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A few years ago I was driving out of a parking garage after a Cleveland Cavaliers game and was following the directions of the security officers assigned to control traffic flow. As it came time for me to merge onto a downtown street, one officer pointed for me to turn right and another one pointed for me to turn left. When I approached the first officer who was pointing left, I asked her which way I should go because the other officer was pointing to the right. Her reply to me was: “Are you stupid?”

As I recovered from my moment of stupidity, I thought about how sharp and professional the woman looked in her uniform and yet her attitude and behavior were nothing of the sort. It was very disappointing and frustrating to deal with such a person.

Back in my military days as an Air Force Chief, I created an image and slogan that I printed on the letterhead I used when corresponding with Air Force Airmen. It contained small images of every rank in a horizontal line across the top of the page with a caption below it that read “Wear it on the inside.” My intentions were to symbolize that military ranks and what they stand for should be more than something worn on the arms of uniforms--they should also be worn in the hearts of military servants. The profession of arms is not just a facade to put on and take off each day--it should be absorbed within and exist at all times.

The best police officers, doctors, nurses, teachers, postal carriers, day care providers, janitors, seating assistants, etc., are the ones who wear their pride and reputation on the inside as well as on the outside. For instance, I can recall different experiences I’ve had

with nurses. Some fill out the charts, quickly take your blood pressure (some don’t even tell you what it is unless you ask), and walk out of the room without a comment. Others do more than fill out charts. They talk to you, listen to you, smile, let you know they care about you, and explain things to you. To them being a good nurse is more than a job and a paycheck, it’s a calling and commitment to our fellow mankind during times when compassion and competence are very much needed. Good nurses wear their uniform and pin on the inside as well as on the outside.

A few weeks ago I watched a story on my local news station about an extraordinary police response. After a single mother unexpectedly ran out of baby formula for her newborn late at night, she became extremely concerned because she had two other young children sleeping and couldn’t leave them unattended to run to the store. When no friends or family replied to her phone calls or texts, she decided to call 911 to ask for help. The police dispatcher didn’t discard her call because it wasn’t within the purview of a valid emergency, but instead got in touch with a patrolman to discuss the matter. The patrolman decided he would still respond to the situation. He drove to a convenient store, bought a can of baby formula with his own money, and delivered it to the mom. This policeman took his commitment to serving his community to heart. And he didn’t lecture the mom about the importance of having an ample supply of formula on hand, he simply responded and helped. In doing so, this policeman showed he wears his uniform and badge on the inside as well as on the outside.

Even if you don’t wear a uniform where you work, you should dress

accordingly and represent something more than yourself. Whether you’re self-employed or work for a company or organization, you should have service values that you believe in and serve by. For instance, if you’re a construction worker and having pride in your work is something you should value, then value it because you’ll do a much better job if you build with pride rather than just complying with blueprints. If you’re a car wash attendant and are expected to be energetic and upbeat, then subscribe to those traits and display enthusiasm and energy rather than walking around like a robot pushing buttons. Even though the quality of the car wash will be the same either way, the quality of the customer’s experience will determine whether they return or not.

When I’m grocery shopping, I often walk past a stocker who smiles and sings out loud while he’s stocking shelves. I commented to him once that I’ve never seen such a happy stocker, and he said he works according to his boss’s intent--that stockers are expected to be cheerful and helpful to shoppers while stocking. He certainly performs to his boss’s intent by wearing a joyful attitude on the inside so it shows on the outside.

It’s important for you to be what you represent. Dressing the part doesn’t automatically mean you are the part. Being the part requires an internal commitment. You don’t have to love your job but you can love the opportunity to do it passionately. You can love being part of something important. You can love the fact that you have a job!

So make it clear to everyone that you truly are the professional that they see. By wearing your professional image on the inside, you will certainly show it on the outside.

~ The End ~