

Play to Win

Your Professional Attitude May Need an Adjustment

By [Sally J. Schmidt](#)

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A professional attitude is about more than hitting the expected marks — it's about how what you project makes your client feel.

Recently, I saw a [video](#) taken from a school corridor camera showing a tired teacher walking down the hall. As he was about to go into his classroom, he stopped in front of the door, took a breath and smiled. Then he turned the doorknob and entered.

I've been thinking about this in the context of a lawyer's busy and stressful life. Working in such a fast-paced environment, [lawyers often have to move from project to project](#) or problem to problem. In interactions with clients and other contacts, it's easy to let your frustrations and moods slip in. I can always tell when someone doesn't really want to take my phone call by a sigh or the greeting.

I'm not saying you can't be a real person; I know everyone has ups and downs, particularly in this day and age. What I'm suggesting is that you think about how you can put others at ease. Clients are hiring you to help them with an issue and want you to give them confidence.

Times to Refresh Your Professional Attitude

Emails: Before pressing send on a client email, take a moment to look at your introductory words. Did you greet the client? Can you follow up on something they may have shared with you, such as, "I hope your daughter is feeling better" or "Did you have a good trip to Hawaii?" It takes virtually no time to personalize your communication.

Virtual calls: Before you hit the button to join, look at yourself. Inhale and exhale to release stress. Try a smile. Close other apps and focus on the meeting and the people involved.

Meetings: Similar to the teacher I described above, shake off frustration and get ready to concentrate on the issues at hand. Prepare to greet participants and take a moment to build rapport. Put away your phone and anything else that might distract you. Don't bring items related to other projects or matters into the room.

Conferences or events: Sit outside the venue for a moment and steel yourself for the best possible experience. Remind yourself why you're there. Think about who you might see. Come up with a few conversation starters to get things going. Invoke a professional attitude the way that teacher put on a happy face. And prepare a few things you want to be sure to convey as you talk to people.

Phone calls: Before picking up the line, breathe out to eliminate stress that might be detected. Plan a friendly greeting. Take notes so you concentrate on the call. Don't look at your computer or other papers on your desk.

Showing Up

Woody Allen supposedly said 80% of life is just showing up. But I'd amend the quote to read showing up "with the right attitude." People are interested in being around others who are positive, comforting and make them feel good. It takes a little effort but it pays big dividends.