# Professionalism on the Job

Whether you are in a volunteer, part-time, work-study or summer position, you will want to make the best impression possible to ensure a good reference and to build your network for future employment. You are representing the organization and are required to meet professional standards. It can be difficult to know what your employer expects from you on a day-to-day basis. There's a certain code of behaviour that's expected by most employers, and your adherence is key to being a successful employee. Use the list of "Dos" and "Don'ts" below to help you manage yourself.

| Managing Relationships – relationships with supervisors, co-workers and clients | |
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| Do | Don't |
| ✔ Find a co-worker who is respected by your supervisor to be your mentor. Co-workers are a great sounding board for awkward questions or situations. | ✘ Take things personally as constructive feedback is an opportunity for learning. |
| ✔ Be clear on what your supervisor expects from you – check how he/she would like to be updated on the progress of your work. | ✘ Get wrapped up in conversations with co-workers that are unrelated to work, engage in negative talk or mimic bad work habits. |
| ✔ Remind friends who drop by while you are working that you are busy and recommend a time you can meet after work hours. | ✘ Offer your personal opinions to clients if you are not an expert – know your boundaries. |

| Communication – writing, verbal abilities, listening and non-verbal cues in body language | |
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| Do | Don't |
| ✔ Be tactful and diplomatic when dealing with situations where you are exposed to confidential and/or personal conversations. | ✘ Use offensive vocabularies and expressions in the way you communicate in writing or verbally. |
| ✔ Wait until a person is finished speaking before making your point. | ✘ Be afraid to contribute your ideas to your supervisor, co-workers and/or clients. |
| ✔ Know what message you are sending even when you are not speaking. | ✘ Interrupt others while they are speaking as it is considered impolite. |

| Time Management – planning, prioritizing, goal setting, scheduling, and managing your workload | |
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| Do | Don't |
| ✔ Arrive 5 minutes before your shift to get yourself settled. | ✘ Make assumptions about doing homework on the job as most employers prefer you focus on their work. |
| ✔ Notify your supervisor if you are unable to make a shift or will be late. For things you can predict, i.e., exams/tests give him/her plenty of notice. | ✘ Be unrealistic about the things you can accomplish in the amount of time available. |
| ✔ Set your own schedule if your supervisor has not set one for you and keep him/her informed on how you are doing. | ✘ Wait for your supervisor to tell you what to do after you have completed a project as he/she will value your ability to take initiative. |

| Work Property – personal and shared workspace | |
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| **Do** | **Don't** |
| ✓ Ask to borrow items especially if you are working in another person's workspace. | ✗ Photocopy or print class notes, print essays or readings. |
| ✓ Tidy your workspace and replace items (scissors, stapler, tape etc.) back to where you found them. | ✗ Download anything over the internet while using a work computer as viruses can cause a lot of damage especially to network settings. |
| ✓ Ask to be trained on how to use the computer, printer and photocopier. | ✗ Use Facebook and Twitter, watch YouTube videos or open personal email accounts during work hours. |

| Dress Code – standards that orgnizations develop to provide employees with guidance about what is appropriate to wear to work | |
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| **Do** | **Don't** |
| ✓ Check with your supervisor about the dress code before you begin your job. Even if there is no dress code in place, keep it clean and modest. | ✗ Wear T-shirts with controversial slogans, ripped or torn clothing (even it is the latest trends) and exposed underwear. |
| ✓ Practice good hygiene and be careful with strong scents – even soaps, deodorants and shampoos can be too potent for cramped workspaces. | ✗ Wear rubber-soled or athletic shoes to the office. This is sportswear, not business casual wear. |

| Eating on the Job | |
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| **Do** | **Don't** |
| ✓ Check what the eating policy is – often it is acceptable to have a beverage or snack at your workstation. | ✗ Eat messy food or those with a strong odour – as yummy as they might be, they are never appropriate in a public workspace. |

| Focusing on the Job | |
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| **Do** | **Don't** |
| ✓ Ask your supervisor for a break if you find yourself tired and overtaxed with multiple responsibilities. Sleeping on the job is inappropriate. | ✗ Wear earphones and listen to music unless specifically cleared by your supervisor – many will look at this practice as being inattentive to the task at hand. |

Navigating the workplace takes good interpersonal skills, judgment, intuition and experience. All workplaces differ with regards to work standards and each supervisor's personal style will vary. Do not presume what is acceptable in one situation will be okay for another. When you adhere to common rules and are knowledgeable about your organization's expectations, professionalism in the workplace can become second nature.

## Resources Available at the Academic Advising & Career Centre

A staff member is always available to assist you in finding the best resources to meet your specific needs.
Some books available in the Resource Centre include:

- How to Succeed in Your First Job
- The Workplace Survival Guide
- E-mail Etiquette

**For more information,** please visit the Academic Advising & Career Centre
AC213 • aacc@utsc.utoronto.ca • 416-287-7561 • www.utsc.utoronto.ca/aacc

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