

# Conversations in Mentoring

## Professionalism: Finding Your Fit

### Context

Professionalism is a catchall term that often translates as “needing to conform.” At times, this is absolutely true; there can be a need to conform in certain areas. Yet, exploring professionalism is also an opportunity to clarify what is being asked or expected of you in the workplace, how you intend to respond, why that response feels right to you, and whether and where compromises are possible or further conversation would be helpful.

- You have a right to be who you are and to express that identity as you see fit (gender expression, hair style/color, body art, etc.).
- Employers have a right to set professional expectations (schedules and punctuality, work assignments, dress code, appropriate language, etc.).
- When these two rights do not fully align, some kind of conversation should happen and usually does.
- Be open to and respectful of that conversation.

### Approaches and strategies

- Assess the work, the workplace culture, who you are (or intend to be), and how all of these come together.
- Reflect on the professional expectations of your workplace, consider the reasoning behind them, and assess where the responsibility for change or accommodation lies.
- Look for a path that allows you to successfully represent your workplace and yourself for who you are (or intend to be).
- Identify what opportunities for skill development this job or organization offers you and how can you take full advantage of that to position yourself for long-term success along a career path you are creating for yourself.

### Considerations and goals toward a more effective practice

- Identify a challenge or question around professionalism. Reflect on why you want to focus on this challenge or question and assess how best to address it.
- What is an aspect of professionalism you want to add to your practice? What will this change in practice look like? Sound like? Why is this change important for you to make?

