

PERSONAL PRESENTATION DURING PROFESSIONAL SITUATIONS

WHAT IS A PROFESSIONAL SITUATION?

A professional situation is a time when you are likely to interact with a person or people that may have an impact on your career development. Examples include the following:

- Employment Interviews
- Employer Delivered Presentations (Information Sessions)
- Job Fairs
- Networking Events and Meetings
- Informational Interviews
- Meetings with Carnegie Mellon Faculty and Staff
- Employer Facilitated Campus Events (Tech Sunday, Slice of Life, Career Kaleidoscope, Creative Careers, etc...)
- Internships
- Interviews for Scholarships/Fellowships
- Campus Employment

It is imperative that you exhibit your best professional behavior. Focus on areas including verbal and non-verbal communications as well as dress and personal hygiene.

EFFECTIVE VERBAL COMMUNICATIONS:

Even your most thoughtful answers to questions can lose their impact if they are not delivered in a professional manner. For example, most of us sprinkle our everyday speech with 'fillers' (such as 'like' and 'you know') that serve as transitions between thoughts and phrases. While sometimes helpful, these fillers can be very distracting to the listener if they are overused. This is particularly true in a professional situation, as it focuses attention on the fillers instead of what is being said. In addition, many of us tend to talk rapidly or to mumble, especially in stressful situations (such as job interviews). Both of these factors can make it difficult to understand your responses and will water down the strength of your presentation.

Improving your verbal communications during professional situations requires an awareness of the quality of your speech. Take the time to listen to yourself in daily conversation, and try to identify overuse of fillers, or of rushed and unclear speaking. Sometimes, it helps to tape record your everyday conversations or have others listen to you speak. Mock interviews are also a great way to polish your verbal communications. Contact your Career Consultant for other strategies.

IT'S NOT JUST WHAT YOU SAY...

Fillers and unclear speech aren't the only potential distracters in professional situations. For example, during a job interview much of a recruiter's perception of you as a candidate is based on non-verbal factors that define your 'presence', or the impression that you convey. In fact, non-verbal cues can represent 50% of the interview. In any professional situation, impressions of you can be influenced by something as simple as the way that you sit. Slouching, fidgeting, tapping your fingers, and swiveling in the chair are just a few of the many non-verbal distracters that can scuttle an otherwise strong and professional presence. Be aware of other potentially distracting behaviors related to eye contact, hand gesturing, etc.

With a little practice, you can improve your non-verbal 'presence'. Sitting with hands, arms, and legs unfolded, as well as maintaining good eye contact and smiling appropriately are strategies that will work well in just about any professional situation. Your Career Consultant can provide you with more tips and details.

YOU NEVER GET A SECOND CHANCE TO MAKE A FIRST IMPRESSION. . .

Dress and personal hygiene are important aspects of your professional image. A "dressed for success" appearance creates a positive impact. Consider investing in professional looking attire, in colors and designs that are appropriate and produce confidence. Your attire should be suitable to your industry. Contact your Career Consultant for advice on the norms you should follow. Whether your job is corporate and conservative or casual and creative, you should look professional and put together. Despite the variety of dress options, certain expectations remain universal:

- Clothes are clean, pressed, and free of odors
- Shirts are tucked in
- Shoes are polished and hosiery should match your outfit
- Shower daily and use deodorant
- Hair should be washed and styled neatly
- Breath kept fresh
- Cologne or perfume kept to a minimum
- Jewelry and make-up should be professional and tasteful and kept to a minimum
- Earrings are acceptable, but other visible body piercings should be removed (except if interviewing in certain creative fields)
- Nails kept clean and neatly trimmed

You don't need to spend a lot of money to look professional. Choose your attire carefully and pay attention to small details, and you will make a good first impression. If you do not have time to purchase a suit for an upcoming interview, contact your Career Consultant. The Career and Professional Development Center has a limited amount of professional attire that students may sign-out.