

5 Steps to Professional Success



caregivers

PREVENT  PROTECT  PROMOTE
abuse/neglect *clients* *dignity*

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

Developed by:

UW Oshkosh

Center for Community Development, Engagement and Training (CCDET)

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Learning Points

Let's review the main learning points:

- Learn to project a professional image
- Understand the rules and guidelines of your job
- Know how to work within a team
- Use customer service techniques for the best client/resident care

Five Steps to Professional Success



Caregiving is a career that many choose because they take pleasure in helping others. But in order to be content in our jobs, most of us need to feel valued and respected and to establish positive relationships with our colleagues and supervisors. This module focuses on five important steps that will showcase your dedication and skill as a caregiver while helping to ensure your professional success.

What are some qualities you think of when you imagine a “professional person?”

Step #1: Put Your Best Foot Forward

Professionalism is most often measured in four basic ways:



- Appearance (How you look)
- Communication (What you say)
- Performance (What you do)
- Attitude (How you approach your work)

Let's look at some tips to make sure that you are succeeding in each area.

Appearance

First impressions are usually made on the unspoken signals you send. As a caregiver, consider some ways that you can convey professionalism without saying a word:

Clothing. Choose clothes that fit the job. Many caregivers wear uniforms, so that can help make choices easier. Appropriate clothing choices say, "I understand the focus is on the job, not on me." Clean and crisp attire sends the message that you are organized, competent, and well-prepared to do your work.

Hygiene. The nature of your job requires very close contact with residents and clients, co-workers, etc. so good personal hygiene is a must. Good practices include oral hygiene, daily showers, using deodorant and fresh clothing. Clean hands and short, plain fingernails are two specific ways that caregivers send a message that hygiene is important to them.

Body Art. Different generations and cultures view body art and body jewelry differently. While it's great to express yourself, it's best to underplay that aspect of your personality when at work.

Perfume/Fragrance. Although fragrance isn't visible, those around you will "see you coming" if your perfume is overwhelming. And some are allergic to certain fragrances. Save the perfume for personal time.

Communication



A famous quote suggests that you should never miss an opportunity to say nothing! While we can't work in silence, it's important to think about how our words send signals about our professional demeanor. What are some tips for positive communication?

Manners. In today's busy workplace, it's easy to forget courtesies like saying please and thank you. How much more likely are you to respond to a request when these simple words are included?

Compliments. When you see it, say it. Never miss an opportunity to acknowledge others' accomplishments or good deeds.

Tone of Voice. A big complaint in small work spaces is the volume and tone of a co-worker's voice. Be aware that a loud, angry voice may annoy or frighten others and sends the wrong message about your professionalism.

Grammar. A tune sung off-key focuses on the singer instead of the song. In other words, using poor grammar may cause the listener to focus on how you speak and disregard what you're trying to say. If your grammar is significantly different from those around you, consider modifying it to convey a more professional image. If you recognize that grammar isn't your strong suit, how about improving it through on-line courses or websites or textbooks?

Jokes/Profanity. Off-color jokes and the use of profanity may diminish your professionalism more than any other single action. While jokes or conversations sprinkled with swear words may be perfectly acceptable in your personal world, they are a huge roadblock on your road to professional communication.

Performance

Actions speak louder than words. While your words are important, it's your actions that are the final measure of your professionalism.

Work Hard. Being seen as a hard worker is admirable. And employers treasure employees who can get the job done. But how do you prepare yourself to consistently work hard every day? Here are some suggestions for performing your job in the most focused way possible:

1. **Identify Your Job Responsibilities.** It really is all about the work. Focus on the tasks associated with those responsibilities.
2. **Do Your Best.** Acknowledge that "your best" may vary from day to day. But at the end of the day, can you say you did your best, tried your hardest? If not, take that as a lesson learned for tomorrow, but not as a punishment that you impose on yourself for events already past.
3. **Ask for Help.** If you feel that your duties can't humanly be completed in your work day, talk to your supervisor. Ask your supervisor to job-shadow to suggest different approaches. Demonstrating your situation is usually more effective than complaining about it.
4. **Avoid distractions.** If you have identified your responsibilities in #1, it's easier to recognize and avoid distractions. Activities that detract from your hard work include excessive chatting with co-workers, focusing on relationships with co-workers instead of clients, allowing too much of your personal life to creep in through phone calls, e-mails, text messages, communications with co-workers, etc.

Be Reliable. The hardest worker in the world can't make up for excessive absenteeism and tardiness. The nature of your job as a caregiver makes reliability more important than many other positions. Your job won't wait until tomorrow—your services are needed today. Planning ahead for the “what-ifs” in your life that affect your attendance/timeliness can reduce stress and maintain your reliability. What if your daycare provider is unavailable? Do you have a back-up? What if your car breaks down? Do you have another way to get to work?

Attitude

These days, when a person is said to have an “attitude,” it usually means bad attitude. Maintaining a good attitude is critical to any worker's success. A clever quote by Zig Ziglar says it all:

“It's your attitude, not your aptitude, that determines your altitude.”

In other words, a positive attitude can mean more than ability in terms of job success. Employers believe they can always teach skills, but it's much harder to teach “attitude.”

A positive attitude is a good habit that is contagious. Did you ever notice how hard it is to stay grumpy when you're approached by a smiling colleague? With a little practice, you too can view matters from the sunny side of the street. Here's how:

Choose Your Attitude. You have the power to choose your attitude. If you choose the positive approach, your day just got a little easier!

Count Your Blessings – Literally. Go through a mental checklist of all the good and positive things in your life. This exercise helps put negative things in perspective.

Banish the Negative. While you can't always avoid negativity in the workplace, you can decide never to contribute to it.

Keep Moving Forward. Everyone has an off day or a bad experience. Learn from the past but focus on the future.

Don't Take Things Personally. What others say and do is a reflection of them, not you.

Your attitude affects the way you see yourself and the way others see you. When you choose an optimistic and positive approach to life, both you and your career will benefit.

Step #2: Know the Rules of the Road



There are many rules to keep in mind on your road to professional success, especially when you are a caregiver. Knowing those rules can help you avoid roadblocks and smooth your journey.

Work Rules

Every business has work rules, and abiding by those rules is part of a contract with your employer when you accept a job. Work rules are usually presented and explained during new worker orientations.

It's in your best interest to thoroughly understand the rules at your workplace for several good reasons:

- You want to know what's expected of you
- You don't want to unknowingly break any rules
- You want to be seen as a valuable employee

Here's an example of someone who didn't know the rules:

Mary is 19 years old and has been working at ABC Assisted Living for the last 6 months. It's her first full-time job and she loves helping residents. Her supervisor has complimented her on her hard work and positive attitude.

Yesterday Mary was fired. "I can't believe you're firing me! What did I do wrong?" she asked her boss. The boss reminded Mary that she had been warned twice in the past about being late. "We went over all the work rules in the employee handbook when you started your job, Mary. Here's your signature stating you understood them."

Mary was angry and embarrassed. She hadn't paid much attention to the work rules; it seemed like a bunch of legal mumbo-jumbo. As she left the facility for the last time, she muttered to herself: "Who wants to work here anyway? They don't even appreciate all I did for them!"

Even though Mary was doing a good job, the facility felt it was equally important that Mary get to work on time. Understanding and abiding by the work rules are critical to your success as a professional.

Care Plans

They may be called care plans or individual service plans or given some other name at your workplace. Whatever the name, care plans outline your job duties with each individual resident or client. It's in your best interest, and the interest of the resident, to know the care plans completely.

Advantages to knowing individual care plans include:

- Understanding the resident's history and needs
- Providing the best quality of life possible for the resident
- Making your job easier by understanding successful approaches to use with the resident
- Providing you with an outline of your specific job duties

The most successful care plans include input from doctors, nurses, social work staff, the resident, the resident's family and you—the direct caregiver! Participate in the care plan process. Not only will it result in more positive outcomes for those in your care, you will be seen as the professional you really are!

The Caregiver Law



Caregivers in Wisconsin are held to very high standards of conduct. A 1998 law outlines “caregiver misconduct” and imposes penalties on caregivers who commit prohibited acts against clients and residents in long-term care facilities.

The caregiver law is an important set of rules for caregivers. A person found to have violated these rules can be barred from working as a caregiver in Wisconsin. Let’s take a look at the “plain English” definitions of caregiver misconduct.

Caregiver Misconduct – Simplified Definitions

MISCONDUCT	SIMPLE DEFINITION	POSSIBLE EXAMPLES
ABUSE	An intentional act that: Contradicts a health care facility's policy/procedures AND Is not part of the care plan AND Is meant to cause harm.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical abuse – hitting, slapping, pinching, kicking, etc. Sexual abuse – harassment, inappropriate touching, assault Verbal abuse – threats of harm, saying things to intentionally frighten a resident Emotional abuse – humiliation, harassment, intimidation with threats of punishment or depriving care or possessions
NEGLECT	A careless or negligent act that: Fails to follow facility procedure or care plan AND Causes or could cause pain, injury or death BUT Is not intended to cause harm.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not using a gait belt when required or transferring a resident improperly Failure to perform ROM exercises Turning off a call light Leaving a resident wet or soiled Disregarding hydration orders Failure to deliver or administer medication
MISAPPROPRIATION	An intentional act that: Is meant to permanently deprive a client of property OR Misuses a client's personal property AND Is done without the client's consent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theft of cash, checks, credit cards, jewelry, medication, etc. Misuse of property, e.g. using a resident's cell phone, wearing a resident's jewelry, eating a resident's box of candy, etc. Identity theft

These definitions apply to alleged violations committed against residents in health care facilities regulated by the Department of Health Services. The DHS Division of Quality Assurance investigates allegations of misconduct by non-credentialed caregivers. If a finding of abuse, neglect or misappropriation is substantiated, that caregiver will be listed on Wisconsin's Caregiver Misconduct Registry. Caregivers with findings may be permanently barred from working in long-term care facilities such as nursing homes. In addition, DQA investigates allegations of harm to residents in nursing homes by any person. Violations against residents allegedly committed by credentialed caregivers, family, friends or other individuals may also be reported to and investigated by agencies such as DHS, county Adult Protective Services, the Department of Safety and Professional Services, and law enforcement.

Reporting Misconduct

Under Wisconsin law:

- A *caregiver* must report a suspected incident of misconduct immediately to a supervisor
- A *long-term care facility* must investigate and report to the State Division of Quality Assurance under certain conditions

Activity: Reporting Challenges

One of the toughest challenges a caregiver may ever face is reporting suspected misconduct by a co-worker. What are some of the reasons a caregiver might hesitate to report an incident to a supervisor?

What could supervisors or managers do to make it easier for caregivers to report suspected misconduct?

Both the caregiver and the facility have a legal responsibility to report suspected caregiver misconduct. While it may be the hardest thing you ever have to do, your responsibility to your clients and residents must come first.

When caregivers and facilities talk openly about the requirement to report, there is no unspoken expectation that witnesses to caregiver misconduct will remain silent.

Step #3: Don't Travel Alone!



Few travel the road to professional success by themselves. And what a boring trip it would be! Along the way, colleagues, supervisors, clients and many others will offer challenges, lessons, frustrations, and rewards to your life's experience as a caregiver.

Let's talk about two areas that are essential for successful professional relationships:

Teamwork

Employers often say they are looking for “team players.” But what does that mean exactly? Here are some qualities used to describe people who work well within a team:

Shows Dependability. Gets work done and does his or her fair share. Follows through on job duties—a person you can count on all the time.

Communicates Positively. Speaks up and states thoughts clearly and honestly but with respect for others and the work of the team. Asks for and respects the input of others. Gives credit to others.

Listens Actively. Considers ideas and opinions from other team members. Accepts criticism and disagreement without becoming defensive.

Participates Energetically. Good team players actively participate in the work of the team. They have a “can-do” attitude and volunteer for assignments. Their philosophy is, “While I’m here, I’ll give it all I’ve got!”

Shares Information and Experiences. Good team members “spread the wealth” by sharing information to keep others informed. They develop good relationships with other members to encourage open communication. Some people see knowledge as power and hoard information. Not this team member!

Cooperates and Supports Partners. This team member believes in working with others to get the job done and works this way naturally. Good team players figure out ways to get along with co-workers who have different styles and views in order to get the job done.

Accepts Change. Good team players see change as an opportunity for growth, not a threat to the status quo.

Shows Flexible Thinking. This team member can live with different points of view and compromise when necessary. Flexible thinkers stay away from rigid thoughts and move forward to get the job done.

Shows commitment to the team. Strong team players value their work, the team and the team's commitment to meet its goals. They give and expect good effort.

Solves Problems. This member approaches problems with solutions in mind. They don't dwell on a problem, or place blame. Problem solvers are always looking forward in a positive way to defeat problems and improve the team's work.

Team players display many different characteristics and styles. It isn't always the outgoing, talkative person who works best on a team. Sometimes it's the quiet person who seems to offer sensible approaches and follows through on his/her efforts.

The best indicator of teamwork is demonstrated by the person who sees his or her individual work as part of a greater effort. The commitment is about winning—but not in the sports sense. In the caregiver world, teamwork means using the best contributions of the whole team to accomplish a goal. In this case, the goal is providing exceptional care and treatment to clients and residents while enjoying the support of other members of the team.

Activity: Memory Game Team Building Exercise

Many of you have probably played this game in the past. Today we will use it to focus on the positive power of a team.

Look back at the qualities of good teamwork that we talked about earlier. Did your team display any of these qualities? Which ones? Did your team have a better outcome (remember more objects) than when you worked alone?

Successful Professional Relationships



Positive relationships with co-workers and supervisors contribute directly to job satisfaction and performance. Remember the saying, “You can pick your friends, but you can’t pick your family?” The same holds true on the job; you usually can’t choose your co-workers. But you do have choices when it comes to fostering positive relationships in the workplace. And the attention you dedicate to those relationships will pay dividends to you, the workplace, and the residents and clients that you serve.

Listed below are some thoughts about ways to have successful relationships at work:

Friends vs. Colleagues. Working closely with others can blur the line between friendship and professional relationships. You have a personal life full of joy, hardships, successes, and challenges that you naturally want to share with someone. Although lifelong friendships sometimes start as professional relationships, don’t assume that every co-worker has your best interests at heart or wants to hear personal details. It can be especially tricky when a relationship with a colleague goes sour because you must still work with that person. Pay special attention if you are considering a romantic relationship with a co-worker.

Too Much Information. Personal information is just that—personal. In your professional life, it's usually best to keep those intimate details to yourself. Sensitive topics include your sex life, problems with family members, romantic relationships, your health, your salary and your desire to find a different job.

Courtesy vs. Familiarity. In the workplace, courtesy and respect are keys to successful relationships. Behavior that is perfectly acceptable in more casual or personal relationships may be viewed negatively at work. For example, kidding around or teasing friends and family may be a time-honored way of communicating. But those same approaches may be misunderstood by co-workers.

Gossip and the Grapevine. Although both are informal ways to communicate, neither is based on reliable facts. Consider whether you want to participate in a conversation that may prove hurtful or harmful to another. The underlying motivation to gossip usually stems from feelings of low self-esteem or jealousy. The person who gossips is trying to feel important or interesting at the expense of others.

Hot Button Issues. There are certain topics about which people feel very passionate. For that reason alone, it's best to avoid them in your workplace conversations. Topping the list are religion and politics (particularly around election time). Even though you may be discussing either topic with a like-minded co-worker, someone overhearing your conversation may be offended or feel uncomfortable.

Getting Along with the Boss. Some people have trouble with authority or authority figures. But professionals find ways to get along with all types of personalities. Sometimes it helps to “walk a mile” in your supervisor's shoes. You both have the same goal, but your supervisor must also be concerned about staffing levels, training, human resources, costs, building safety and other big picture items. Problem solving is part of your boss's job, too. While it's important to report problems, try to offer solutions. Pay attention to the rules and work with integrity. Most bosses couldn't ask for more.

Dealing with Difficult Co-workers. With the many different personalities and styles found in the workplace, it's inevitable that people will clash from time to time. Most of the time you can disregard or avoid minor incidents, but sometimes you will have to find the courage to face situations head on.

Think about how this assertive approach might work:

1. **Talk to the person privately about their words or actions.** Avoid exaggeration and be respectful. The statement might start out, “Jane, I enjoy hearing about your children, but when our conversations go on too long...”
2. **Tell the person how you feel.** “...I feel like I’m neglecting my responsibilities,” or “I’m worried the boss will think I’m wasting time.”
3. **Ask for what you want.** “Can I count on you to help me limit our personal conversations to lunch or breaks?”

Can you think of any other tips for establishing successful relationships at work?

Step #4: Remember the Destination



Think of your path to professionalism as a means of reaching your destination or goal. Clearly, as a caregiver, the most important goal is providing high quality care to residents and clients.

There are many judges of quality care including supervisors, family members, state regulators and others. But the most important person in determining the quality of care is the person receiving it—the client or resident.

If we look at the resident as a *customer*, it may be easier to define quality care and service because we've all been customers ourselves. We usually think of *customer service* in terms of companies that sell goods or services.

Here are some types of entities that depend on strong customer service to attract and keep your business:

- Grocery, clothing, discount and appliance stores
- Utility, phone and cell phone, internet and cable TV companies
- On-line retailers, home shopping networks and catalog merchandisers
- Rental agencies, banks, insurance companies
- Health care providers, e.g. doctors, dentists, nurses, hospitals
- Elected officials. In this case, the customers are the voters!

Activity: Customer Service

Think about a negative or frustrating situation in which you were the customer. Write down two or three things the customer service representative did to make your experience unsatisfactory.

Next, think about a positive or satisfying situation in which you were the customer. Write down two or three things the customer service representative did to make your experience satisfying.

Take a look at the two charts. What do you think are the most important qualities a caregiver should demonstrate to make their services a satisfactory experience for their customers (residents and clients)?

When we are able to empathize with clients and residents by comparing our own experiences in a similar situation, it seems much easier to reach our destination or goal of providing quality care.

Step #5: Celebrate Your Journey



A caregiver was overheard saying, “This is the toughest job I’ve ever loved!” Caregivers have demanding jobs and provide critical, life-supporting services to fragile people every day. There is no more honorable task than serving those who need us most.

As you follow the steps to reach your professional goals, take the time to celebrate your accomplishments and look forward to higher levels of achievement. Here are some ways to support yourself and your colleagues along the way:

Stay Connected

In the last few years, more resources for supporting direct caregivers are available on the internet. For example:

Wisconsin Long-Term Care Workforce Alliance

A coalition of public and private organizations and individuals that recognize the critical and indispensable role direct caregivers play in meeting the long term care needs of older persons and persons with disabilities in Wisconsin. The purpose of the Alliance is to develop and implement statewide community based strategies to improve the recognition, retention and recruitment of the long term care workforce.

<http://www.wiworkforcealliance.com/>

Keep Learning

There are many opportunities for life-long learning:

Did you always mean to go back to school? Whether it means getting a G.E.D. or a Ph.D., explore that next step of formal education.

Learn a new skill for your own enjoyment. Take a cooking class; learn to skate or how to knit. Craft stores, community centers, technical colleges and public school systems offer a variety of free or inexpensive classes.

Enrich your professional knowledge base. Find resources that will improve your professional skills. For example, caregivers are seeing more residents in later stages of dementia or Alzheimer’s disease. To learn more about these conditions, caregivers in Wisconsin are eligible to participate in training developed by UW Oshkosh as part of the Dementia Capable Wisconsin project. For more information, www.uwosh.edu/dementia.

Suggest training topics. Most long-term care facilities are required to provide ongoing training to staff. Identify a need and suggest it to your boss.

Interested in pursuing a career path? Find out what it takes to move up the ladder. Health care job opportunities will grow steadily in the coming decades as America ages. Wisconsin has excellent technical college and public university systems. For more information: <http://www.wistechcolleges.org/> or <http://www.wisconsin.edu/>

Inspire Your Workplace

We all know that breaks in our routines are welcome in the working world. After checking with your boss, plan some activities that might help strengthen your team, make work fun or provide a respite from daily stressors. Here are some ideas others have used to brighten their days:

- Spiff up your break room, your locker or other employee space. It doesn't have to cost a penny. Replace those year-old magazines with newer ones from home or friends; ask a few co-workers to contribute a coffee mug to replace the stained and chipped collection; look for free, colorful posters to replace the tattered versions on your walls.
- Establish a lending library of used books, CDs, movies, etc. Don't contribute anything you expect to get back, however. There won't be a "librarian" on duty.
- Bring a food treat on a day no one expects it or plan a pot-luck where everyone brings a dish to pass.
- Dress up or decorate for special occasions.
- Exchange unwanted items with co-workers. Use a small bulletin board in an employee area to post items that someone else might need: used furniture or small appliances, children's or baby items, uniforms, etc.
- Plan a "compliment" day. Use tickets, poker chips or pennies. Staff make a special effort to "pay compliments" to co-workers by handing them a token and offering a word of praise. If you wish, provide a small prize to the person who earns the most compliments that day.

As you can see, celebrating your journey requires extra effort on your part, but can provide great rewards to you, your colleagues and those in your care. As you travel along the path to professional success, keep in mind the 5 steps we just reviewed. And most of all -- enjoy the trip!

Wrap-Up

Let's review the main learning points:

- Learn to project a professional image
- Understand the rules and guidelines of your job
- Know how to work within a team
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NOTE: This material was developed by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services-Division of Quality Assurance and the UW Oshkosh Center for Community Development, Engagement and Training (CCDET) as part of the federal Caregiver Abuse and Neglect Prevention Project.

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