

BE THE BEST PROFESSIONAL YOU CAN BE

It seems as if everyone is calling themselves a professional, whether they're competent in their job or not. There are the titles of "Professional Marketing Ninja," "Professional Social Media Rockstar," and the (perhaps more common) titles of "Professional Sales Executive" and "Professional Entrepreneur." But are these considered 'real' professionals? For that matter, what does a real professional look like?

I believe professionalism is more than being dressed for success or saying the right things. To be truly professional is about being prepared to compete and win by having a plan along with a course of action. To be truly professional is about always learning more about what you do and ensuring you do it as well or better than your competition.

To determine whether you are prepared to be a professional, I suggest asking yourself the following questions:

1. Am I using my strengths as an individual and as a company? As you prepare to compete, you want to play from a position of strength. Knowing what your strengths are isn't arrogance, it's having confidence in what you can offer.
2. Am I truly aware of what my competition is doing? Decide what they are not doing (or not doing well) so you can do it (and do it better). Understand how you can differentiate from them and prepare your approach to go after them intentionally and aggressively, yet professionally.
3. Have I analyzed my current business trends? This is above and beyond running reports, but rather looking at trends by market segments, product categories, and time frames. The goal here is to understand where to put your focus for retention. Establish your immediate plan of action and decide what activities are going to have the greatest impact on business growth.
4. Do I understand my customer's business? Think about what they want and need from their standpoint, not what you want to sell them. Then be strategic in your approach and sales process. This is about knowing how you can positively impact their business.

So, prepare and plan to compete aggressively and be the best professional you can be.