

Professionalism – Setting the Stage

By: Chris Bachman | February 5, 2014

PHYSICAL OFFICE

If you have a business where clients are going to be stopping by, the way you care for your business is going to reflect greatly upon your degree of professionalism. Imagine for a moment that you spent some money and had your website cleaned up so it looks really, really good. As a result, you had The Big Client give you a call. Your nifty new virtual office phone system handled their call quickly and professionally and you got right back to them. Duly impressed, they are talking about doing a lot of business with you and now it is time for the face-to-face. They come to your office/store/business. What do they find?

Go ahead: imagine a new client is coming to your office in ten minutes....I want you to walk outside and imagine you are that client. What do you see? Step inside; what impression do you have? Ask to use the restroom. Would your want your mother to step in there? Sit in the waiting area for five minutes....how do you feel now?

Better yet, ask some friends to do the same thing and give you their impressions of what needs improvement. Below you will find some things to watch for.

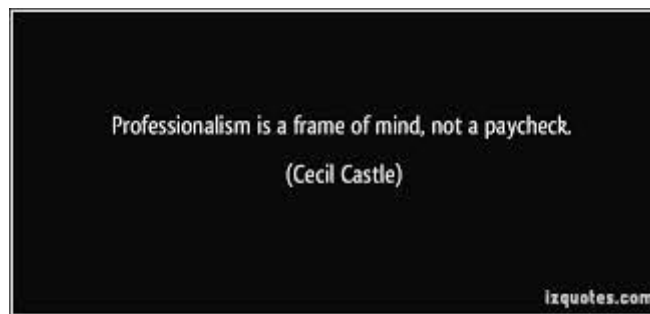
Visiting Your Place of Business

What Your (Potential) New Client *SHOULD* Find:

- Easy parking and a parking area free of garbage. Remember: first impressions...
- A professional and tasteful sign, if that is in order.
- Clean landscaping and healthy plants. You take pride in your appearance.
- Flooring that is clean and in good condition. This means no holes, stains or bulges.
- Furnishings that are both comfortable and tasteful. Tacky wall hangings are usually not the way to go.
- Waiting room:



- A selection of up-to-date magazines on a variety of topics. Something for kids if applicable.
- Plants – these indicate both a willingness and ability to nurture and take care of things (like your relationship with them).
- Music – Background music of a steady, smooth type with an even volume. No radio!
- Restrooms – spotless and smelling fresh.
- Lighting which is neither too bright nor glaring, nor too dim. Shadows are not acceptable. Also, think of using “green” lighting solutions such as LED bulbs wherever possible. This is attractive to more and more people. Using the incandescent bulbs that you stockpiled before they were banned is going to lose you points faster than you might think.
- Receptionist/Salesperson/Clerk – They are helpful, welcoming, dressed appropriately for the job, smiling...basically they are happy to see your client and it shows.



What Your (Potential) New Client *SHOULD NOT* Find:

- Trash the moment they get out of their car.
- An old sign or one showing weathering stains or which is broken.
- Dead or dying landscaping; signs of disrepair.
- Stained or otherwise clearly old carpet or tile.
- Furnishings from your mother’s basement.
- A \$15 painting on the wall...Black Velvet is an especially big no-no.



- Every issue of Ocean Biologist from the last two years...and nothing else.
- A radio station blaring through ceiling speakers and nowhere to hide.
- A bathroom that you wouldn't want your mother to see.
- Cheap lighting circa 1970.
- Bad attitudes/hygiene/customer service/personality characteristics that show you are not professional.

MOBILE OFFICE

Okay...So you don't have a physical place of business; you visit your clients or you work from your car/truck/UFO. The same principles apply. Your vehicle should be clean both inside and outside, and that means no smells either. Preferably it is a late model vehicle that is in keeping with your type of profession; i.e., a pickup truck for landscaping or snow removal, a van for housecleaning, an upscale four-door for real estate; you get the picture. Look the part.

If you don't have a proper vehicle, try to avoid physical meetings in the field or arrange to borrow someone's vehicle. Renting a car for a day is another good option. Line up as many appointments as you can for as long as you have the vehicle and then relax and enjoy. You will also be more likely to come across as confident and professional if you are pulling up out front in an appropriate rental rather than parking around the block and walking. Your clients will never suspect a thing (unless you make the mistake of not knowing how to open the gas cap...).



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