

# The P's in Professional

BY ROBERT GIGNAC

**H**ow many P's are there in the word professional? Just one? What is it that makes someone "professional"? I think that there are five keys to being professional (*regardless of profession*), and since they all begin with the letter 'P', I'll call them the "P's in Professional" – and they are: Purpose, Plan, Performance, People, and Perseverance.

**Purpose:** The primary key to being a professional is knowing why you are doing what you are doing. People who are 'professionals' typically did not stumble into their jobs by accident. To be professional, you must be doing what you love to do. When you aren't doing the work that you love (*you'll notice that I did not use the word 'like'*), it will show in both your attitude to your job, and your performance.

There are three key questions that you should be able to answer as a professional: 1) *Where have you been?* 2) *Why are you here?* 3) *Where are you going?* They seem deceptively easy.

First: Where have you been? Not just a resume rehash, but what training, education and blind dumb luck got you to where you are today? What have you accomplished/learned on the way? Second: Why are you here? What did the company that you are currently working for, or contracted to, hire you to accomplish? In one sentence. Please don't reiterate the corporate mission statement. Professionals can explain why they were hired in one sentence. If you can't, hopefully you'll be able to explain in one sentence why they don't need you any longer. Third: Where are you going? This is the big picture, your personal plan, your dreams and goals. You do have them written down, don't you?

**Plan:** Nothing great has ever been completed on a whim. Somebody involved had a plan. Actors have scripts, architects have blueprints. Plans involve thought, they also involve action. Deciding what it is you want to accomplish, then writing the plan down, so you have an achievable objective, is the first step. The act of writing the plan down creates insight, raising issues that will not be found if you are merely using a mental 'virtual' plan

instead of one solidly documented.

Keep in mind that good plans are not static. No writing and filing the plan away. Plan 1.0 is soon followed by Plan 1.1 leading to Plan 2.0. The biggest part of planning is the re-writing of the plan. Why? Things change. People change. The market changes. Your plan has to allow you to develop your skills and keep abreast of an ever-changing market. Don't count on others to do this planning for you. Personal plans are your responsibility. However, if you are a manager, you should have a plan in place for your staff. What's coming tomorrow? Stay tuned and be prepared to change your plan. As someone once said, "a curve is not the end of the road unless you don't make the curve."

**Performance:** Having a Purpose and a Plan will set you on your way to being a 'professional,' but those two steps will go for naught if you don't perform. Actions always speak louder than words, and your actions will reveal more about your professionalism than almost any other thing you do. The people you work for/with may never know your Purpose or Plan – but they will judge you by your performance.

Performing carries with it one additional aspect – attitude. Performing well under normal or trying circumstances, but carrying a bad attitude, will take away from your performance. I'm sure we all know someone who at best is an adequate performer, but their positive, upbeat attitude endears them to the people they work with. At the same time, we all know someone who has more skill/talent than their peers, and an attitude that makes working them a chore at best, and impossible at worst.

**People:** Who do you associate with? Do you surround yourself with positive, energetic people? If you persist in associating with people who are cynical and negative, you cannot help but become cynical and negative. Are you a member of professional associations within your industry? Networking is an essential commodity because somebody out there needs what you can offer them – your job. Find them.

The people you meet through the networking opportunities you have can be an invaluable source of information – for today,

and for the future. Think back to how many times you run into a former associate, only to find out that they are now working with someone you know, who also used to be somewhere else. Word spreads, both good and bad, and in the hiring process it's not uncommon for people to tap their personal 'networks' for information about you. These networks can act as a better information source for employers than your references. Treat people well because you never know when a curt discussion or flippant remark may come back to haunt you.

**Perseverance:** There will be those projects that turn out to be disasters. There will be contracts you take as a consultant that you wish you hadn't. A professional perseveres through these difficult times because tough times don't last. A professional also pays attention to the adage that "they who learn the most, earn the most." The tough situations are often the best teachers, because if everything goes as planned all of the time, we don't learn anything, and perhaps worse, we begin to think that we know everything. Thinking like that is not only a fallacy, it's dangerous.

Most of us have seen numerous applications of "Murphy's Laws." Not familiar with Murphy? Stick around, he's coming. Perhaps the phrase, "Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong – and at the worst possible time," will ring a bell? When this happens, your ability to persevere will be given a chance to shine.

## Are you professional?

Now that you have seen the five P's, are you a professional? Are the people you work with professional? My personal opinion is that no one 'P' is more important than any other, but if I had to pick just two, I'd lean toward 'People' and 'Purpose.' Your ability to deal with people will either keep you in business or force you into some other endeavour. Your ability to state and stay true to your purpose, will allow you to stay focused when times are tough. We are responsible for our own actions, but we help others when we encourage them to be professional as well – that is part of what being professional is all about. **SBCM**

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