Launch your Career, Professionally

LEANNE RALSTIN: Hi. My name's Leanne Ralstin, and I'm glad you waited around for us. We got started a little bit late, but I think we're going to be OK now.

We're going to be talking about the making of a Carson Coug Professional. Whether you're a part of the College of Business or not, all the things we're going to be talking about tonight will apply to you. Anyone, whether you're in college, not in college-- it should apply to you.

Being a professional is so important-- if you want to get that job, you want to keep that job, you want to have a good impression with those that you work with. It's important. So let's get started.

So one of the things that you're all working on right now is your education. An education is very important to your future career. You know that you need to do all that you can to get good grades. You need to be involved. You need to gain experiences.

And this is great, because you know you're going to get a world-class education with WSU. That's all there is to it. But you need more. You just need more. You need more than just that education.

The secret to launching well into your career is professionalism. If you want to jump into that career, you need to think about, what is a professional? Does anyone have any ideas of what they think professionalism is?

There's a lot of ideas out there. Go ahead and post any ideas that you think, words that you think a professional embodies. A lot of people think, well, a professional is just someone who has the education, or who's being paid. And yeah, that doesn't include that.

But what else? What does it mean to you? It's a little different. Different people have different ideas.

One thing that people think about a lot of times is the dress. How is it that you dress? That's one thing that a student told me today-- is how you present yourself in your dress might be how a professional is embodied. But what do you think? I'm going to put dress here as one of the things.

What else? Demeanor? Demeanor is one of them that's come up. Let's see if I can spell that right. What else? Anything else? Demeanor is certainly important. And we'll be talking about both dress and demeanor.

SPEAKER 1: Presenting yourself well in all capacities, be it on the phone, via email, physical looks, or other ways you can do that.

LEANNE RALSTIN: Wow. Lots of different things there. So let's see. Speaking. Look, which might go along with dress. What were some of the other things in that comment?

SPEAKER 1: How you act on the phone. How you feel.

LEANNE RALSTIN: Emails. Email. Phone. So communication in general. OK. These are some great things that certainly apply to what makes you a professional.

And I just jumped over some things. So professionalism certainly means all of these things. And we'll talk about a lot of these things. So you have your education. Your education is very important.

But what else do you have? Skills? Skills certainly talk about what a professional is. Some skills that you might have might include some technology skills, some platform skills. Maybe things that you've accomplished or learned or developed. These are all great things.

But Albert Einstein once said that the only thing more dangerous than ignorance is arrogance. That's something to think about. There's always someone who knows more. Of course there is.

You will have a lot to learn. Even though you have a world-class education, you'll still have a lot to learn. So if you're willing to learn, that's a sign of a professional, as well. So keep that in mind as we go along here.

So what else can we talk about here? Oh, your virtual image. How do you appear to others online and in the media? Some of the things that you might think about might include what are the things that you're liking?

You like this really absurd, maybe a little bit inappropriate post on the internet. What does that say about you? Especially if the media that you're choosing-- the social media platform that you're choosing-- is something that's public. Yeah, it's fine on your own private Facebook if

you're keeping it very private.

But think about what you're liking and what you post. What does this say about you? Does it show you as a professional? What are you showing to the world? What are you commenting on?

It's very important, because potential employers-- they will look you up. They will. Especially on LinkedIn. If any of you have LinkedIn, make sure that what you're showing to the world on LinkedIn is very professional.

And at any time, if you have any questions or comments, feel free to just let me know.

So another thing that people do-- almost all of us have cell phones. How are you using your cell phone? We carry our cell phones around all over the place anymore. I don't know how I lived without my cell phone before.

It has my calendar in there. It has my email. It has my Facebook. It has my LinkedIn. As well as, oh, yeah, I can make phone calls, and I can do texts on there, as well.

But one thing you don't want to do is have your ringer on during work time. Turn off the ringer. Make it silent. There's nothing more annoying than a ringer going off in the middle of an appointment with someone, for instance. Or in the middle of a meeting.

Another thing. Don't check it during meetings. It is so rude to the person putting on the meeting. It shows disinterest. And one thing you don't want to do is show disinterest, especially if you're new to the field.

Another thing is, be judicious about your number that you give out. Do you want clients calling you on your cell phone? Sometimes it might be appropriate. Other times, not so much. So be careful about who you give out that phone number. It is your private phone number.

Now, if the company gives you a cell phone, and it's meant for business, that's a whole other story. Yeah, give it out. But be careful about your own personal. You don't want to be getting calls at 3:00 AM from a client, and it's something that you could have taken care of during the day.

So let's see. What else should we consider when we're being a professional? Etiquette. Yes. Those things that your mama taught you. Well, hopefully, she taught you, and she taught you

well.

What sort of things should we consider? Well, one of the things is basically use your manners. You know how we teach the little kids-- say please, say thank you? It works as an adult, as well. It's much nicer if you ask please if you're asking someone to do something for you, and to say thank you if someone does something for you.

That's just common etiquette, and you should use these things. It just makes you a much more pleasant person to be around. Demanding doesn't really get you that far, for the most part. It might a little bit, but not so much.

And another thing is, look and learn first. Don't assume that you're going to go into some company and be able to change the world or make big changes right at first. Look around you. Learn the company culture. Learn who's who and who's doing what.

You might have no idea that somebody does XYZ, and you thought it wasn't being done. So look and learn first so that you're not stepping on toes, that you learn how to work with the team well.

Another thing to think about-- dining etiquette. There's going to be times where you go out and eat with a client, or you go out and eat with your boss, or even your team members. How should you act?

What about alcohol and table manners? Should you drink alcohol when you're out to dinner with your coworkers, or out to dinner with the boss? What if the boss is drinking a lot? Do you follow suit? These are things to consider.

I recommend never more than one, assuming you're of age. Never more than one alcoholic drink. And even then, sip it slowly.

And use all your table manners. If you're not sure about table manners, there's etiquette dinners that you can attend. There's one that's coming up in February at the WSU Pullman campus. So if you're interested, talk to the ASCC program, and they can maybe get you a seat. If you just want to chat about it, you can always email me or call or something. We can talk about it.

Conversation and behavior. What are some things that we should think about here? Slang and profanity-- probably not appropriate in the professional setting. Even things like "sorta," "um,"

"uh." I'm guilty of using these filler words. But it shows you as someone that's not really articulating what it is they want to say, if you use them overly.

Don't use profanity at all. Just cut that out of your vocabulary in the workplace.

Appropriate workplace topics-- what are these? There's lots of things you can talk about. Yeah, you can talk about some personal things with your coworkers to a point. You're going to eventually find out who's married, who's not, who has kids, who doesn't-- that sort of thing.

But probably, you should avoid things like religion and politics in the workplace. Because everyone has their opinions about it, and not everyone's going to agree. And other controversial topics such as that. Try to keep it professional.

Ask questions of everyone, especially your superiors, your supervisors, your managers. Ask questions. Be interested in what it is that you're doing.

What's the difference between assertive, ambitious, and aggressive and annoying? You want to be on this side over here-- assertive and ambitious. Not so much aggressive and annoying. And sometimes that can be a fine line.

Make sure that you think about, yeah, you need to be a bit assertive in what you do. And in using your skills and training, you want to be ambitious. You want to grow with the company.

But you don't want to be someone that rubs people the wrong way. That's aggressive or just plain annoying. I'm sure you've all worked with or been around someone who is more on this side. Try not to be that person.

And like I said earlier, if you have any questions or comments, just pop up in the chat box.

Dating and after hours-- should you do it? Should you date a coworker? That is the big question. There might be someone who is pretty nice in your workplace. There might be someone you feel like is your other half in the workplace.

But be very, very cautious. This is not something you should take lightly. Think about if the relationship goes south. Is it going to be uncomfortable to work around that person?

And if it is, probably one of you is going to have to go. You don't want it to be you. But it might be you if you're new to the job, especially. If there's someone that works in a whole other department somewhere else, it might be just fine.

You also need to pay attention to what the rules are at your workplace. What do they say about that?

Socializing after hours. This goes along with should you drink alcohol during a dinner or a meal with your coworkers or with clients? What about just plain socializing? You don't want to be that person that everyone's having to take home afterwards, because they can't drive.

It's OK to socialize and to be friendly to a point. But again, be careful about what's appropriate and what isn't. Probably you don't want to do something like go to strip bars or get rolling drunk or something like that. But it's probably fine to maybe go to the theater as a group, something like that.

Another thing-- office gossip. That's a hard one. You know, there's always those juicy tales that go through the office. But honestly, it's fine to get to know your coworkers. But it's not fine to gossip about them.

It's good to know, hey, So-and-so's getting married next month. Great! Or So-and-so's going to have a baby. Things like that-- that's not really gossip.

But if you're saying, hey, did you hear what they did last week? You know, that thing that they did? Oh, man. That goes into the realm of gossip. You want to avoid those things as much as possible. When you have a group of people, you're not going to avoid all gossip. But try to avoid some of it.

What else can we talk about here? Dress-- and that's one of the things that came up on our brainstorming list-- is your dress. How do you look to others? And how should you dress? There's basic rules of thumb with this.

But something to think about-- what do people see when they look at you? Are they seeing this outfit? Or are they not really paying attention to the outfit, but more concerned about your work? That's probably where you want to be-- is more concerned about your work, rather than how you stand out necessarily.

And it all depends upon the culture of the company. You want to match the culture of the company. You want to be someone that basically fits in.

If your company's business conservative, it's very conservative-- let's say it's an accounting

firm. And it's old, and everyone dresses in suits. And you come in in a polo shirt and jeans, you're probably not going to fit in very well.

But at the same time, if it's a very casual environment, where everyone wears polos and jeans, and you come in in a three-piece suit, you might not feel comfortable. So fit in with the culture if at all possible.

And keep in mind that first impressions can be lasting impressions. What is it that they first see with you? Especially in an interview situation, how do you present yourself as a professional?

Those first impressions can last for quite awhile. So make sure-- especially in interview situations-- that you're someone who comes across as a professional that would fit right in with the company. So do your research.

Some main tips. You always want to be professionally dressed-- whatever professional means at that company-- because that's what we think of first. But you want to dress appropriate for the occasion and the culture.

So, ladies, what should you think about? In a situation where it's a pretty formal place or for an interview situation, probably dress slacks or a skirt. And the skirt should be at least knee-length.

A dressy blouse. You don't want anything that's low-cut or see-through. But you want it to be dressy.

Yeah, hosiery. Yeah, I know, I know. I'm not crazy about it either. But close-toe shoes-- this is considered the most conservative.

Depending on the culture of your company, minimal or understated jewelry. You don't want big bangles that distract or big earrings that dangle all over the place. You want them to be minimal, professional.

Conservative use of makeup and perfume. You're not getting ready for the runway. You're not bathing in perfume. You want to be fairly conservative. Glittery eyelashes-- probably not appropriate for most offices. Something like that. But probably you can still wear nice makeup. But perfume-- a lot of people are sensitive to it. So you want to be aware of how much you use it.

And gentlemen, it's basically the same for you, just menswear. Dress slacks. Probably not a skirt for guys. Dress shirt and tie. Dress shoes. Blazer or a suit jacket. Minimal jewelry and cologne. And that's it. If you have any questions about dress, just let me know.

Another thing. Be aware of body language. What are you saying? Are you showing yourself as aggressive? As bored? If you're just sitting there and slouching all the time, that shows someone who is bored or disinterested. Make sure that you are aware of your body language-- for instance, your posture and nervous habits.

One of my worst habits I find myself doing is-- you know those pens that are clicker pins? I find myself, if I grab ahold of one, I tend to click it and play with it too much. And pretty soon-- I have destroyed so many pens this way-- before I know it, the pen kind of explodes all over the place. And then I'm embarrassed, because I found that I was playing with the pen.

That's kind of a nervous habit for me. We all have our little things. For some people, it's tapping a foot. Maybe for others, it's playing with their hair. It could be any number of things. Maybe twiddling your thumbs.

Everyone has their little things. Just be aware of them. Try to minimize them.

OK. So what else can we talk about here? Let's talk about networking. How do you professionally network? How do you present yourself as a professional?

And most of you probably know what networking is. It's basically talking to people that you know. And perhaps they can help you get a job. And that's very true.

But what do you need to think about? Who knows you? Who do you know? And what do others know about you?

So networking-- yeah, you can maybe make a networking contact. But if they don't know anything about you, how can they be a good contact? So getting to know these people is very important.

What have you done for them? That's something to think about. What sort of things have you done for them? You're like, well, they're supposed to get me the job. They're my foot in the door. But what have you done to them that makes them pay attention to you?

Some of the things that you need to think about when it comes to networking include the

Golden Rule. Everyone knows the Golden Rule. Do unto others as you would have done to you. Basically, be nice to everybody.

But have you heard of the Platinum Rule? This is something that's fairly new out there that people are suggesting. Treat others as they'd like done to them. That's a paraphrase of it. And that's kind of like, huh, how does that work?

Well, some people, for instance, love to be the center of attention. They're very extroverted. They like it. And so if you praise someone in public, they really like it. But you praise someone in public who's a real introvert-- they may not like it at all.

So keep in mind who the person is. And certainly you should praise people when they do jobs well done. But think about how they'd like something done for them. And keep that in mind.

Nurture your contacts. Build a relationship with them. Don't just put them on your LinkedIn account, and then forget about them. Think about how you can build the relationship with them.

And always, always, always act with maturity and integrity. Don't say you're going to do something for someone and then not do it. Integrity is huge in the professional world.

And maturity, as well. You don't want to come across as a kid. Nobody wants the kid in the workplace. They want a grownup. They want an adult. So always act with maturity.

So what else? Let's talk about character. And that goes to this demeanor point that someone made there. What is character? What should you think about when you're a professional?

You should be accountable. You do something wrong. Say, hey, I did it wrong. I dropped the ball. I'm going to do better next time. Be accountable for what you do.

Be reliable. If you say you're going to do something, do it. Let the boss know, let the company know that if you say you're going to do something, you'll do it.

Responsible-- that goes along with being reliable. Be a planner so that you get things done. Be organized. That goes along with being a planner. A lot of these things overlap.

What else? Your image. What is your image? Cultivate your image as a professional.

Focus. Be focused. Don't be all over the place. Be focused and organized.

Your attitude means everything. What are some other things? Integrity. Supportive. This is part of being a good team player. It's so important in most jobs that you're a good team player. You need to be supportive and respectful of your team members.

Ethical. Ethics are huge in the business world. You know, the old joke years ago used to be that, oh, business and ethics-- ha ha, they don't go together. But they really do. Those businesses that last, that are well thought of, are ethical businesses. And those that work for them are ethical people.

Honesty. Grace. Things go wrong. If you're still graceful about it, you're still very-- you still say please, you still say thank you-- those are things that are important in the business world and show maturity. Again, mature.

What else? Competent. That goes back to the skills. If you say you know how to do something, then surely you should be competent enough to do it.

Be a lifelong learner. Goes back to where I was saying always be willing to learn. You don't know everything. Be willing to learn. Always be a lifelong learner.

Always continually improve. Look for those opportunities for professional development. Be skilled at what you do. Or strive for skill.

Be a time manager, going back to being organized. A good listener. A self-starter. And a team player. These are all things that big picture of professionalism. And professionalism is so much to different people.

But a lot of it boils down to character. What are you? Who are you? How do you show yourself? And how do you show yourself to others? How well do you work with others?

They say everything that is worth learning, you learned in kindergarten. And that goes back to learning to play with others well. That's a big one. That's basically what it boils down to here.

And I think we hit about everything there. How you communicate well with others. Your email and your online presence. Speaking. How do you talk to others? Your demeanor. Your dress. Your look.

And if you have any questions, any concerns, any additional thoughts, just let me know. Yes?

SPEAKER 1:   We have one question from the global campus, and it's how to judge the culture of the

company if you're just starting.

LEANNE RALSTIN: The question is how to judge the culture of a company when you're just starting. Well, that comes from doing your research, basically. Go online. Figure out what you can about the company online. Talk to people that work there.

A good place to find people who work there is to go on LinkedIn. You can look for alum-- WSU alum-- that are working at many different companies. And maybe you can get a contact and ask them. Glassdoor is another good place to find details such as that.

SPEAKER 1: And with the second question that was, more so for women, are wedding rings distracting, depending on the style of it?

LEANNE RALSTIN: Are wedding rings distracting for women, depending upon the style? That's the question. I've not really seen a distracting wedding ring. I think wedding rings are fine. That's up to the individual woman. Are you thinking of the ones that are very big, perhaps, or flashy?

I think not, for the most part. Most wedding rings are very beautiful rings. I think they would be just fine to wear to work, unless there's some reason your work discourages jewelry on your hands. There's some jobs that would. Then I wouldn't worry at all about it.

There might be another question. Yeah.

SPEAKER 2: When working for a casual company like Microsoft or Google, how would you suggest maintaining professionalism?

LEANNE RALSTIN: When working for a casual-cultured company such as Microsoft or Google, how do you maintain professionalism? I think a lot of it goes back to character, honestly. How are you? What's your demeanor? How do you speak with others? How do you put across that you're a team player or that you're reliable? That you have integrity?

Professionalism is more than just dress. You dress according to the culture of the company. But even in a casual setting, you still need to work with integrity. You still need to be mature and be professional in that sense.

So were there other questions? OK, so as you can see, it's a whole desktop, if you will, of different things that you need to think about that make you into a professional. It's not just your education. It's not just your skills, or just your dress, or just your virtual image.

It's the whole thing. It's how you network with others, how you treat others, your character. So keep this in mind as you're building up your professionalism. And thank you for attending. Thanks.