



Tips for Professional Success

Developing Professionalism Through Your AmeriCorps Experience

**America Reads – Mississippi
Team Leader Training
February 22, 2006**

[Training Objectives]

- Understanding the Importance of Professionalism
- Identifying the Benefits of ARM AmeriCorps Service
- Essential Elements of Professionalism Learned Through AmeriCorps

Understanding the Importance of Professionalism

What is professionalism?

The conduct, aims, or qualities that characterize a person in a work setting or profession.

Understanding the Importance of Professionalism

- ***“Individuals do not become professionals because of some sudden leap that they make into the stratosphere. Individuals become professionals because of their lifetime dedication and commitment to higher standards and ideals, honorable values, and continuous self-improvement.”***

Jim Ball, author, *Professionalism is for Everyone*

Understanding the Importance of Professionalism

Why is professionalism important?

- Being Productive
- Effective Management of Relationships
- Handling Conflict
- Being an Ambassador
- Being Mission-Minded

Understanding the Importance of Professionalism

■ Being productive in ARM means....

1. Good attendance and timeliness
2. Follow directions
3. Focus on tasks
4. Be proactive
5. Follow-through on commitments
6. Go the extra mile
7. Be a team player
8. Successfully complete the year
9. Use the AmeriCorps education award
10. What else?

Understanding the Importance of Professionalism

- Effective management of relationships in ARM means...
 1. No personal relationships on the job
 2. Mature, polite, loyal
 3. Respect authority
 4. Maintain confidences
 5. Do everything with style and class
 6. What else?

Understanding the Importance of Professionalism

Handling Conflict

LISTEN!!!!

- Develop the habit of listening when a member or client is upset.
- Simply listening when someone is upset, oftentimes diffuses their anger.
- Try to understand their issue – do not just prepare your rebuttal.

Understanding the Importance of Professionalism

- ***“If you argue and rankle and contradict, you may achieve a victory sometimes; but it will be an empty victory because you will never get your opponent’s good will.” -Ben Franklin***
- ***“The only way to win an argument is to avoid it.” -Dale Carnegie***

Understanding the Importance of Professionalism

Handling Conflict (continued)

- Have the courage to initiate “*fierce conversations.*”
 - Say what needs to be said!
 - Engage in the tough, difficult conversations.
- Do not talk about people; talk to them.

Understanding the Importance of Professionalism

Handling Conflict (continued)

How would you handle these situations?

- You need to confront a fellow member that has been talking about you behind your back.
- A member is not taking care of his/her service responsibilities and it is causing problems for the rest of the team.
- You disagree with the way a teacher is teaching or with what the teacher wants you to do. What do you do?

Understanding the Importance of Professionalism

Conflict

- Conflict can destroy team work.
- What are some examples of conflicts that hamper the effectiveness of teams?

Understanding the Importance of Professionalism

Your Role as Ambassador

- **Ambassador = Somebody who serves as an official representative of something.**
- **Members are the most visible ambassadors for ARM, AmeriCorps, and schools.**
- **67% of first impressions turn out to be accurate. (University of Connecticut study)**
- **So what does this mean for you?**

Understanding the Importance of Professionalism

Being a Good Ambassador

- How you dress is a reflection of your organization.
- How you interact with people in person, on the phone, and in writing (e-mail, flyers, letters) is a reflection of your organization.
- Your attitude is a reflection of your organization.
- YOU are a reflection of your organization.

Understanding the Importance of Professionalism

Benefits of Being a Good Ambassador

- I was speaking to my Sunday School class at church about America Reads-Mississippi.
- I mentioned that we recruit volunteers to come in to the school and read with students.
- After the presentation one of the audience members said he would like to volunteer for one or two hours each week.
- I talked to my site supervisor to work out the details and now he is volunteering every Wednesday from 8-10 am.

You secure support for your program by being a good ambassador.

Understanding the Importance of Professionalism

- **An executive in a large corporation stated, “I allow three to four minutes for a salesperson to establish credibility. The three-part criterion is simple: appearance, communication skills, and the value of the service. If the appearance and communication skills are poor, the sale is already lost because I stop listening.”**
- **What do you “sell” as an ARM member? Who are your “customers”?**

Understanding the Importance of Professionalism

The Importance of Mission

- What is the mission of your organization?
- Are you passionate about the mission?

A strong belief and commitment to the mission of the agency is critical for success.

Understanding the Importance of Professionalism

- **America Reads - Mississippi is dedicated to improving the reading skills of students, encouraging public awareness and support of literacy, and helping to increase the number of certified teachers in Mississippi.**

Understanding the Importance of Professionalism

***“If you would be happy for one hour, take a nap.
If you would be happy for a day, go fishing.
If you would be happy for a month, get married.
If you would be happy for a year, inherit a fortune.
If you would be happy for life, love your work.”***

Chinese Proverb

If you love your work, it's not work.

Benefits of AmeriCorps Service

■ Professional experience

- Serving as a reading tutor
- Introduction to the school culture/setting
- Attending conferences/trainings

■ Learn new skills

- Technology
- Public speaking
- Civic Engagement
- Team Work

[Team Work]

What are the characteristics of a good team member?

Most of the good we do for students is accomplished by members working as a cohesive team.

[Importance of Teamwork]

“Never doubt that a small, group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

Characteristics of a Good Team Member

- Uses their skills, talents, and expertise to accomplish team goals.
- Understands their role and plays it to the best of their ability.
- Shares their ideas, thoughts, and opinions honestly with consideration for others.
- Respects their team members.
- Avoids gossiping and backbiting.
- Makes decisions collectively.
- Honors their commitments.
- Helps others unselfishly.

Benefits of AmeriCorps Service

- Networking opportunities
 - Schools and Districts
 - Universities
 - State Agencies
- Opportunity to serve your community
 - Reading Tutoring
 - Service Projects

[serving others]

*“If you can’t feed a hundred people, then
feed just one.”*

Mother Theresa

Benefits of AmeriCorps Service

■ Education Award

- Funds to attend college
- Funds to pay back student loans
- Meet educational and professional goals

■ Opportunity to develop meaningful relationships

- Continued service with school after ARM service ends
- Tutored students
- Presenting LAA sessions at Regional Trainings

AmeriCorps as a Stepping Stone

Nikitna Barnes

- Completed two years of AmeriCorps in the America Reads - Mississippi Program (1999-2001).
- In 1999, completed undergraduate degree from Alcorn State University.
- After AmeriCorps worked with ARM in the ASU Region as Field Program Specialist.
- Used Ed Award to work on master's degree
- In 2004, completed master's degree from Alcorn State University.
- *"The future doesn't just happen, it is created...Our destiny is not in the stars, but in ourselves. We may need to follow in the wake of those who have gone before. But what we do and where we go is ultimately up to us. The attitude of initiative is an on-going state of exploration that is never finished...A journey that never ends."*
- Still taking some graduate classes.

Essential Elements of Professionalism Learned Through AmeriCorps

- Good Work Ethic
- Respect of Self and Others
- Confidentiality
- Time Management
- Positive Attitude
- Commitment to Life-long Learning
- Accepts Responsibility
- Knows the Language/Culture of Work

Work Ethic

"Let him that would move the world, first move himself."
Socrates

- Regular Attendance
- Being Present (in mind and attitude)
- Standing by Your Work
- Not Taking Short Cuts
- Being Honest
- Respecting Authority

[Respect for Self and Others]

Our work in human services (non-profits, education, social work, etc.) is about building relationships that help people change their lives!

Our work says something about us to those we serve and are accountable to.

Our work cannot be separated from our character.

[Confidentiality]

- Another barrier to building and maintaining relationships is violating trust.
- You must disclose if someone has committed a crime or is planning to hurt themselves or somebody else.
- Must develop the ability to keep a confidence.
- Do not discuss client information.

[Effective Time Manager]

- **BE ON TIME!!!!**
- Do not procrastinate – do the tough, important tasks now.
- Make a to-do list and use it to prioritize your work.

Time Management Tools

- **Planner or Calendar**
- **Task Lists for Special Projects**
- **Reminders – setting alarms, written notes, etc.**
- **Scheduling sufficient time to complete tasks**
- **Self-Discipline**
- **Review task lists/calendars daily**

[Time Management Skills]

- The ability to manage **multiple projects and responsibilities** is essential for professional success.
- Employers look for excellent time management skills when hiring.

[Attitude]

- Maintain a positive attitude about work, co-workers, and clients.
- Be polite: say, “please,” “thank you,” and “excuse me’ a lot!

Maintain a commitment to learning

- Learn from supervisor's constructive criticism.
- The best supervisor's honestly share your strengths and weakness with you via performance appraisals.
- Must see performance appraisals as an opportunity to learn and grow as professionals.

[Accept Responsibility]

- Develop the ability to accept responsibility (blame) and to share credit.
- Do not pass the buck.
- Share credit and your co-workers will be endeared to you.

Know the “language” and “culture” of your work place

- Know and follow your schools’ and ARM’s policies and procedures.
- Know “AmeriCorps lingo” – pronunciation, spelling, and usage
 - AmeriCorps – “s” is silent, capital “C” in the middle
 - ARM – no “s” on the end
 - Volunteer or Member – not employee
 - Service – not job or work
- Guard your tongue.
- Only use email (and internet) for business.

[Success]

“There are no secrets to success: don’t waste time looking for them. Success is the result of perfection, hard work, learning from failure, loyalty to those for whom you work, and persistence.”

Colin Powell

[Questions?]

Questions?