



## Take steps to enhance your professional image

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Thursday, September 25, 2008  
9/25/2008 3:37:14 AM

Are you looking for more credibility, upward mobility, better working relationships and greater bottom-line performance? Then perhaps it's time to take a closer look at your professional image.

Having a good professional image is valued in the working world. After all, you and your company do have competition. So it's important that your professional image sends a positive message about you — and your organization.

Your professional image is always on display, no matter where you go. It's a lifestyle — not something you "put on" when you go to work or meet a client for lunch. It includes your appearance, body language, verbal communication, customer relations and business etiquette.

Nationally, this is "Build a Better Image Week." Here are five easy, yet powerful, ways you can enhance your professional image.

### 1. Work on your table manners.

Remember what your mother taught you: Sit up straight, napkins go in the lap, no elbows on the table, and wait until everyone is served before starting to eat. Use the silverware from the outside first and work in. Take smaller bites of food so it's easier to take part in conversations in between bites.

### 2. Check your appearance.

Keep your wardrobe in style. Women can add a new ruffled blouse to last year's suit. Men can update with a couple of new dress shirts and ties. Keep jewelry to a minimum and stay on the conservative side — take off one piece before you walk out the door. Avoid attire that's too tight, too short or shows too much skin — midriff, lower back and cleavage. If in doubt, don't wear it. Dress like your boss, not your co-workers.

### 3. Learn to mingle.

Get over the fear of introducing yourself. The more you do it, the easier it becomes. Just extend your hand and say your name and your company's name. Be interested in others; don't talk about yourself. Keep food or beverage in your left hand. Your right hand will always be ready for shaking.

### 4. Be considerate of co-workers.

Don't eat someone else's food from the refrigerator. Use "please" and "thank-you" a lot — for every level of employee. These words aren't just reserved for your clients and customers — or your boss. Be understanding of someone else's busy schedule or tight deadline. Just because you don't have a busy day doesn't mean others have time to hear the full details of your weekend. Offer your help instead.

### 5. Give a great handshake.

Your handshake gives an impression of you. Make it a good one! Give a firm shake, have good eye contact and connect "web to web" to avoid a fingertip grip.

You can make a positive and lasting impression in any business or social setting. Yes, it requires continual learning and practice. But by doing so, you come out a winner. Better yet, your great professional image reflects on your company in a positive manner, too!