PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES FOR BUSINESS SUCCESS

Today's business environment is changing faster than ever before. Technology is constantly expanding where and how we conduct business. Business must now be able to operate in a global environment. Thus, business professionals must be able to interact with people from many backgrounds, cultures, and parts of the world.

Most businesses recognize the need for their employees to develop and maintain appropriate work-related attitudes and skills. The annual personnel performance evaluations performed by many companies provide insight into the qualities these organizations deem critical for career success. Performance evaluations rate individuals on a number of jobrelated responsibilities and also on some general characteristics, as follows.

- Technical skills
- Ability to communicate in oral and written form
- Ability to get along with co-workers and customers
- Willingness to accept responsibility
- Ability to complete tasks on a timely basis
- Ability to follow instructions
- Ability to set and meet professional goals
- Professional appearance

This list illustrates that your technical skills alone will not enable you to achieve professional success. In addition to gaining accounting skills, you must develop the personal attributes that are required in a global marketplace. This section provides a brief discussion of the personal attributes you should develop in preparing to be a successful business professional.

Professional Image

Professional image is a combination of attitude and appearance. Research suggests that over 80% of success is a result of positive attitude. Develop a positive attitude by having a genuine enthusiasm about your work. Be assertive in completing the tasks of your job, but be careful not to appear overly dominating. Your assertiveness should appear as confidence in your ability to complete the task.

Your physical appearance will enhance your professional image. Proper clothing is the first step to improving your appearance. Dress in clothing that supports your professional image without drawing attention to it. Wear high-quality clothing that is conservative, clean, and neat.

Clothing alone, however, does not result in a professional appearance. Your posture when walking, standing, and sitting conveys a message about you. An upright posture projects an image of enthusiasm and confidence. You can help maintain a good posture through regular exercise, adequate sleep, and good nutrition.

Business activities will place you in a variety of professional and social situations. You can enhance your professional image by using proper manners. Avoid drinking and smoking, poor table manners, incorrect grammar, and profanity.

Communication Skills

As a successful business professional, you must be able to communicate your ideas to others. Communication is especially important in accounting. Accounting information is of little value unless it can be communicated to managers and affect the decision-making process.

Written communication provides the reader with an impression of your professional image. Many sources exist that provide checklists for planning and organizing written communication. Communication checklists provide suggestions such as the following.

- Outline the main points of the document.
- Use simple language and select words that convey precise meaning.
- Avoid outdated phrases, jargon, abbreviations, and other analogies that the reader may not understand.
- Consider the reader's point of view (empathy).
- Use short sentences.
- Cover only one major thought in a paragraph.
- Proofread the document carefully.

Oral communication is also a valuable tool in business. Oral communication takes many

forms, from informal conversations with an individual, to team meetings, to formal presentations. Different situations call for different styles of communication. An effective communicator is able to adapt the message to the situation.

As with written communication, checklists exist to assist you in preparing for oral communication. A checklist will contain suggestions including the following.

- Outline your message.
- Use words the audience understands. Avoid using acronyms and figurative language.
- Speak in active tone.
- Use direct eye contact.
- Vary the tone of your voice to provide emphasis.
- Open yourself to feedback and adapt your message to meet the audience's needs.
- Use gestures and visual aids effectively.

An often neglected area of communication is nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication includes eye contact, facial expressions, hand motions, posture, and other body-related motions. Research indicates that nonverbal communication delivers more of the message than verbal communication. For this reason, many business professionals practice their presentations in front of a mirror or videotape a practice session. This technique helps speakers evaluate whether their nonverbal communication is reinforcing their verbal message and is free of distractions.

The increasing cost of traveling is forcing business professionals to conduct more business over the phone. When communicating by phone, remember that you have lost the ability to communicate with nonverbal communication, Thus, verbal messages must be precise to convey messages that would otherwise be communicated nonverbally.

Time Management and Meeting Goals

Long-term success requires a balance of activities, including work, education, family, and recreation. Individuals who regularly work excessive overtime and neglect these other activities ultimately experience a high level of stress and eventual burnout. Thus, it is important to learn how to manage your time to provide ample time for a variety of activities.

Probably the major hurdle to managing your time is the human tendency to procrastinate. Most people put off doing unpleasant tasks. In most cases, however, the task is rarely as unpleasant as you imagine. It is also easy to procrastinate tasks when the deadline is far away. What student hasn't procrastinated writing a term paper until the last minute?

The good news is that you can train yourself to avoid procrastinating important tasks. Maintain a calendar to log deadlines, important dates, and other reminders. Stay on schedule for completing long-term projects by setting (and meeting) intermediate deadlines. Prepare a daily "to do" list of tasks to complete. As each task is completed, mark the task off the list to provide yourself with a sense of achievement.

Stick with a project until it is completed. Time is wasted when you skip among projects. Surround yourself in an atmosphere conducive to productive work, including a quality chair and desk, sufficient lighting, non-distractive music, and comfortable temperature. If you experience frequent interruptions, arrange for a "quiet hour" of uninterrupted time to encourage evaluation and planning.

Delegation is a key to time management. Delegating tasks to others is an effective way to make more of your time available for other tasks. Learn to say "no" to requests for your time if other commitments prohibit you from performing the task in a professional and timely manner.

Ethics

Our sense of right and wrong has been developed since childhood. Events and relationships continually modify our principles of right and wrong. The principles of right and wrong that guide an individual in making decisions are called **ethics**.

Business managers and accountants are constantly required to apply their ethics when making business decisions. A three-step checklist is presented in Chapter 1 to provide structure to your ethical decision-making process. Activities throughout the textbook provide students with the opportunity to practice making ethical decisions.

Most professional organizations and many businesses have codes of professional conduct. These organization realize that long-term success is enhanced when individuals make ethical decisions. Making ethical decisions is contagious—managers who make ethical

decisions are more likely to have employees who make ethical decisions.

Group Dynamics

Athletes and coaches will attest that a team's performance depends on more than the cumulative abilities of each player. Great teams arise from players who work toward a common goal and together excel above their individual abilities. This synergy can be developed in a business environment as well as on the athletic field.

Many business projects today are too complex to be managed by a single individual. As a result, today's business professional is more likely to work in groups to achieve a common business objective.

Team success in sports or business requires each member to actively work toward developing the team. You can help to develop a team by using the following guidelines.

- Accept the different lifestyles of group members.
- Develop a group attitude.
- Observe the written and unwritten rules of the group.
- Carry your own weight.
- Don't impose your values on others.
- Develop tolerance for different ideas and values.
- Learn how to provide constructive criticism.
- Provide positive reinforcement of members' achievements.
- Learn to delegate tasks to develop members' skills.
- Be considerate of team members.

For good interpersonal communication, show genuine interest in a team member's ideas by listening attentively and avoiding the temptation to interrupt. Provide supportive feedback, such as a smile or nod of the head to encourage the team member to continue speaking.

Most of all, avoid the "if you want a job done right, do it yourself" attitude. This approach fails to develop the skills and self-image of team members, thus sacrificing the long-term productivity of the organization.

Listening

Effective communication requires both a messenger and receiver. Too often we focus on the qualities of the messenger. The ability to listen is equally as important as the ability to prepare an oral or written message. Effective listening provides managers with important information about the operation of the business, the attitudes of employees, and the needs of the customers.

Listening is a skill that can be practiced and developed. Listening skills can be improved by using several techniques.

- Listen with empathy to appreciate the speaker's viewpoint.
- Become involved with the material by making mental or written notes.
- Attempt to anticipate the speaker's next point.
- Key on the speaker's nonverbal communication to understand the entire message.
- Provide the speaker with feedback (smile, nod of head) to encourage additional communication.
- Avoid distractions that give the speaker the impression you are not interested in the message.

Neatness

Accounting information is useful only if the user has confidence that the information is accurate and reliable. Neatly prepared accounting records and financial statements reinforce the user's perception of accuracy and reliability. Neatness in preparing accounting records reflects the professional image of the preparer. You can improve the neatness of your work in several ways.

- Acquire the necessary office equipment and supplies.
- Take the time to do the task right the first time.
- Review and edit your work.
- Take pride in your work.

Your professional image will also be affected by the neatness of your desk. The appearance of an individual's desk is often a sign of his or her attitudes and ability to organize and delegate.

Personal Development

After reading this section, you probably have identified several personal attributes which may need improvement. The first step toward improving your professional image is to recognize that learning is a life-long process. Personal attributes, like technical skills, can be learned and refined. You can learn to improve every attribute, from posture to listening to time management skills. Seek out professional assistance to assist you in improving these and other skills.