Chapter 12
Raising Ethics and Integrity Awareness by Incentivizing Professionalism

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ABSTRACT

Far more than in the fields of business, research scholarship in the medical and legal fields has considered the integrity of students and graduates. Within the broader concept of professionalism, integrity is manifest in these fields as behavioral qualities such as bedside manner, client relationships, and dedication to quality. Yet in business scholarship, research into professionalism extends little beyond exploration of it antonyms as evidenced in the moral conduct of certain notorious executives. Conspicuously absent from business literature is much consideration of the positive behavioral qualities desirable in our institutions' students, neither with respect to scholastic progress during college, to employability and career progression following graduation, nor to the foundations of conduct that characterize pro-social business practitioners. In this chapter, the author offers an exploration of professionalism as a concept within which integrity is implicit and critical, and around which business schools can structure programs to raise awareness and standards among their students and graduates. The chapter begins by fleshing-out the concept of professionalism, including brief review of the word's etymology and history. Next, an argument is developed as to the relevance of professionalism to students and, therefore, to faculty and administrators of business schools. Finally, the intentions and experiences at the college of business at a mid-tier state university, where colleagues and the author have developed and launched what is called the Professionalism Recognition Program, are presented in the spirit of positive organizational scholarship to provide other business faculty and administrators with a potential idea for addressing professionalism at their institutions. The author concludes with discussion of additional research related to the concept of professionalism and it's applicability in business schools' planning.

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INTRODUCTION

Underrepresented in management-education literature or curricula is extensive consideration of the positive behavioral qualities desirable in our institutions' students, neither with respect to scholastic progress during college, to employability and career progression following graduation, nor to the foundations of conduct that characterize pro-social business practitioners.

In this chapter, I offer an exploration of professionalism as a concept within which ethics and integrity are implicit and crucial, and around which business schools can structure programs to raise awareness and standards among their students and graduates. The chapter begins by fleshing-out the concept of professionalism, including brief review of the word's etymology and history. Next, an argument is developed as to the relevance of professionalism to students and, therefore, to faculty and administrators of business schools. Finally, the intentions and experiences at The W.A. Franke College of Business at Northern Arizona University, where colleagues and I have developed and launched what is called the Professionalism Recognition Program, are presented in the spirit of positive organizational scholarship to provide other business faculty and administrators with a potential idea for addressing professionalism at their institutions. I conclude with a discussion of additional research related to the concept of professionalism and its applicability in management educators' planning.

PROFESSIONALISM: A CONCEPT WITH INTEGRITY AT ITS CENTER

From the perspective of graduates' future employers, professionalism qualities extend far beyond what can be bulleted on résumés (Barr & McNeilly, 2002). Recruiters can reasonably expect that a decent GPA from an accredited school connotes requisite knowledge, necessary technical training, generic attributes (Barrie, 2006), or simply "book smarts." And lists of prior work experience provide solid indications of applicants' background, capabilities, and ambitions. But at least as important as those two categories of applicants' attributes is a category reflecting qualities such as integrity, conscientiousness, responsibility, and attitude.

Fitting within this initial conception of professionalism are what executives, such as those interviewed for a *BizEd* article titled "What Business Wants from Tomorrow's Leaders" (Shinn, 2009), cite as the most important characteristics for career progression: attributes like initiative, creativity, flexibility, and openness to opportunity – none of which is captured on typical résumés nor specifically addressed in typical undergraduate curriculum. Success in the workplace, especially for junior employees, depends on reciprocal social exchanges of "organizational socialization … the process by which a new member learns and adapts to the value system, the norms, and the required behavior patterns" (Schein, 1967, p. 220), which is likely to be challenging for young people who have had little exposure to workplace cultures beyond schools and college. These necessary pro-social characteristics, and many more detailed below, align with the exhortations of critics of the management education industry (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Mintzberg, 2004), who assert that career success depends on character and behavior far more than on technical knowledge.

Having come to mean integrity, duty, and comradeship among colleagues, the origins of "professionalism" trace to the emergence of classical professions in the renaissance era. While guilds were forming for fields of skilled labor, the fields of medicine, law, clergy, military and academe required a sense of devotion to principles beyond just skills. The need to "profess" devotion to a field's principles became the essence of being "professional." Through the industrial revolution and into the modern era, being a professional meant to abide by a standardized, normative ethic within a field – which typically spanned company