Professionalism: Making a Great Impression

LEANNE RALSTIN: Hello, everyone. As Andrea said, I'm Leane Ralstin. I'm a career consultant for the Carson College of Business in the Center for Student Success. What I do as a career consultant is basically help students develop professionally, help them find jobs, help them figure out a major, all of those sort of things. And my colleague is Ashley.

ASHLEY KUZNIA: Hi. I do the same things that Leanne does. So I'll keep that short and simple. My pronouns are she, her, hers. And I'll kick us off with our next slide on our professionalism today. First, we have a quick reminder about subtitles. So Andrea mentioned that if you want to show or hide the subtitles feature, you can do so by selecting the CC icon on your toolbar, typically located at the bottom of your screen. It should say live transcript, and that will allow you to toggle it on or off.

And then next, before we begin, we would like to acknowledge W2's America's first people. So Washington State University acknowledges that its locations statewide are on the homelands of Native peoples, who've lived in this region from time immemorial. Currently, there are 42 tribes, 35 of which are federally recognized that share traditional homelands and waterways in what is now Washington State. Some of these nations and Confederacy's that represent multiple tribes and bands. The University expresses its deepest respect for and gratitude towards these original and current caretakers of the region. As an academic community, we acknowledge our responsibility to establish and maintain relationships with these tribes and Native peoples in support of tribal sovereignty, and the inclusion of their voices in teaching, research, and programming.

All right. And to kick us off on our topic about professionalism, we first wanted to start by acknowledging different components with regards to career readiness. So we've highlighted some of the top competencies that employers want to see when they're looking out for recent graduates about how do they demonstrate being career ready. And as you'll see here, professionalism is one of those competencies listed.

LEANNE RALSTIN: So, what is professionalism to you? If you want to put your ideas in the chat, that would be great. Or just unmute for a second and tell us, in a word or two, what is professionalism to you? Give it a second.

Respect. Yeah. Absolutely. Being respectful, appropriate language to coworkers. These are all great things. The-- anyone else? Composing oneself to represent. Yes, absolutely. Honesty, empathy. These are all great words.

Love it. Being prepared. Yes. Integrity. Yes. Great participation here. Let's see how it's defined in NACE, which is the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

It's knowing work environments differ greatly, understand and demonstrate effective work habits, and act in the interest of the larger community and workplace. So it is all of these things that you mentioned, and even more. Tonight, we're going to focus on a few of the main things that are included in this. Next, we're going to focus on being authentic, developing a positive personal brand, showing up, supporting your team, communicate with respect, and navigate conflict effectively. All of these things encompass what it means to be a professional.

So, one of the first things we're going to talk about is being authentic. And that includes knowing who you are, and figuring out what makes you unique. And that can mean a lot of things there, but if you know, for instance, a great example that I heard recently, is a student told me that she knew she was extremely outgoing, but to the point where she could sometimes dominate a conversation. So she knew that one of her foibles was dominating.

So she knew that she needed to be tone that down a little bit in order to have good conversations with people. So you shouldn't change yourself, but know that maybe you can take over a conversation and be aware of that. And your strengths, Yes it's extremely a strength to be an outgoing exuberant personality. That's certainly a strength, and she should use that student.

And being a reserved person is fine as well. You can use that as well, because maybe you're a little more thoughtful before you speak, and people listen to that. But at the same time, in the overall picture, understand how you add value into an organization or a situation. And just be you. Don't try to change who you are, just be you and bring your strengths to the table.

So this is still me, I guess. Next slide. Develop a positive personal brand. OK, how does the world see you? Have you ever googled yourself? It's kind of eye opening sometimes when you Google yourself. Oh, Yes. Several of you are saying yes you've googled yourself.

It's kind of interesting, isn't it, what pops up. Sometimes it's surprising, and sometimes it's like, yes, that was perfect, especially if it was something you did well. And-- but sometimes, some things pop up and you're like I'm not so proud of that. So one thing that I recommend as you're developing into the professional that you are is to clean up your social media.

Make sure that there's nothing out there that you're not OK with. You don't want something to be out there that portrays you in a way that isn't you. And so, put up your firewalls in your Facebook account, or your Instagram, or your Twitter. Put up your firewalls. Look at it critically. If you get someone that knows you to critically look at your social media and give your ideas of maybe things you might need to clean up, but keep your private stuff private. That's basically what I'm saying.

You don't need to tell the world every little bit about you. Remember, anything out there on the internet can possibly be out there forever. So be aware of that, and don't give out your private stuff. What you want to do when you're developing this positive personal brand is to be able to show to the world what skills, abilities, values, that you bring to the table, to an employer in support of an organization.

But at the same time, be an authentic. Don't try to portray yourself as anything other than who you are. Going back to the first point that I was making. You don't want to pretend that you're something, and then your actions, and your skills, and things you bring to the table doesn't match up to that. Make sure that you're yourself. You don't want to work or be anywhere that you can't be yourself.

OK. I'm kind of behind here. So we're going to have our first set of breakout rooms here. And what I'd like you to do, you're going to be paired with one other person. If we have odd amount of people, you might be in a small group of three. But only for 2 minutes, and we want you to take turns practicing developing your elevator speech.

Now, an elevator speech is basically an introduction of yourself. And here's the scenario. You are representing your club, your organization, some group that you're a part of or hope to be a part of. And you're in a room networking with people. In this case, just one other person. How do you introduce yourself to that person?

So we're going to head off to the breakout rooms in just a second. And just take less than a minute introducing yourself, and then switch places. And we'll see you back in a few minutes. OK, so how did that go? Did you get to meet a person that maybe you've never met before in a networking situation? OK, now, let's try the second breakout room. And in this case, you're introducing yourself to a recruiter who's from your dream company. Let's say you want to work for Boeing. So maybe it's the CEO from Boeing that you happen to run across and you're introducing yourself. Maybe your dream companies somewhere else, and that's perfectly fine.

But-- just in this case, slightly different. Rather than a peer, it's a recruiter who might hire you for an internship or a career position. So this is fairly high stakes for you here. So are we ready to go into the second set of breakout rooms. You may or may not be with the same person you were with last time. And I'm going to, with that, we're going to move on to our next topic.

ASHLEY KUZNIA: All right, so this segues nicely in thinking about when you're in that kind of networking opportunity. Whether you're representing a product, or group, or yourself, you always want to show up in a way where you can demonstrate being present and prepared. So showing up can look different depending on the setting, as you just saw what those breakout activities.

So for example, when you think about showing up in the classroom, what are ways that you show your instructor that you're present and prepared? I'll keep an eye on the chart for examples. Posture, eye contact, doing homework. Great. So both in class and outside of class. Staying engaged, answering questions, having knowledge on the chapters. Right, so having done the homework beforehand. Taking notes. Yep.

All great examples. And so these are elements related to the setting of the classroom. Also, of how you might demonstrate participating actively. So this will look different when you're in a networking setting. There's going to be different topics that you want to acknowledge of how you've done your homework.

Your homework might be having research that professional or their organization beforehand so that you can show up being prepared, and also being present by actively engaging with relevant questions. You also want to demonstrate how you can listen actively. So you want to listen, to learn, and to understand rather than to respond. So it can be very natural to fall into a tendency of thinking of the next thing you want to say, especially when you're feeling on the spot or maybe you're feeling kind of pressured, that high stakes situation. But it's really important to slow down, to pause, to take a breath, and also focus on what the other person is saying so that way the conversation feels more meaningful to all parties involved.

The next component you want to think about is how you can be accountable. And this, again, it's going to differ on the setting. So in a classroom, being accountable maybe means turning your homework in on the deadline, or asking for extensions when reasonable to manage those expectations. Being accountable in a work setting might mean that you establish a clear understanding of timelines, of goals, and processes so that way you can show that you were going to follow through with what you said you would do, you will exceed expectations when you can, and you'll ask for help when it's needed.

And that brings us to the last point of establishing and respecting boundaries. So thinking about boundaries is a really helpful way to meet your expectations and meet other expectations. It helps you establish those things more comfortably, and it will also help you navigate challenges more compassionately, because you'll understand how you've been through those situations before. And you'll also probably be more effective at identifying conflict resolution or solution oriented approach.

So what are some examples of setting boundaries that have worked for you all in any setting? What's a way you maybe establish or communicated with those? Maybe it's around chores with family. Yeah, taking time away, establishing one's me time so I can prioritize mental health. Knowing how to say no when you can't commit to something, understanding your capacity. Time limits for internet use. Great example of personal boundaries too. Excellent.

So in the work settings, these are going to be equally important to think about. How can you manage what you need to be your best self when you engage at work, to be your best self when you want to show up for a networking opportunity, a club engagement, or even a classroom setting. Maybe it's a group project. And that also contributes to how you would support somebody on a team. So I'll pass this back to Leanne.

LEANNE RALSTIN: Yes. Supporting your team is so important in the professional world. As a student, you've probably been put on teams to do projects, and you learn how important it is to hold up your end of your part of the team. And here's a few tips for supporting your team.

Right up front, if you can figure out what are the goals of your team. It could be the goals of actually the project that you're working on, or it could be, hey, we're going to take this much time for mental health breaks, or we're meeting on these days. But ultimately, what's your team trying to accomplish. You should all agree on what the goals of the team are so everyone's on the same page basically.

And constructive feedback, this is a tough one. I know it is. It's hard to-- if you've worked on something and then you go back to the group, and they're all like, I don't know. Think of it as constructive feedback. Never insult the person. And always-- it's meant-- constructive feedback is meant to help everybody improve, help the project. View it as an opportunity for growth.

And when given constructive feedback, do not let-- don't use any personal insults. Look only at the big picture, the work, or the project, and how it could be improved. How can we make this even better. One of the things that I always recommend is this what I call the sandwich approach. Other people call it other things. But be specific about the area that could use the improvement. Be specific about it.
And say what you see that's good about it. Offer something good. And then offer solutions, that's the inside of the sandwich. And then use terms like, instead of. Just a second. Use and instead of but so that the feedback does not negate the praise given before. So the way you say things makes a difference.

Give them something good that you liked about it. Give them away that could be made even better. And then end it with another positive thing about it. And it goes over a lot better when you use constructive feedback in manners like that, because you're looking for the good as well as the parts that could be improved. And another-- imperative to be in a part of a good supportive team is to do your part. What was your part in this.

Make sure you do it. Make sure you come with the goods basically. And if others need help, don't be afraid of helping them. That's all part of being a team. That's how we get more done. We do more together than we do apart basically.

So, I can't stress enough. Supporting your team is definitely one of those professionalism things you want to make sure that you do. And with that, part of supporting your team is communicating, and I'll let Ashley talk about that.

ASHLEY KUZNIA: Yeah. So many of these points really stack well on top of each other. And some of you already mentioned some of these suggestions in the comment with regards to how do you show up present and prepared. What are some examples of this. You already gave examples of how you might communicate with respect to.

So we gave some general Do's and Don'ts, such as do consider your nonverbal body language. Now, we left this vague, because we want you to think about the fact that there are going to be different standards and norms across different cultures. So be mindful of that, of who you're communicating with and what might be normalized for them. Don't assume that your own understandings are going to come across that way for them. Try and get to know your audience to communicate in that way effectively.

Also, consider how you make space and take space. Leanne give a great example of this earlier with that student story who naturally tends towards maybe dominating conversation, knows that that's a tendency that comes out if they don't think about it mindfully. And so that person might need to lean into conversations with remembering to pause and make space more often. Whereas other folks who might

be on the other end of the spectrum who maybe are more quiet can think of ways in which they can contribute to a conversation to also take some space and vocalize or share their input as well.

Another component of respectful communication is thinking about how you can be both accessible and inclusive. So when you're giving examples, when you are using technology, as we are today, what are the different methods with which you can make yourself and your message more accessible. So we have captions available, for instance. Other things to think about are in the do not section. You also want to avoid unnecessarily complex language.

So if there's certain vocabulary words or syntax or jargon, acronyms are a good example of things you want to be careful about using, because not all people in your audience or your conversation partners, they might not understand what those things mean. And your communication is going to be more effective, and ultimately respectful, if you think of what's most accessible through that.

You also want to avoid language that could cause offense or harm. So be mindful of, could this potentially cause offense. If so, what's a more compassionate or respectful way to articulate it. Run that lens through before you communicate something to someone if you worry that could be at risk. And again, to Leanne's point earlier. Avoid attacking people's characters. There's usually always a more effective way to give feedback by focusing on the project, or the action, or the behavior, rather than attaching it to a person's character. That's usually much more effective in moving through a solution as well.

All right, so we're going to do another breakout room in thinking about the Do's and Don'ts of ways to communicate respectfully. And we want you to take turns describing a time when you gave or were given constructive feedback, and it can be a positive experience, it can be a negative experience. So free form. We want you to just think of what comes up. Share that, and then also reflect on what went well, what did not go well, what could have made it more professional, or what did make it professional if it was a positive experience.

So we'll copy that into the chat. And Andrea is going to get these breakout rooms ready for us. So as you spoke with one another in the breakout rooms, I want you to comment what are the examples you came up with about ways to communicate with respect. What did you learn when you were sharing stories from one another. Give me key takeaways.

Try not to take feedback personally, trying to take some distance sometimes can be helpful. As Hannah Montana says, everybody makes mistakes, everybody has those days. That's great. Yeah. Self-compassion is often a really effective tool for thinking about how you might have some compassion for other people too. We're all human, we all have flaws, we're never going to be perfect. And that's OK. That's good to embrace.

All right, keep emotions out of it. I would challenge that gently with understanding what emotions might be at play and how can you respond and respect both your emotions and the other person's to give context

to the situation. Let's see. We learned what not to say. Yep. Thinking that you're the higher person of a smarter person in the room is often not as effective.

Praising and acknowledging work before offering feedback can be helpful, such as with Leanne's suggested sandwich approach. So let's say-- let's see, written feedback can feel harsher due to how sterile technology is, so keep that in mind. I think that's great feedback.

Understand how that might read. Tone is really hard to communicate through text sometimes. So practicing different ways you can maybe ultimately execute that through written word, that takes some practice.

LEANNE RALSTIN: Absolutely.

ASHLEY KUZNIA: Speaking up and being honest. Yeah. Saying nothing sometimes isn't helpful at all. And so being willing to embrace courage and trying to articulate feedback and might take some practice. You might get it wrong, and that's OK. You can work on that. You can always apologize to, and let someone know, hey, I realized I had this impact. I wish I would have said it differently next time around. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to grow. That's often a way that you can demonstrate self-reflection, and self-growth as well.

Let's see, hard to think of an example where you received it in your profession. Some of you, this may be the case. And this will come more and more as you continue to put yourself out there in more situations where you're maybe discussing work with another person, or making decisions. Often, decision making brings these type of topics up. So great examples, everyone.

All right, and then as we come to a wrap on the different topics that we discussed today. We also wanted to acknowledge that conflict resolution can be one of the situations in which you might feel most challenged to remain professional. And so when we think about those core elements that you all mentioned at the beginning of what does professionalism mean to you, sometimes remembering respect and empathy can be harder when you're feeling challenged about a conflict that arises.

And so thinking of these steps can be helpful to keep those things present. First is, try and resolve the conflict with the individuals directly involved to the best of your ability. Again, embracing the courage to let someone know, hey, I'd like to share some feedback about how that made me feel, or what outcome happened because of x action.

That can often give the other person the opportunity to grow. They may not realize that there's an opportunity for growth and would want that. And so first starting there if at all possible. Sometimes there may be toxic situations at play, in which we recommend the next step is to think about your leadership team. Who is in a position of power that might be able to support you through offering additional mechanisms through pursuing conflict resolution.

They might know about strategies or different methods or approaches that could work for different team members, or for different scenarios when there's a lot of people involved or complexities with regards to systems and processes. And then lastly, if that also doesn't feel like a supportive or safe way to navigate conflict, this is why companies have resources like human resource departments and sometimes we're seeing an increase in things like a diversity, equity, and Inclusion Officer or team that you could consult as well. So these are important as you go on to pursue different opportunities and want to work through navigating conflict.

So lastly, we want you to reflect on everything we've discussed today. And would you introduce yourself any differently, thinking back to that initial slide. So Leanne, if you want to remind them of what those prompts were earlier.

LEANNE RALSTIN: Yeah. If we think back from the beginning, when you first introduced yourself, and now, after hearing these various tips, what would you have done differently when you introduced yourself in either scenario? The first one being in a networking situation, the second one being with a dream company. How-- would you do it any different or would you have introduced yourself the same?
I'll let you comment. Same. Fredricka—

AUDIENCE: I would mention my degree.

LEANNE RALSTIN: Yeah. Eugena said you'd do it differently. How would you do it different? Done some research on their company. Yeah, that's always a good idea. Several of you have said the same. A few of you said you'd do a few things differently.

So I'm guessing that a lot of you did a really good job on introducing yourselves. I know that sometimes I have to work up my confidence a little bit. Practice and introduce myself to maybe the first couple of people, and then I'm OK. Some people have to work up to it like that. But I tend to be a little bit more introverted.

So I might have added more details after I do it a little bit. That's my process. Others that are different than I might not have told them such a long story up front. They may build up to it. Being honest about your passion is always good. I see Fredricka said that, and that's a great tip. Just be honest about who you are. Be authentic. That's the main thing, I think, number one, be who you are. So we'll move on to giving you a few resources if you want to dive into this topic a little bit more.

ASHLEY KUZNIA: Yeah. I love that being authentic and thinking about what's relevant for that person to know about you as well. So the homework, that prep part and the research part can be really helpful. And I know for me, building up my courage to feel like I will have something meaningful to say is knowing what would they want to know about me, what can I articulate about myself that will be felt as valuable and that I also value about myself.

So we wanted to offer some resources for continued growth, because there's just the surface that we can skim on this topic of professionalism. And there's obviously so many different ways that you can develop these different skill sets further and refresh them. Because sometimes, we take some steps forward on it, and maybe we get a little rusty on the skills.

So we've got different topics outlined here, such as career development, emotional intelligence, social awareness, communication, and diversity, equity, and inclusion too, so that way your understanding your cultural competency and how you have impact on others when you engage in diverse spaces. So we'll get these resources out to you so you can actually click on the links and access them later.

And you will notice that we said nothing today about professional dress. Because really, professionalism is not about how you look, it's much more about your character, your work ethic, your integrity, all those things, again, that you mentioned at the beginning of the workshop. So we will open it up for questions if there's something we did not cover that you would like to hear more about. And also, we have some additional resources listed the bottom if you want to screenshot this slide for additional resources to consult.

LEANNE RALSTIN: So any questions? This is your chance.

ASHLEY KUZNIA: If you have a question, please feel free to leave it in the chat or you can also use the Raise Hand feature here on Zoom in the little reactions, and you can unmute and ask your question that way as well. It looks like we have a question in the chat. Aaron asks, is having an uncomfortability with making a good impression a common theme with people?

LEANNE RALSTIN: I would say yes, especially if you haven't done a lot of that, if you haven't done a lot of networking or getting out there. Being uncomfortable, that's OK. That's—

ASHLEY KUZNIA: Normal.

LEANNE RALSTIN: So normal, and I truly believe that practice will help you. Just-- I mean, initially, this sounds kind of corny. Practice in the mirror. Look at how you look in practice, and then practice with someone that you know pretty well, someone in your household, or a good friend. And just built yourself up a little bit. And the more you do it, the more comfortable you'll be with it, just like any skill. it's just really difficult at times, but practice makes perfect.

ASHLEY KUZNIA: All right, awesome. We have another question from Federica. She's curious if there's a right way to pitch yourself if you truly do not know where you want to work, but you do know what you want to do.

LEANNE RALSTIN: I'll let Ashley go after this one.

ASHLEY KUZNIA: Sure. These situations, when I'm in a career consulting appointment, I usually try to unpack a little bit more about the student to see-- there may be something that you do know about where you want to work, but you haven't figured out how to articulate it yet. So think about-- and this is a great opportunity to, as Leanne said, practice answering this question with other people that know you as well, because they may help you craft your answer as you're practicing it.

So think about things like environment in a company, or opportunities for growth. Maybe it's not specifically the product that a company sells, or their organizational setup. Maybe it's their environment. Maybe you really like that they are a sustainable company. Maybe it's their values. Think about their mission.

Maybe you do like that there's not only upward mobility, but lateral mobility. Maybe you're somebody who wants to explore a lot of different career options. These are types of things that you could articulate about a company. And then you can get more specific about what you might do in a role that you're pitching yourself for. So I would say explore that, maybe practice articulating out loud and focus on what feels right when you're doing it with a person who is not related to the company. That can sometimes help you clarify those things. Anything else you'd add to that, Leanne?

LEANNE RALSTIN: Oh, I think that's fabulous. Just kind of explore. Maybe it's not the particular company, like Ashley said, or the product or the service. But the atmosphere, but maybe it is their product. Maybe you love athletic wear so. Nike would be your dream company, for instance. What is it about it?

What would you say to a student who wants to major in accounting, but also education? Fabulous. It seems to me that you probably have a teacher's heart and you like numbers. There's so much you can do with both of those. Yeah, it seems like-- Yeah. You can work in accounting for a while and then maybe decide to go teach accounting. I think that's wonderful.

ASHLEY KUZNIA: My love, we just got a comment about someone saying, hey, reach out to me. We're working in global-- ASW Global. The VP is curious about working on opening more degree options. So this is a good example of being brave to vocalize a question you might have, and a networking opportunity can present itself. And there you might be able to collaborate and share resources and solutions. So, awesome. Love to see it.

We have a few more minutes left if there's any other questions about professionalism, or professional development more generally.

LEANNE RALSTIN: Feel free to email us, either myself or Ashley. Or of course, your Global Campus career services, as well as check out Handshake, if you haven't already. It's a great tool for career development, including a job board. You can find events on there, all kinds of things.

ASHLEY KUZNIA: I definitely echo that. Handshake is a great hub. You can meet with a career consultant on there if you want to schedule a formal appointment, in addition to those job search resources and events pages as well.

LEANNE RALSTIN: So I want to thank everyone for coming. And you've been a great audience, very much active and we appreciate that you made presentation very enjoyable for me at least. I'm going to let Ashley speak for herself, but thank you.

ASHLEY KUZNIA: Yes. Thank you to everyone. Participation was really engaging, made it exciting on the speaker end. And we hope that we've encouraged you and helped you all feel a little bit more confident and normalized in your feelings about making a great impression when you're wanting to represent yourself professionally.