

Professionalism

CAP Officer Basic Course

Introduction

What does it mean to be a Professional? We use phrases such as, "Take it to a professional," or, "That was a very professional job," or, on the negative side, "He acted very unprofessionally, when..." All of these phrases refer to our belief that a professional should not only be an expert in a particular field but is also held to high standards of behavior. How does this apply to the Civil Air Patrol member? Why is it important? How does the member's professionalism reflect on the organization? What are the responsibilities of the individual for his or her own professional conduct and that of the members in their unit? These are some of the questions we will address in this lesson.

1. Describe the traits and characteristics of professional officers.

There are several words derived from the word profession. Here are their definitions from The American College Dictionary:

A profession is "a vocation *requiring* knowledge of some department of learning or science."

A professional is one who follows "an occupation as a means of livelihood or gain," or one who is "engaged in one of the *learned* professions."

Professionalism is exhibited by one of the " *professional character, spirit or methods* " or the "standing, practice, or methods of a professional as *distinguished from an amateur* ."

In these definitions, there are some key words to note: Knowledge, an occupation, and character. These are the essence of professionalism.

In an article from the Small Library Management Training Program at Texas State Library, author Julie Todaro outlines five basic elements of Professionalism: Philosophy; Body of Knowledge; Leaders or Philosophers; Guidelines for Behavior; and Admission Requirements.

Let's examine each of these and how it applies to Civil Air Patrol.

Philosophy. Professions have their own philosophy, which must be communicated in both written and oral form. In Civil Air Patrol, we use Mission and Vision Statements to define our purpose. An example is the CAP Vision Statement: "*Civil Air Patrol, America's Air Force Auxiliary, building the Nation's finest force of citizen volunteers-performing Missions for America.*"

Body of Knowledge. Professions must have a body of professional literature of research, study and comment. In Civil Air Patrol, we have regulations, manuals, and pamphlets on how to carry out our program. We also reference and use many publications on Aerospace knowledge, Leadership, and Emergency Services. Throughout your CAP career you will add to that body of knowledge. Right now you are taking this course. You are also probably working on your Technician rating in your specialty by reading and studying the material listed in your Specialty Track Study guide (CAPP 200 series) and applying what you have learned at squadron. (For more information see the Specialty Tracks lesson of this course or your squadron Professional Development Officer.) In your future there are all the other training listed in the Professional Development program (for more information see CAPM 52-17 and the Professional Development lesson of this course), specialty related training and

Emergency Services training. All of this is provided to help you become "an expert in the field" and help your unit accomplish its mission professionally.

Leaders or Philosophers. Professions have those who write about, research and teach the profession. Leaders can be writers, role models, and active participants. Examples of role modeling are particularly evident with the Civil Air Patrol Officers active in the Cadet Program.

CAP Officers who use their skills and experience to conduct Search and Rescue exercises and training are another excellent example of role modeling and active participation.

Guidelines for Behavior. Professions have codes of conduct, guidelines, creeds, oaths, core values, and other statements on ethics. Civil Air Patrol models its organizational behavior after the U.S. Air Force. Our hierarchy, uniforms, customs and courtesies, awards, oaths, mottos, core values, etc. all are guidelines for how we conduct ourselves. These also provide a system of accountability to measure our conduct against a traditional standard. How you conduct yourself at CAP meetings, activities and missions is incredibly important. All members should conduct themselves with focus and attitude toward getting the mission accomplished. That "mission" may be teaching cadets at a meeting, attending an aerospace conference, or finding a lost, downed aircraft.

2. Explain why the CAP officer should present a professional image and strive for professionalism in all CAP activities.

A professional looks the part. You do not have to use big words or special jargon to be professional. These are communication barriers. Professionals choose language appropriate to their audience.

Think about it this way: If you entered a doctor's office, and that office was not sanitary, the doctor was dressed in a t-shirt and shorts without explanation, the nurse had a bad attitude, and neither one explained your prognosis in a way you could understand it, you wouldn't want to go back, right? And, you'd want another opinion, too. As CAP members, we have to have professional conduct, aims, and qualities. This means wearing the uniform properly, speaking clearly and consistently using language appropriate to audience and situation, learning all we can about our job, and accomplishing our job with a proper attitude.

When we wear the Air Force uniform, it marks us as a professional organization that is affiliated with the Air Force. What we do and say in public affects how the general population thinks about the Air Force and the military in general. From a distance, we look like Air Force members, not CAP members.

Remember this adage: "You never have a second chance to make a first impression." You will be continuously making "first impressions" in CAP. Make any impression the best you possibly can.

Admission Requirements. Professionals are often licensed, certified, and have specific education requirements, both initially and continuing. Most professions have testing requirements for admission or renewal of licensing. To be an Officer in Civil Air Patrol or to be promoted to higher grades, the CAP member must meet certain requirements either of previous professional certification or through participation, demonstrating skills in various specialty tracks, and service.

The CAP member must demonstrate continued dedication to self-improvement in his or her knowledge of leadership philosophy through attendance in professional development courses such as this one, Squadron Leadership School and the many others offered through CAP (See CAPM 52-17 and the Professional Development Lesson of this course). Members also

develop their skills through constant practice. They attend practice missions, fly for proficiency and perform their primary duty functions at the squadron meetings. Even when members have "finished" all the training in the Professional Development program there will be changes in their specialties, changes in technology and changes in procedures that will require continued training to maintain that professional edge.

Some of the benefits of being professional have already been discussed, such as the impact of our uniform in public, accomplishing the mission, etc. But, there is another purpose: that of enhancing or advancing your personal CAP career.

Many times, during CAP activities, we may relax a little. This is a great time for networking, and camaraderie, but we still should have a professional attitude. "Downtime" does little to get the mission accomplished, but is necessary for members to recharge and renew their spirit. It also may allow your superior to see the "real you," if you are in fact putting up a facade. This works in the leadership quality of integrity. Integrity means having consistency in your actions, values, methods, measures, principles, expectations and outcomes. Maintaining that integrity even during downtime is part of professionalism.

Simply wearing the uniform properly also doesn't make you professional. How you look demonstrates how you feel and defines how others see your professional being, inside and out. If you "lose your cool" and have an emotional outburst while wearing the uniform, that reflects badly on CAP, and possibly the Air Force.

So, what's the proper attitude to have? You leave out the outbursts and emotional thralls that accompany stressful situations and successes. Maintain focus with a sense of urgency, and accept responsibilities on a path toward a specific goal. In the process, you'll gain and maintain respect for your superiors, peers and subordinates.

Now just a quick word about gossip and rumors. They simply have no place in CAP. Passing gossip and rumors violates the very core of being professional. Report anything suspicious through your chain of command.

3. Initiate steps toward becoming a professional CAP officer through the use of traits and characteristics indicative of professionalism.

In volunteer organizations, accountability is based more on personal integrity and values. Our organizational need to continually recruit and retain skilled members sometimes affects our acceptance of less than professional conduct. On one hand a unit leader might not want to lose a skilled pilot and be willing to put up with some lapses in professionalism regarding uniform appearance or customs. On the other hand, even minor lapses can reflect badly on the entire organization. Such lapses have, in certain cases, led to restrictions or loss of privileges by CAP members on military installations. When and where to draw the line is a leadership decision but holding ourselves accountable is a matter of professionalism. Dealing with professional situations without emotion, and basing CAP-related interactions on intellect, industry and experience provides a common foundation from which professional relations can flourish.

As CAP members, we all have received training on proper uniform wear, customs and courtesies, and core values. Competency in our CAP missions provides a relatively linear basis of understanding. This creates a level playing field from which everyone can function and exercise power appropriate to their position and responsibilities. By submitting an application and paying our dues we are committing to act professionally and conduct ourselves according to those customs.

When we are assigned a duty in CAP, we commit to learning the rules and skills of the relevant specialty tracks. As we achieve higher levels; Technician, Senior, and Master, we

are demonstrating professionalism through continued education and self-improvement and, ultimately, by teaching others those skills.

In Emergency Services, we attain and practice complex skills in aeronautical activities, disaster relief, communications, and leadership. The professional CAP member continually hones his or her skills and abides to a high level of safety requirements in the execution of those activities. The professional CAP member does not engage in unsafe acts nor tolerate unsafe conduct by other CAP members.

Understand that in CAP, we have a purpose and a goal in all we do. Jocularly has no place when it takes away from time spent moving forward to mission accomplishment. Having a sense of humor is important, we're all human! But when that humor takes away from the mission, all team members suffer. Too much jocularly can get you labeled as "a jester among knights" and not being a "team player." There are times to have fun and times to be serious. Professionals know the difference.

Don't think of professionalism as being subjective based on a hidden set of standards. CAP's standards are clear. Our culture in CAP plays a considerable role in our professionalism. If you treat professionalism as an add-on to your being, you will become the "team player" we need to get the mission accomplished. As you gain confidence advancing in CAP, your professionalism will improve based on experience, position, and direction.

CAP officers are CAP cadets' role models. Working with cadets or not, cadets watch seniors. As role models in the Cadet Program, the CAP Officer must demonstrate professional bearing in appearance, attitude and integrity. You can be certain; the slightest falter will be noticed by at least ten cadets!

Lesson Summary and Closure

Professionalism can be described as having five elements: A Philosophy; A Body of Knowledge; Leaders or Philosophers; Guidelines for Behavior; and Admission Requirements.

If you've been to cadet meetings, you may have heard them recite the CAP Cadet Oath:

"I pledge that I will serve faithfully in the Civil Air Patrol Cadet Program, attend meetings regularly, participate actively in unit activities, obey my officers, wear my uniform properly, and advance my education and training rapidly to prepare myself to be of service to my community, state and nation."

Every part of the cadet oath reflects professionalism in the cadet program.

The Civil Air Patrol Officer's conduct reflects not only on his or her own professionalism but the professionalism of the entire organization. The CAP member has a duty to continually improve himself through education, practice, and participation in the activities of the Civil Air Patrol. Doing so with pride and in accordance with the established guidelines reflect professionalism not only upon the individual but to the entire organization.

In summary, remember that accomplishing the missions of CAP relies on the proper professional attitude from all members.

For more information and additional readings about professionalism, click on "Read to Lead" at the top of the lesson.

Works Cited

The following articles were used in the preparation of this article:

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