

The Eleven Hallmarks of a Professional

Having spent the odd year or three in business, that's like saying I'm 29 still, and playing various roles from hands on Operations management to senior executive and board positions in Sales and Marketing I have had the opportunity and the privilege of meeting and working with so many great and inspiring colleagues and people who worked for other companies, including the opposition.

They weren't all senior execs. And many were not 'Professionally qualified' in the strictest sense of the words. Lots of them didn't complete High School let alone go to University.

But each of them in their own way displayed qualities that clearly set them apart from their contemporaries.

Examples:

- *The On line Marketer with almost no budget at their disposal* that, after every small or large campaign they ran, didn't restrict their vision to the numbers and KPI's, they went back and looked at the whole process. Whether the campaign was successful or not; they wanted to find out what it was that made it outstandingly successful or abysmally so and to see what they could change or improve to get that extra point or two. They weren't looking for a reason for a lack of performance but for ways to improve the process and get even better at doing the job. End result? A turnaround in campaign results and business, a significant promotion and eventually a directorship.
- *The renowned author and presenter* who fell foul of a less than professional accounting company and lost almost everything. He got back up on the horse immediately and not only did he find a way to pay all of the bills; he went on to sell millions of books world wide. He wasn't satisfied with accepting his 'fate', he took it on in the face of adversity and won.
- *The computer programmer* in a small but growing software business who when faced with the seemingly impossible task of reducing development and support costs asked himself the question, 'Is there another way I can use this code to produce a different outcome? Can I re-purpose this package and create another product for the same development cost?' You got it in one! He did and he, the package and the business went on to be real winners.
- *The cash strapped small business owners* who spent hour after hour learning about the Internet, web sites and marketing. Trying and falling short time and again until they eventually were able to create their own site and get some first page Search Engine listings and the traffic and revenue that goes with that. Success from a seemingly 'no-win' almost cashless situation.

- *A Warehouse Supervisor in a large multi national building products business who took the time to meticulously check every item being despatched to certain customers because ‘They had some problems last month.’ Not only did he do that, he made a list of the top 20 customers and personally telephoned them following delivery to check that all was well. In doing so he successfully retained key customers and helped the business attract new ones. That lady now manages three major warehouses for the same company. No big surprise!*
- *A Production manager in a cosmetics company who, when faced with numerous equipment breakdowns, led his team on shifts of 30 hours straight on three consecutive weeks catching up with lost production and then went on to put in place a Best Practice manufacturing operation. Did he lose any staff? No way, they stayed with him because he is a leader.*

And your point is?

Here’s the point. It doesn’t matter what job you have, what position you hold or what responsibilities go with the job. Everyday you’re presented with opportunities to set yourself apart from the also rans. This is ‘turn around’ country! You have it within you just as the people in the examples had it and still have within them to totally change a seemingly impossible situation into the ‘light on the hill’. In an apparent wilderness, a business landscape barren of all opportunity, you will always find a way forward guaranteed!

These opportunities will almost invariably present themselves as significant problems. The reality is that they are no more than ‘opportunity filled’ situations. Situations that present you with the opportunity to grow into and be recognised for the ‘Professional’ that you really are just as those people in the examples did. You can take on the challenges, whether it’s your own business or someone else’s, and you can make all the difference.

It doesn’t matter what your background is or what qualifications you have, you can set yourself apart and become a ‘Professional’ in every sense of the word.

Any distinguishing marks?

How many times have you been asked that question? Getting a new passport or licence or perhaps an insurance policy; in fact anytime that your physical appearance can act as a reference point this question crops up.

Manufacturers of Gold and Silver items still use that approach, they apply ‘Distinguishing marks’ to their work; ‘Hallmarks’ to describe the fineness and quality of the materials they use in creating their finer pieces. Often a ‘Hallmark’ is used to apply trade marks and there was a time when Hallmarks were used to indicate whether ‘Duty’ had been paid.

It struck me that 'Hallmark' is a particularly good word to use when talking about 'Professionals.' They have demonstrated fineness and quality and their own personal trademark of their work and the way that they approach it; you can most certainly say that they have paid their 'Duty' in arriving at this special place reserved for true Professionals. That same place is now waiting for you to step up and claim the title you can earn, 'Professional'.

Read on to learn just what the attributes are that identify a true 'Professional'

Hallmark #1. Continuous Improvement

Not satisfied with the 'status quo', the Professional continuously looks for new and better ways to service their clients and customers. They understand that in business, change is the only constant and that a method or technique used successfully today could be made obsolete or, worse, have a detrimental effect tomorrow. They monitor and make themselves aware of their operating environment, they constantly measure performance, they are fanatical about meaningful KPI's, and they review new and emerging technologies on a regular basis and assess them for use in their business.

They involve their people in those reviews and only when they have satisfied themselves that the proposed new method or technology is right for the business and the people have bought into the idea do they implement. And following that implementation they go back and measure the results.

The 'Professional' is constantly searching for ways to improve.

Hallmark #2. Process Oriented

Faced with an organisational problem, the Professional doesn't look to the business plan, they look to the process. They see a bigger picture that includes every small and subtle transaction that takes place in the operation whether that is a human interaction or machine/computer processing. They look at the relationships between and outcomes of, processes. They make use of the tools available to them to review process and gain input from those around them. They document processes and they stand prepared to change them when necessary but only with consultation and with thought given to the possible impact of those changes.

They create a process map and then organise a 'keeper' for that map. Easy changes can be identified and implemented quickly and more complex ones go through, you guessed it, a process!

Write up your processes, if you have the proper process mapping tools use them. If they are not affordable then start with a flow chart, get people from each area of the business to draw up a flow chart of their part of the operation ask them to highlight problem areas or conflict between one area and another. Now is that a great way to uncover 'Opportunities' or what?

Hallmark #3. Learning

Every Professional I ever met was a learner, I can honestly say that there has not been one that did not spend large amounts of time on Learning. Not necessarily formalised or structured learning; it may have been through attending seminars, involvement in discussion groups, researching the market place and competition. Every piece of experience added to their knowledge. Professionals always want to know more and look upon it as a real find when they learn something they could apply in their operations.

‘Ancora Imparo’, ‘I am still learning’, the words of Michelangelo at the age of 87 Years. Get the picture?

Never stop learning, never stop enquiring; it is a sure fire way of ensuring the continuance of change and improvement.

Hallmark #4. Ethics

Maintaining an Ethical stance in the face of so much pressure can be an extremely demanding task. There is an old adage, ‘If thou wouldst be an Honest Man thou shouldst not be in Business!’

It can be a serious conflict at times but those who stick by their guns and to their principles will always win in the end.

Each of the Professionals I have met had established a reputation for being ethical and fair with those around them to the extent of actually leaving a company when they felt that the practices started to conflict with their own standards.

Stick to your principles, do not be corrupted by those who have a ‘Smart’ but unethical way of achieving goals. You will be the most successful in the long run.

Hallmark #5. Tenacity

Faced with adverse conditions from either internal or external sources, the Professionals unswervingly stick to the task almost beyond all reasonable expectations until the barriers eventually give way. The author and presenter mentioned earlier knew the value of never giving up and went on to outstanding success.

Professionals have learnt either from their own experience or through observation that all too often people give up when success was within their grasp. This is not to say that they are stubborn or obstinate, far from it, they balance their tenacity with the other Hallmarks and are perfectly willing to change a plan provided it is well thought through.

Be tenacious, to be otherwise gives entirely the wrong message, research your subject well, weigh up the risks and the odds and then go for it like there was no tomorrow.

Hallmark #6. Leadership

Let's not confuse Leadership with management. The professional is a leader capable of providing motivation and inspiration to those around them to take on challenges and change and to derive great satisfaction in the process. The production manager typified this quality when he led his team for hours on end to fix the problem and find the opportunity. In fact he later re-named his supervisors 'production team leaders'. Professional leaders will typically not offer much by way of monetary reward, just plenty of hard work and the great sense of achievement that comes with success.

Great leaders take risks and risk is the partner of change, without it there would be no change. Leaders understand that and take their risks sprinkled with a fair measure of logic and common sense but they still take the risks.

Admiral William Halsey during the battle for the Pacific in World War 2 said 'A half baked plan executed with precision is far better than a perfect plan executed in a half baked way.'

Professional leaders plan but not to the extent that the time taken to create the plan means the opportunities are lost. Their focus is on effective implementation and speed.

Spend time on designing the 'execution' of your plan; involve your people, lead by example and then implement with speed, decisiveness and confidence.

Hallmark #7. Diligence

Great believers in 'Checking things out', Professionals will go to lengths to make sure that if changes are under consideration or a new deal is being put together, then every aspect will be scrutinised. Little if anything is left to chance, issues are prioritised and weighted for impact on the business and the decision is made in as full a knowledge of the facts as is possible and then they follow it through.

The exercise of diligence gives you credibility and a sound footing for growth and success. Be diligent, check it out, weigh it up, plan it and then move decisively.

Hallmark #8. Decisiveness

Decisiveness is the Hallmark that underpins all of the others. No shifting from one foot to the other, no 'partial' decisions. Plain, straight out decisions. The Professional researches and plans, gets the team onside and acts decisively. When they make a decision it is based on knowledge and facts with a fair sprinkling of intuition!

When you are decisive and that your decisions are based on research and knowledge, you will inspire confidence in those around you.

Hallmark #9. A sense of 'Re-Purpose'

The computer programmer in our examples who worked for a software company and had to find ways to reduce development and support costs if the company were to survive. He did just that but not by an immediately obvious method. Instead of looking to staffing and associated office and equipment costs, he thought about what else he could with what he had, not about less than what he had. He came up with an idea that 'Re-Purposed' an existing asset; in his case an existing piece of software. It had already been developed and needed only the slightest of changes to make it perform a different, though related, function. The great news was that this function was quite unique, there was nothing else like it anywhere and yet the application was an extremely attractive one from the users' perspective. The programming staff was familiar with the code so support costs were optimised. Sales staff, (the owners), were able to go out and tell a terrific story to existing and prospective customers, sales took off, costs were minimal and the company is now a success.

Don't accept that because a method or technology has been designed to do one thing that it can't do another. Think it through, get a brainstorming session happening, you will be amazed at the results.

Hallmark #10. Consistency

Don't underestimate the value of consistency. Professionals can be relied upon to be consistent in the way they operate; those are the keywords, 'relied upon'. You will probably have noticed people in your own operation who have that quality. They always perform to a standard; importantly it is one that they have set for themselves. If they haven't reached the level of 'Professional' yet, they are on their way. Consistently high standards of work, consistently providing input and feedback, consistently delivering on time. These are the qualities of a Professional or a Professional in the making.

When you strive for consistency, you will become a person of influence by default. Consistency will identify you to others as a person to be respected and whose views will always be taken into consideration.

Hallmark #11. Commitment

No half measures for the Professional, no shifting from one foot to the other. A professional commits and they do so publicly. They are prepared to 'put their money where their mouth is' and take a position. They typically not only verbally express that commitment, they put it in writing. They are able to do this because they have done a thorough job, they have become confident in their own processes. If having researched and planned, they are not prepared to commit then they go back over the plan, their intuition is telling them that something is not right and they need to fix it. Intuition and gut feel is based on experience and experience is an unwritten but extremely valuable aspect of the Professional.

It is all about creating credibility and it is all about leadership. In our examples, everyone demonstrated commitment, in some cases because it was called for and in one or two

others because there was no option. They did it because the alternative was not acceptable to them. Whatever the reasons, being prepared to make a statement of commitment quite definitely sets the Professional apart and deservedly so.

By committing you will set an example to all around you and you will drastically improve your chances of success; just watch in awe as new Leaders start to emerge and grow before your eyes.

Which is the key Hallmark?

If I were asked which of the above was the most important I would have to say all of them!

The journey to true Professionalism can start from anyone of these Hallmarks. Consider each of them and look for the subtle relationships between them. See how one can lead naturally to another? If you start with 'Re-Purpose' you are a short step away from 'Leadership', if with 'Learning' you can quickly move to 'Continuous Improvement'.

There is no sequence of acquiring Hallmarks, just a logical progression from whichever starting point to whichever next point. Go with it and Grow with it!

You may well see yourself and others described in these words and if you do, I hope that you will use them to move onto the next stage of your own journey and that you share this experience with others.

I wish you success!

Article written by:

Gordon Cramer
Actif Communications
37 Forestwood Drive
Buderim
Queensland 4556

Telephone +617 5452 7888

Mobile +61 417 684 377

www.actifcommunications.com