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## **Professionalism and What It Means (CDE #16075)**

By Candice Solie, Minnesota Chapter

Public safety telecommunicator is a professional position. Does that mean all public safety telecommunicators are professionals? No, it does not. Professionalism is not defined by the position held. It is defined by who you are (inner character), what you do (behavior exhibited) and how others perceive you (image projected).

On his website, [www.ParentLeadership.com](http://www.ParentLeadership.com), James B. Stenson, an educational consultant, provides a common-sense definition of professionalism. In part, this definition reads,

“Professionalism isn’t just a set of appearances – neatness, good grooming, “shop talk” and the like. Nor is it just technical skill; many technically skilled people are not really professional. Professionalism is, rather, a set of internalized character strengths and values directed toward high-quality service to others through one’s work. In their daily work, whatever it may be, real professionals show these inner strengths and attitudes – sound judgment, know-how, business savvy, mature responsibility, problem-solving perseverance and ingenuity, along with what people call “class”.... They show self-respect in their work. They are conscious that their work reflects their inner character. Their work is, among other things, a statement of their personal commitment to excellence of performance. They don’t see work as just a job to be done or merely a source of “spending money;” they see work as service to others. They labor toward the betterment of other people, directly or indirectly; thus they’re both task-oriented and people-oriented... They tend to see problems as challenges and opportunities, not burdensome “hassles” to be avoided. They have a long-term habit of approaching problems confidently and optimistically. They don’t let indecision or fear of failure lead to paralysis. They do the best they can with what they have... They have a high level of personal responsibility and respect for others’ rights... They tend to have an intense dislike for gossip or otherwise uninformed criticism... Even off the job, professionals demonstrate admirable character... Their personalities show tasteful self-restraint combined with concern for others and love of life – in a word, ‘class.’”

As I read this description, I was struck by how closely it mirrored the behavior and attitudes of professional public safety telecommunicators.

A few years ago, Profile Evaluations, Inc. (PEI) compiled the personality and cognitive-ability test scores of hundreds of public safety telecommunicators to develop a profile of the personal characteristics of a successful telecommunicator. To be considered successful in this analysis, the telecommunicator had to display the total package: excellent technical skills and abilities, plus excellent interpersonal skills and abilities.

The analysis results demonstrate successful public safety telecommunicators have inherent traits and abilities that set them apart as professionals. These inherent traits and abilities correspond closely with what Mr. Stenson defines as the essence of professionalism, a set of internalized character strengths and values directed toward high-quality service to others through one’s work.

### **Here is a summary of PEI’s “Profile of a Successful Public Safety Telecommunicator.”**

Successful public safety telecommunicators have respect for themselves and their profession. They have a genuine interest in serving the needs of others, as well as good team-worker abilities. They demonstrate a positive attitude toward the public, the agencies the center serves and management within the center; they represent the organization to other agencies and citizens with a courteous, helpful and business-like attitude in all radio, telephone and personal contact. They retain emotional

control, honesty and productivity, even when under pressure from personal problems, requirements of supervisors or other sources.

They demonstrate professionalism in the performance of job tasks. They have the ability to handle both task-oriented duties and people-oriented duties, as well as an above-average ability to do more than one thing at a time and remain focused under stress. They have a strong sense of their limitations: they know they can't solve every problem, yet they do the best they can with what they have. They don't get involved personally with callers. They empathize, not sympathize, and they don't take it home. They have the conviction to give an opinion without timidity and the self-assurance to take risks when necessary.

They have a strong desire to learn new techniques to perfect their job skills. They have a high degree of self-discipline to organize and prioritize each day's job duties and a good ability to prioritize events and information effectively. They act decisively, using good judgment (common sense) and make decisions without analysis paralysis or tunnel vision. They have confidence in their abilities and the self-reliance to act independently when required.

They accept responsibility for their actions. They can accept criticism. They recognize and admit their faults and/or mistakes without blaming others. They do not engage in harmful gossip or other negative behavior and strive to discourage it in others. They have respect for private, confidential information and the willingness and ability to support and carry out directives.

They strive to project a professional image in their appearance and demeanor. They use an appropriate tone/manner of speech in all oral communications, realizing excessive cursing or other inappropriate language only serves to diminish their credibility in the eyes of others. Their personal grooming is good and their clothing is neat, clean and properly worn. They don't abuse sick leave and they strive to report to work on time, ready to take over their positions.

They are **professional** public safety telecommunicators.

Professionalism is demonstrated daily by telecommunicators in centers of all types and sizes. If you are new to the profession, seek out the real professionals in your center and follow their examples. They embody the essence of professionalism and what it means – in a word, “class.”

### **About the Author**

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### **Resources**

- Stenson, James B. “Professionalism and Workplace Savvy”  
<http://www.parentleadership.com/worksavvy.html>
- Profile Evaluations, Inc. (PEI), “Profile of a Successful Telecommunicator” – analysis of the Employee Evaluation Program (EEP) test scores of public safety telecommunicators.