Professional behaviors in the workplace are of equal importance to technical skills; just ask any business owner. In academic settings, students learn the technical ‘hard’ skills required in the workplace but are they being taught everything necessary to be successful employees? College graduates are entering the workforce with the necessary technical hard skills but seriously lacking in professional soft skills. Hard skills include computer skills, the ability to run a welding machine or to perform a surgery; soft skills are behaviors and attitudes: teamwork, time-management, initiative and determination. “Professionalism in the workplace can increase morale, improve job satisfaction and…help you…retain customers” (McQuerrey, n.d.).

Students exhibiting sufficient hard skills but having a lack of soft skills and professionalism is referred to as the ‘skills gap’ and it seems to be growing. Consider how students behave in the classroom: texting, talking over other students, surfing the net, coming in late, leaving early, packing up their bags before the end of class, etc. These behaviors demonstrate a lack of soft skills in the classroom and can provide insight into the behaviors students take with them into the workplace.

The solution then lies in training both skill sets in the classroom as part of our regular curriculum. The logic in this is twofold; while we teach students solid professionalism skills; we also create better classroom environments, ideally with fewer behavioral issues that foster learning. The classroom can imitate the work place where the instructor is the boss and the students are coworkers whose behaviors and technical skills earn them a grade. Guests come to
the classroom role-playing various scenarios sometimes interviewing students or working side-by-side them. The consequence for a student’s inability to demonstrate professionalism and soft skills per the set rubric is a loss of points in the assignment. It is a perfect opportunity to teach students soft skills using real world scenarios for practice in the classroom.

Professional behaviors include punctuality, being prepared and attentive, speaking in turn, a positive attitude, taking initiative, and being clean and neat in appearance. Unprofessional behaviors include sleeping, being disruptive, not proofreading your homework, and inappropriate dress. Define expectations of appropriate behaviors and attitudes from the first day of class and hold students fully accountable to those expectations. Put this agreement in writing using professionalism pledges signed by both instructor and student. Remember that the first impression is the most important, so being clean and neat is part of being professional. It has been observed that, “…traits or behaviors most associated by the respondents with “unprofessionalism” included “appearance” (Moltz, 2009). A welder would wear different clothing than a CEO of a major company; but both the welder and CEO should demonstrate basic hygiene, respectful communication and a positive attitude.

Soft skills are defined as interpersonal skills and behavioral competencies. Our behaviors come from how we were socialized, learned to communicate, our attitudes and personal habits. This is basically emotional intelligence: self-awareness which is knowing your strengths and weaknesses; self-regulation which is practicing honesty and integrity; having empathy which is being aware and caring about the emotions of those around you; and social skills which means being active in relationships, listening and leadership skills. Emotional intelligence is considered the greatest factor in determining leadership capabilities over IQ.
Researching statistics on why people are losing jobs can further prove the value in teaching soft skills. The reasons usually involve poor ethics, no motivation, misuse of technology, not following instructions, harassment, punctuality, time-management issues, or not taking pride in their work. Employees stop to look at their phone and check Facebook or send a text several times an hour or more. Employers aren’t paying employees to text or Facebook; they expect productivity and good service. A positive experience will keep customers coming back over and over; a negative experience will mean losing future business or worse. In a nutshell, a professional employee would communicate effectively, behave respectfully, have a positive attitude, take pride in their work and themselves.

The professionalism project began with Ms. Ojeda seeking guidance on how to handle disruptive behaviors in her classroom. Students were very disrespectful to one another; they would come late to class, use inappropriate language, and fight verbally and physically. Time was wasted dealing with these behaviors and it was difficult keeping the class on track. Advisement came in with a presentation on stress management and professional behaviors. The group behaved slightly better for the remainder of the term.

Next term, there was a similar pattern of unprofessionalism. When asked why, one student stated that, “I am wearing a hard hat and this is how construction workers act.” It was clear there was a need for more focused training on soft skills; the presentations were not enough and more needed to be done. A graded hands-on technical project was created that incorporated soft skills into a simulated real-world scenario. The results were impressive; the students started to act professionally. A second exercise was added using a faculty member from another trade and the students learned quickly that these tasks were not easy. Many stumbled, but by the end of the class; an obvious shift could be seen in these students.
The project became less reactive and more proactive; things were planned out well in advance. There were two to three exercises each term and the timing was important. Have the first project by the third week; then another two to three weeks later and if possible, a third towards the end of the term. Each activity had different guests who role-played different scenarios for example a female CEO of a women-owned company and female head of HR. We ask pointed questions about a variety of subjects including working with women, teamwork, and PPE (protective equipment). Students are graded on a variety of soft skills and engagement with the visitor; each of the visiting guests scores independently. Conclude with a reflection on the results with the class as a whole and privately with individual team members giving constructive feedback.

Begin implementation by first defining professionalism for your specific industry; then start day one with clear expectations. Students and faculty need to commit to behave professionally during their time together. Faculty buy-in is essential to role-model professionalism, “…if you don’t show the professionalism you want your [students] to demonstrate, you’re sending a message that behaving in a professional manner…isn’t a priority” (Miksen, n.d.). Illustrating these behaviors reinforces that mastery of these skills is important. Then identify the customer and create scenarios based on real life experiences. Creating difficult situations will only help the students. Answer questions on the how and who of their interactions; patients in a hospital or family member at home. Also consider who is around the corner or sitting nearby.

Look to those in your community for help including advisors, achievement coaches, administrators, deans, associate deans, student workers, faculty, other schools and industry professionals. Determine who on the management team will back your endeavor; you will need
support. What makes this project so successful is the willingness of those outside the classroom to take time out of their day to connect with the students and give them good advice. It may surprise you how many of your colleagues are willing to participate.

The final piece to the professionalism exercises is to measure their success; experiment to find out what works. Every term use new approaches and different scenarios. Prepare a rubric with clear expectations where technical skills and soft skills are given equal weight. Exercises should get progressively more realistic and challenging over the term; start simple first term and put soon-to-be graduates into complex critical thinking and problem solving scenarios. Encourage persistence and determination, model strong work ethic and integrity, and mentor to provide a blueprint for students to follow.

The value in teaching professionalism in the classroom is creating employees that have solid hard skills to get the job done well and right, the soft skills to keep the customers coming back and people getting along and being productive. “Soft skills are the underlying principles that trademark a company for professionalism and excellent customer service. They provide differentiation between all the cookie-cutter look-alikes and play a vital role in customer loyalty. In today's working environment, where customers and employees are demanding more, instilling the use of soft skills in your team members is something you simply can't survive without” (Nicolaides, n.d.). Train the faculty to ensure solid professional behaviors; get buy-in from the management; and hold students accountable for their education. Empower them by giving them the tools to succeed. The indisputable benefit is better classroom behavior, a collaborative classroom environment and excellent citizens.
Bibliography


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Stout, U. (n.d.). Retrieved from Professionalism: http://www2.uwstout.edu/content/skills/group/professionalism/Professionalism.pdf


Create Your Own Professionalism Project Tool Kit

1) Define professionalism (Consider your subject area - health care vs. trades vs. IT)

_____________________________________________________________________________________
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2) Do you have a skills gap in your industry? (Mindtools)
   - Do you have trouble with repeat customers?
   - Is there high staff turnover?
   - Is there a lot of management and no leaders?

3) Who is your customer?

   **Internal Customers**
   1. 
   2. 
   3. 

   **External Customers**
   1. 
   2. 
   3.
4) Create real world scenarios
What can you think of that is a real experience in your industry?
5) Create Your Network of Help:

Who do you know in your department that you can use to help with your exercises?

_____________________________  ________________________________
_____________________________  ________________________________
_____________________________  ________________________________
_____________________________  ________________________________
_____________________________  ________________________________

Management buy-in – who do you need?

_____________________________  ________________________________
_____________________________  ________________________________

Faculty role-models/mentors:

_____________________________  ________________________________
_____________________________  ________________________________

Who from industry can you invite to participate in the activity?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Company</th>
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6) Steps to develop leaders among faculty & improve faculty professionalism:
   a.
   b.
   c.
   d.
   e.
7) Add, change or alter the language for your needs:

Professionalism Pledge

CNM holds its students, faculty and staff to the highest level of ethics, honesty, integrity and social responsibility. The following standards are established to ensure my professionalism during my time with CNM and throughout my professional career.

1. I understand that communicating and presenting myself in a professional manner and being courteous and respectful in my dealings with others including electronic, written, phone and in-person communications is critical in my career and my professional development.

2. My education is my responsibility. I will do my best in all classes, be open to new learning and work hard to ensure my own success. I am responsible for my own success both in school and in my career.

3. My safety is my responsibility. I will follow all established protocols.

4. I accept responsibility for my choices and understand that my mistakes may result in consequences. I will learn from my own mistakes and endeavor to not repeat them.

5. I understand that my actions reflect upon CNM, my fellow students, and my own character.

6. I agree to follow professionalism standards and ethical standards as set by my instructor, industry standards, the CNM student Code of Conduct and the rules of this classroom.

7. I will practice honesty and integrity throughout my entire time with CNM and throughout my career development.

8. I will strive for technical competence in my studies.

9. I will communicate and present myself in a professional manner and be courteous and respectful in all my interactions with other people including other students, faculty, administration, staff and coworkers.

10. By signing this document, I am agreeing to demonstrate the highest level of integrity and professionalism during my entire time at CNM and after graduation.

Signed (Student): ____________________________  Dated: __________

Signed (Instructor): ____________________________  Dated: __________
8) Role Playing Question Ideas

**Head of HR/CEO of Company**

How do you feel about working for a company that is primarily female (80%)?

How do you feel about having to answer to a boss that is younger than you?

How do you feel about having a female for a boss?

What would you do if someone walked on to the job site who obviously should not be there?

As a team, how do you start your day?

How would you handle an emergency situation on the worksite?

How important is punctuality?

How would you respond to a coworker that kept making the same mistake over and over?

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<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Question Ideas</th>
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9) Create your rubric

See attached rubric for reference

Tool Kit

Dept. of Labor online free professionalism lessons and activities
https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills/Professionalism.pdf

Observer – Beyond the Classroom: Developing Student’ Professional Social Skills

Applied Educational Systems
http://www.aeseducation.com/careercenter21/employability-skills-lesson-plans/

IT Professionalism Lesson Plan

Learning to Give – practice workplace professionalism activity ideas
http://www.learningtogive.org/units/be-change-workplace-readiness/professionalism-doing-what-works

On Course Workshop – Promoting Student Professionalism
http://oncourseworkshop.com/table-contents/promoting-student-professionalism/

Teaching and Assessing Professionalism: Healthcare

Mindtools
https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newCDV_34.htm
Directions to the Evaluator:

CNM holds its students, faculty and staff to the highest level of ethics, honesty, integrity and social responsibility.

Professional behavior assessment is a means of ensuring that team members contribute time and effort to group as well as adhere to the above mentioned standards. Contributions to the team include individual preparation for teamwork, reliable class attendance, and responsiveness to team needs outside of class, positive contributions to team discussions, valuing and encouraging input from fellow team members, etc. Please use the rating scales below to describe your evaluation of the CNM student today by circling the most appropriate box. There is space provided on the back for additional comments.

1. **Professional appearance:** the student is dressed appropriately and is neat in appearance with no hygiene issues.

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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not dressed appropriately; poor hygiene; smells of smoke, perfume, alcohol or body odor; wears jewelry; no</td>
<td>Clothes are dirty, ripped, stained, wrinkled, have holes in them; wears some jewelry; poor hygiene; not all</td>
<td>Dress is acceptable; needs to address personal hygiene but acceptable; appropriate PPE.</td>
<td>Dress and overall hygiene acceptable; isolated grooming or clothing issues; appropriate PPE.</td>
<td>Clean and neat. Student well groomed. Clothes neat, clean and pressed. Hair is clean and groomed. Perfect</td>
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</table>
2. **Engagement**: student demonstrates interest in professional/program through actions and interactions with the evaluator.

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<td></td>
<td>No questions asked, minimal participation when requested.</td>
<td>Asks few questions, minimal participation &amp; initiative.</td>
<td>Asks one or two questions; good participation if asked, but little initiative.</td>
<td>Asks questions, takes some initiative, has isolated issues with engagement, and loses interest in conversation once or more.</td>
<td>Asks questions, curious, takes initiative, interested in conversation, engaged, approachable, positive attitude.</td>
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Comments:

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4. **Careful Delivery of Service**: Student follows policies, procedures & protocols. Uses appropriate safeguards in the performance of duties.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No regard and/or awareness for the safety of self, team member, clients or staff. Disregard for policies, safety procedures, protocols.</td>
<td>Minimal regard and/or awareness for safety, policies, and procedures.</td>
<td>Inconsistent in use of safeguards and following policies and safety standards.</td>
<td>Needs minimal supervision to perform safely and adhere to policies and procedures.</td>
<td>Exercises due caution in the performance of duties &amp; follows policies, procedures &amp; protocols.</td>
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5. **Problem Solving**: the student uses knowledge to solve a previously unencountered situation.

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<tr>
<td>Unable to recognize problems.</td>
<td>Recognizes the problem, cannot solve it.</td>
<td>Recognizes there is a problem, inconsistent recognition of problem or ability to solve it.</td>
<td>Identifies the problem and takes some steps toward solving it but needs guidance.</td>
<td>Identifies problems and can independently devise a plan to solve the problem.</td>
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Comments:

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6. **Teamwork**: student demonstrates effective teamwork.
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<td></td>
<td>Student shows no effective teamwork;</td>
<td>Somewhere between 1 and 3.</td>
<td>Some teamwork demonstrated;</td>
<td>Somewhere between 3 and 5.</td>
<td>Clear communication with team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>not a unified effort; hostile work</td>
<td></td>
<td>lopsided participation; tries to</td>
<td></td>
<td>members; equal participation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>work environment.</td>
<td></td>
<td>listen but not effective; some</td>
<td></td>
<td>active listening; checked-in with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>miscommunication</td>
<td></td>
<td>each other.</td>
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Comments:
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_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

Additional Comments:

Please use the space below to write any comments and suggestions for further development of the student’s potential. Comments are highly encouraged and recommended.

Please include comments for any score of 0, 1, or 2.
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

Student Signature: ___________________________  Date: ________________
Evaluator Signature: ___________________________  Date: ________________
Title: ______________________________________