

Customer Service Notes for

Professionalism – Another Key to Stellar WIC Service

Professionalism – while it’s not easy to define, we know it when we see it or experience it. As WIC service providers, professionalism plays a role in how we are viewed by participants. Professionalism can involve how we dress, what we say, our non-verbal behavior, how we speak on the phone, and even what our office looks like.

Let’s start with dress. We all know there are some clothes in our closet that should be kept *AT HOME*. While we’re not suggesting you head to the mall to purchase a set of \$500 suits, we are suggesting that you dress appropriately for your office. Also, be sure your clothes are ironed and do not look like you slept in them. If you are unsure about what you are considering wearing, ask yourself, “How would I react as a participant if I looked like this and was meeting myself for the first time?”

What we say and our non-verbal behavior also plays a role in professionalism. We have overheard WIC service providers, who when thanked by a participant, respond by saying “Yep” or “No problem.” A better – more *professional* – response would be “You’re welcome,” or “My pleasure.” Also be mindful of your non-verbal language. Rolling your eyes or sighing in front of a participant is *unprofessional*. Even if the participant you are rolling eyes at cannot see you, another participant might, causing that person to wonder...”What does she say about me?” Other non-verbal behavior such as crossing your arms or putting your hands on your hips should also be avoided, since they convey negativity and possibly impatience.

Telephone communication is another area where we should demonstrate professionalism and it starts with the greeting. When answering, say the name of your WIC agency and your name. You don’t need to add “speaking” after your name. It’s better to say “Melville WIC Agency, This is Jane.” You could add “How may I help you?” When on the phone with a participant, be careful about background comments as the receiver can pick up more than we think. For example, suppose you are on the phone with Mrs. Ellis, who is known to complain about WIC policies and procedures. If your co-worker overhears you taking a call from Mrs. Ellis, and says in the background, “Oh not Mrs. Ellis again! What does she want now?” – Mrs. Ellis might hear this.

Lastly, even the look of your office conveys professionalism. Try to keep your desk uncluttered. Also keep your waiting area clean and neat. Everything the participant observes contributes to an environment that says: “We’re WIC professionals and we are here to help you.”

Questions for Reflection:

1. Have you worn something to work recently that was “borderline” in terms of professionalism?
2. Does your facial expression tell people what you are really thinking? What can you do to combat mistakenly communicating impatience to your clients and/or co-workers?
3. How often do you clean your desktop?