



Being yourself in a professional environment

In a professional environment, people are expected to behave in a certain way. For example:

- Meeting responsibilities and commitments.
- Treating people in a respectful manner.
- Being punctual.
- Accepting responsibility for one's actions.
- Showing initiative.
- Maintaining a professional demeanor.
- Acting with integrity and honesty.

However, being a professional also means being authentic by:

- Not pretending to be someone you're not.
- Not offering more than you can or something different than you feel comfortable with.
- Not pretending to know more (or less) than you know.
- Not hiding your age, culture, sexual orientation or circumstances.

The importance of authenticity

Allowing people to see the real you is essential to professional success. Here are just a few reasons why:

- Building relationships is part of doing business. That means letting people get to know you.

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- When you're hiding aspects of your life or personality, people may perceive you as secretive or aloof.
- Struggling to be someone you're not can be stressful and take a toll on your physical and mental health.

Maintaining boundaries

Being yourself at work doesn't mean acting the same way you do when you're with your family or out with friends. The secret is to maintain boundaries. For example, don't overshare. It's one thing to reveal that you play hockey, but maybe not appropriate to give detailed accounts of your antics after the game. Here are some additional areas in which you should consider maintaining boundaries in a professional environment:

- Proclaiming your support of a particular political party or leader.
- Arguing or expressing your views on contentious or controversial issues unrelated to work.
- Displaying religious symbols at your desk or discussing religion.
- Talking about your personal problems or boasting about your accomplishments.
- Telling inappropriate stories or jokes.
- Swearing or bad language.
- Gossiping. If you need to vent or feel the need to share certain information, talk to someone outside the workplace – a friend or family member.

Being yourself in a professional environment means balancing expressing your individuality and conforming to corporate expectations.

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Pressure to succeed

Unlike previous generations who expected to invest years in their careers before reaching their professional and financial goals, Millennials feel pressured to “make it” before the age of 30. According to a U.S. study, **67 percent of Millennials** feel “extreme” **pressure to succeed**, compared to **40 percent** of Gen-Xers and **23 percent** of Boomers. This has resulted in a new phenomenon: the quarter-life crisis. More and more Millennials in their mid-20 and early 30s are feeling lost, confused, and unsatisfied with their lives.

Raised to succeed

Millennials and their younger Gen Z counterparts have been raised to succeed. Parents, teachers and coaches told them anything was possible and went to great lengths to nurture their talents and self-esteem. But as they entered the workforce, a suddenly precarious job market meant many had difficulty even getting their foot on the first rung of the corporate ladder, and their expectations of immediate success faded. This left many Millennials feeling confused and lost – and under even more pressure to succeed.

The role of social media

Millennials not only feel pressure to succeed from their families, teachers and coaches—they feel it all around them thanks to mobile technology and social media.

While social media has tremendous benefits, it also allows people to idealize their lives by only posting and tweeting what they want people to see such as great jobs, exotic holidays, and seemingly perfect marriages and children. Social media can make people feel like they’re not doing as well as their contemporaries and places more pressure on them to succeed.

While it may not be possible to fully escape the sometimes unrealistic expectations our families and culture places on us all, we can find ways to deal with the often intense pressure to succeed.

Coping with pressure

Here are some ways to help deal with the pressure to succeed.

- **Strive for excellence not perfection.** Perfectionism involves setting impossibly high standards and viewing minor setbacks or failures as unacceptable.
- **Focus on what success means to you.** Society tells us that success is about money, prestige and possessions, but do you want from life? Are loving relationships and supportive friends important? Making a difference in the community? Having children? You may already be living a successful life.
- **Set SMART goals.** Make them **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant and **T**imely. For more information on setting SMART goals, contact us.

Finally, if you’re feeling overwhelmed, reach out for help. Contact us for information, resources and support on a wide variety of work and life issues, including financial planning, stress management, career development and personal relationships.

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