

# 12 Steps to Enhancing Professionalism in the New Year



*Setting resolutions for the new year typically involves changing behaviors. Upgrading your professional image is not only a sound business practice, but a chance to create personal growth and build internal motivation. Here's a month-by-month look at how to implement a few professional techniques in the year ahead:*

■ **JANUARY: Take a course.** We all need improvement in one area or another and the first month of the year is a great time to sign up for spring classes. Knowledge is power and the more you know, the stronger your chances of being promoted.

■ **FEBRUARY: Listen more, talk less.** Listening effectively is an art and one that can be learned and developed over time. We confuse listening with being passive, but the most persuasive individuals hear what is being said by focusing on the conversation and staying alert and attentive.

■ **MARCH: Dress one notch up.** While casual dress is the trend and is here to stay, why not choose to dress one notch up? You don't have to wear a three-piece suit or bring out your grandmother's pearls to heighten your wardrobe. Simply, choose to put some polish into your wardrobe by changing your shirt style, for example. Select a button-down shirt instead of an oversized, baggy style for a change.

■ **APRIL: Ask more questions in meetings.** Most of us don't ask appropriate questions in meetings out of fear of appearing ignorant or uninformed. When you choose to question an issue, you appear interested, aware and concerned about your job, the organization and the conversation. And, chances are, others in the meeting have the same questions as you, but aren't asking either.

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■ **MAY: Meet your deadlines.** In the business world, we've become very adept at moving deadlines or simply ignoring them altogether. Change your operating style by resolving to meet your deadlines consistently this year and you'll gain the reputation of someone who can be counted upon.

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■ **JUNE: Resolve a conflict with a co-worker.** We all work with at least one person whom we don't particularly like or with whom we seem to have consistent disagreements. In the new year, plan to learn more about the individual that you have problems with to increase effective communication. One way to become part of the solution instead of being part of the problem is to focus on the strengths of others.

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■ **JULY: Add value by generating new ideas.** Tap into the corporate culture by reviewing your organization's mission, vision and values and decide to make a difference by generating thinking that creates new products, saves your company money or by helping a customer. It's so easy to fall into a routine of day-to-day "doing your job." Look above and beyond for solutions.

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■ **AUGUST: Use time wisely by creating a "power hour" for yourself.** Time management is one of the biggest obstacles in business. Needing ideas and suggestions on how to add more time to each day is a common theme. Carve out one hour daily where interruptions are kept to a minimum so that you can focus, think and become more productive. Learn to schedule a meeting with yourself on your calendar to help you develop the "power hour" habit.

■ **SEPTEMBER: Increase your vocabulary.** This sounds so simple, but even top executives resort to the same language over and over. Start by going through the dictionary or thesaurus and finding ten words that you commonly use. Next, replace those words with stronger words that build your basic vernacular.

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■ **OCTOBER: Build sincerity.** We all wear an invisible sign that says, "make me feel important." By practicing the simple technique of using someone's name in conversation, we acquire the reputation of a strong, caring professional. Another valuable tool for gaining recognition as a sincere colleague is making eye contact.

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■ **NOVEMBER: Polish your etiquette.** Your professional image speaks more loudly in the use of table manners than any other venue. It's so easy to resort to "less than perfect" etiquette in today's casual world. Paying attention to etiquette rules will help you gain future promotions.

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■ **DECEMBER: Practice random acts of kindness.** In today's fast, furious world we often forget about others' feelings and emotions. Make this year-end special by being kind, by using the proper tone of voice, showing concern for someone's health, or by simply being a friend.

**And, remember, the only person you can't take a vacation from is yourself. Practice these 12 techniques in the new year and you'll enjoy your own company more.**

*The 12 Steps have been excerpted from training material in two courses, *Increasing Personal Effectiveness®* and *Professional Presence in a Casual World®* by Employee Development Systems, Inc. The author, Suzanne Updegraff, is President of EDSI which is a 22-year-old, national training company teaching performance improvement and behavioral change for increasing organizational effectiveness. Ms. Updegraff can be reached at 800.282.3374.*



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