic rather than trendy.

### Men
**Dress** - For men, business casual means suit pants or khaki type pants, typically a button-down collared or polo shirt (tie is optional and a jacket can also be appropriate), and traditional black or brown shoes.

**Accessories & Grooming** - Keep things simple and tasteful. Have hair controlled and wear minimal cologne. Avoid wearing facial/body piercings. Belts should always be worn and match your shoes. Carry a basic black or burgundy portfolio for resumes, etc. Make sure your breath is fresh.

### Women
**Dress** - Business casual for women means classic dress pants, a well-pressed dress shirt or blouse (traditional button-down, collared is often appropriate), and a coordinating dress shoe. Also acceptable is a skirt and blouse or dress.

**Accessories & Grooming** - Keep things simple and tasteful. No flashy jewelry, makeup, strong perfume, etc. Avoid wearing facial/body piercings. Carry a basic black or burgundy portfolio for resumes. Make sure your breath is fresh.
There are some other things that contribute to your professional image. In particular we will look at how you speak, how you use body language, and how well you connect with others.

**Be Strong Vocally**
There are three things you can do to make sure your voice sounds professional.

1. **Project** strongly. Don’t be a soft talker; make sure everyone can hear you.
2. Use appropriate **Pitch**. Don’t be monotone.
3. **Slow the Pace**. Most times people talk too fast. Slow it down so people can absorb what you have said.

**Be Strong Visually**
Here are four things you can do to make sure your body language looks professional.

1. **Make** **eye** **contact**. Look people in the eye when you are talking with them.
2. Gesture with your **hands**. Your hands are an extension of your voice. Don’t be afraid to gesture.
3. **Relax** your **posture**. Stand and sit straight, feet shoulder width apart, toes pointing forward.
4. Control your **legs**. Jiggling your foot or leg makes you look nervous.

**Make Small Talk**
When you meet people for the first time, you want them to feel engaged. Here are four things you can do to let them know you are interested.

1. **Prepare** 3 things to talk about and 4 generic questions.
2. Say hello first, smile, and offer your name and a handshake.
3. **Focus** on current events and get them talking.
   - What do you think of...
   - Have you heard...
   - What is your take on...
4. Stay focused on them and actively listen.
Feeling

Assessing how you feel about your professional image is the first step to improving it. Listed below are the four attributes to professional image that we discussed in the Thinking section of this learning guide. Rate yourself on a scale of 1 – 5 for each attribute. First, rate yourself according to how you feel about you, and then how you think a prospective employer might feel about you. Talk about the outcomes of your self-rating, giving yourself credit for the areas you feel good about and identifying bad feelings you want to change.

**Attractiveness**  
Dressing and grooming in a professional manner, smiling and being relaxed.

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<th>You</th>
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**Confidence**  
Making good eye contact, using body language appropriately.

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**Credibility**  
Maintaining consistency between words, body language and vocal tone.

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**Likeability**  
Focusing on the needs of others and being expressive.

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Your Attributes

Now, list specific details about your positive image attributes, and image attributes that need work. For example, a positive attribute might be that you naturally tend to smile a lot. An example of an attribute needing work might be that you tend to drum your fingers when you are nervous.

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<th>Positive Image Attributes</th>
<th>Image Attributes Needing Work</th>
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**Doing**

First off, know that your positive image attributes are strengths that will serve you well in your professional and personal life. Now, let’s focus on some of the attributes that need work. Select 2 or 3 of the items you wrote under the **Image Attributes Needing Work** heading on the preceding page. Then, create an action plan.

Use key words such as *professional image* to search the Internet for additional information on this module topic.

**Your Action Plan**

Create your own action plan using the following form.

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<tr>
<th>Action Steps</th>
<th>Start &amp; End Dates</th>
<th>Resources Needed</th>
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Make a commitment to your plan by agreeing to the pledge and signing below.

I pledge to provide my time and energy to complete our action plan.

Signature / Date:

_______________________________  ________________________________
Mentor  Mentee
After Your Activity is Completed

Come back to this section once you have completed your action plan. Focus on Thinking, Feeling & Doing again and talk about the following:

What did you learn? (Thinking)
- What are two or three things you know about professional image that you didn’t know before?
- What else do you want to learn about professional image?

How do you feel now that you completed this module and/or your activity? (Feeling)
- How do you feel about your professional image? What do you like and what do you want to continue to work on?
- How do you think prospective employers might feel about your professional image?

How did it go? (Doing)
- How did the action plans for your research work out? Were the results what you expected?
- If you could do it again, would you handle the research differently? Why?

We use your feedback to improve our learning modules! Please go to www.mentoredcitizen.com and click on “Contact” to write your comments.

Congratulations on completing the Creating a Professional Image learning module!