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A “Real Pro”

“Little Joe” D’Amico was what’s known as a “real pro.” He was an auto mechanic for Supple Motors, an Oldsmobile dealership in Franklin, MA, where I grew up. Everybody I knew trusted their car to Little Joe. If he said it would cost \$150 and be ready on Thursday by 3 PM, you knew it would cost \$150 or less and be ready by Thursday at 3, if not before.

Little Joe was always in a position to take advantage of his customers, but he never did, which is the principal reason why people saw him as a real pro. Even though he was not a learned professional, he acted like one, by serving those who had faith in him the way people expect learned professionals to serve those who have faith in them: by performing a service competently, reliably, and honestly, with their patrons’ needs held foremost. Of course, not all learned professionals do that. In fact, some learned professionals – including some geoprofessionals – conduct themselves poorly: While they may be learned, they’re not real pros and so are unprofessional professionals.

On the other end of the spectrum are those termed a “professional’s professional” or “pro’s pro”; professionals whose knowledge, competence, and behavior put them a cut above. I believe all professionals should strive to become pro’s pros, if only because the wholehearted pursuit of that objective – achieved or not – will make them better at what they do and how they represent their peers and their profession, in their own eyes and those of their patrons.

What are the attributes you’d ascribe to a pro’s pro? For example, would the person have brown hair? Clearly, hair color wouldn’t matter. By contrast, keeping one’s technical competence up-to-date would be an absolute must; something one owes those who “trust us to do the right thing.” Also owed, as I’m sure Little Joe would agree, would be the integrity required to keep one’s promises and the honesty needed to say, “I’m not

knowledgeable enough to do this for you.”

How about meaningful involvement in community activities? I can easily imagine any type of pro’s pro helping out in a soup kitchen. I can also imagine qualified geoprofessional pro’s pros leading a local citizens’ levee inspection, explaining what to look for and how to find it.

What about knowing the history of one’s profession? Surely pro’s pros would be familiar with their professional heritage and how their professional forebears contributed to society. In the case of geoprofessionals, for example, pro’s pros would be able to respond quickly and authoritatively to, “Who’s the most famous geoprofessional America has yet produced?”

Is it okay for pro’s pros to curse frequently; to lose their temper often? No. Would they give their subordinates a pat on the back when it’s deserved? Absolutely. What about table manners? Would professional’s professionals use their fingers to shovel food onto a fork? I think not. Pro’s pros would have impeccable manners, table and

otherwise: males would be “gentlemen”; females would be “ladies.” And that also applies to attire: Little Joe wore blue coveralls that by 5 PM were always covered in grease and grime. That was fine with his customers; they expected it. What do your client representatives, colleagues, peers, and coworkers expect? How would those who should look up to you feel if you clearly didn’t care about your appearance? If you, striving to become a pro’s pro, came to work in clothing best described as shabby?

Would a pro’s pro be able to stand in front of a group and speak well, because of innate ability or, lacking that, because of training? Yes. And what about writing



skills? Would a pro's pro be able to write a simple, declarative sentence? to match a plural subject with a plural verb? Would a pro's pro know that the proper response to "Who's there?" is "It's I" and not "It's me"? Yes, because a pro's pro should be able to display mastery of fourth-grade English. And the individual should also know how to spell the right word when a spelling checker cannot; e.g., "affect" vs. "effect," "compliment" vs. "complement," and "principal" vs. "principle"...things usually learned by seventh grade.

And how about this one: Would professional's professionals sit apathetically by while the image of their chosen profession was being so maligned even some of the best and most talented of their peers were being commoditized and marginalized? Mine wouldn't. They'd learn what others are doing about the situation and what they could do to help make things better...and then they'd do it. Because they'd know that doing nothing would make things worse; that not being part of the solution would make them part of the problem. Because they'd believe they need to pay back by paying forward, if not for themselves, then at least for their professional forebears, progeny, and peers; in fact, for society itself.

What kind of professional are you?

..... AUTHOR

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