

What It Means To Be a Professional in Public Works: Do You Walk the Talk?

A Roundtable Discussion on Professionalism in Public Works

July 17, 2009 ~ Hartford, CT

“As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.”

---John F. Kennedy

This roundtable concentrated on what it means to be a professional in public works. It focused on the following two questions: What does it take to instill professionalism in your department? What can you do to change apathy and acceptance of the status quo? Six areas of critical importance to professionalism were discussed. The following is a resource developed from the presentation and ensuing discussion.

EXPECTATIONS:

Expectations are at the root of work life and professionalism. Properly communicating your expectations to your employees allows them to understand what their roles and responsibilities are and begins to provide them with the tools they need to be successful.

What do you expect from your personnel?

- respect
- honesty
- strong work ethic
- feedback on tasks
- team work
- high quality work

What do your personnel expect from you?

- respect
- fair treatment
- support
- listen to their ideas
- positive attitude
- open door / open mind
- advocate for the department
- job security

PROFESSIONALISM:

What is Professionalism?

Professionalism is exhibiting a courteous, conscientious, and generally businesslike manner in the workplace. Supervisors have a tremendous impact on this. If employees see their management behaving in a professional manner, they too will do so.

What does it mean to be a Professional in Public Works?

In Public Works, it means having a strong work ethic and doing the best you can. It means managing your time and being as productive as you can be in order to be a proper representative of the department and the town. Keeping up with industry standards is key. A positive attitude and polite manner are also important.

SIX AREAS OF CRITICAL IMPORTANCE

1. Mission/values

- Do you target your resources to maximize the impact of everyone's efforts in the accomplishment of your mission?
- Do you practice the department values you espouse in your everyday activities?
- Do you provide high quality services that are competitive with the private sector?

Developing a mission and values for your department helps to set the stage for everything you do. Be sure to involve your team in the creation and/or updating of them- make them a part of the plan. Think about why you are there and what you do for your town. Post your mission and values on the wall where the crew sees it regularly. Use it frequently in your meetings and communications with the crew to keep it fresh in their minds – remind them of why you are all there.

Some examples of wording to use:

- maintain road network for public safety
- reliable and responsive to public needs
- environmental stewardship
- support town government
- protect and maintain
- serve your community

What are some values:

- responsiveness
- safety (both of public and crew)
- quality
- trust
- teamwork

2. Integrity with Your public

- Do you consistently meet the highest level of ethics, professionalism and legal compliance in serving your customers and in working with each other?

You set the standard for what happens in the department and have an obligation to your staff and the community to provide your highest quality effort.

Within your department / working with each other:

- be consistent
- be a positive role model – work hard and others will follow
- reward positive behavior and deal with negative behavior.
- work safely and ensure that your crew does too
- support what you say with your actions (talk the talk & walk the walk)

Legal Compliance:

- know regulations and standards
- actively work to meet all requirements

3. Professional Competence

- Do you value your workforce and strive to ensure that they are well trained, respect your customers and fellow workers, and display selfless service, commitment, and professionalism?

How?

- Commit to training your employees
- Communicate needs and standards – people will perform to the level of standard set by their immediate supervisor. Be a good example.
- TLC: Talent / Listening / Coaching
 - Talent: Everyone has something to contribute
 - Listening: Hear them and react / act accordingly
 - Coaching: Help to develop their talents and learn new things
- Recognize service – thank your crew for a job well done – let them know you appreciate their efforts.

4. Pride in Performance

- Are you dedicated to providing high quality, needed and timely communication and responses for all services?
- Is your team's collaboration defined by shared values?
 - Team Accountability
 - Respect for diversity & the environment
 - Professionalism in all performance areas
 - Responsiveness to the public
 - Quality of work
 - Positive attitude
 - Commitment to the community

5. Honesty, Respect and Trust

- Do you honor commitments, acknowledge legitimate differences of opinions and accept decisions reached with integrity.
- Is your department's work an excellent reflection on the pride people feel for your municipality?

6. M.M.F.I. (*Make Me Feel Involved*)

- *What are you doing to implement the above?*
- *How can you get people on board?*
- *Who can you change?*
- *What can you do to change your department?*
- *What needs to happen first?*

Instill a sense of pride in the department: establish a team identity, recognize good work, and give your staff a sense of community within your department.

TIPS ON IMPROVING YOUR DEPARTMENT IMAGE:

- Keep Equipment Clean
- Be visible and keep common areas in good repair
- Ensure your work zones are easy to understand and follow safe practices (Don't mislead them with signage – take the time to cover signs when not working)
- Thank the community for their help – Good citizen / neighborhood awards
- Professional appearance – uniforms for crews
- Annual Report – let them know what you have accomplished each year
- Website development – provide them with information on policies/programs/Frequently Asked Questions / contact information
- Participate in parades – polish up the plow trucks and get them out there
- Plan a “Touch a Truck Day” or Public Works Open House
- Participate in APWA Public Works Week activities – let your town know how important Public Works is to them.

-