



In my opinion...

DEAN SAYS:

The Marks of Professionalism, Part X—

Asking for Help

“And, as you embark on your college career,” the esteemed professor told the incoming freshmen from the Class of 1995, “I urge you to aspire to professionalism. For it is within that framework that you will find life’s greatest rewards.”

Aspire to be a professional. Now that is good advice! But, what qualities mark a woman or man whom others acknowledge is a “professional?” So far in this series, I’ve suggested that *compassion, justice, common sense, commitment to excellence, a wholehearted determination to always tell the truth, attention to details, going the second mile, a sense of humor and practicing due diligence* are marks of a professional. This time I add to the list *knowing when to ask for help*.

As I sit in front of the Macintosh™ computer writing this piece, down the hall Dave-the-plumber is busily ripping apart the faucets in my upstairs bathroom. With a certain amount of grunting and groaning, he is attempting to renew the 21-year-old fixtures to stop a constant drip-drip that would make a water con-

servationist throw a tantrum.

Now a certain number of you are smirking to yourselves, “Call a plumber? What kind of a whimpy householder does that. Come on, Wilson, don’t you even know how to roll up your sleeves and get down under those sinks and fix that errant piping and those valves? Why you threaten the very existence of that manly art of do-it-yourself!”

You’re probably right. When it comes to do-it-yourself, I am definitely a whimp. But I’ve come to my whiminess out of a wealth of failed attempts. Why I’m the guy who bought \$200 worth of tune-up gear only to have messed up my car’s electrical system so badly that I almost had to call a tow truck to get the car over to a garage that could finish the simple adjustments I had started to make.

I’m the guy that started to paint the trim in one of my former apartments, only to end up making such a mess of the job that I nearly had to have new flooring installed where I was painting.

A “do-it-yourself whimp?” Indeed! And, sadly, I still haven’t learned my lesson. You see the plumber is here only because I started the simple job of replacing the washers in the faucets. Only now I’m having to have the three sets of faucets all replaced. And the only way I’m going to be able to pay for it is to get out there on the street and try to sell more copies of *TM-WSR*—just about ten new subscriptions will do it.

My plumber, Dave, and I have come

to an important agreement, however. He has promised me that he will not teach anyone about the ins and outs of fire alarm systems, if I hang up my pipe wrench and stop pretending to be an under-the-sink craftsman. Frankly, I think it’s a bargain well struck.

A true professional knows when the task at hand is outside his or her area of expertise. One who has clearly been recognized as a professional knows when to call for help. And, a very real part of this is knowing who to call. Building a network of fellow professionals is an important part of enhancing your craft.

Just yesterday, a veteran in the fire alarm business—a man I respect greatly—called me on the telephone. He simply wanted to touch base quickly on a job he was bidding. It was ever so slightly outside his normal area of expertise. After hearing his proposal, I made only one small suggestion. By and large he had hit the mark. When we ended our conversation, he went away knowing that he was on target, and I, once again, had experienced the satisfaction that comes from helping a fellow professional.

You really don’t have to know everything. In fact, if you have recently, or even for some time, been operating under the assumption that you “know it all,” then I urge you to reexamine yourself intently. The minute that you begin to believe that you can go it alone through the jungle of fire and burglary alarm codes, standards, rules, regulations, and industry standard operating procedures, you have taken the first step that will ultimately remove you from the ranks of those acknowledged as professionals.

Instead of trusting solely in your own abilities, make every effort to nurture the relationships you have with those who share your concern about raising the professionalism of your chosen field.

There’s a Winnie-the-Pooh story where Pooh Bear gets stuck leaving Rabbit’s hole after he’s feasted on some honey. Finally, with Christopher Robin’s help, he’s set free.

Pooh would likely agree, “When you’re stuck, it’s important to realize you need to call for help. And, it’s good to know who you need to call.” □

The Moore-Wilson
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