



**What Do We Mean By
"Professionalism"?**

Melanie Rowen, Associate Director for
Public Interest Programs, Berkeley Law
Alexia McCaskill, Title, University of
Colorado School of Law
Douglas Ebeling, Title, Schulte Roth &
Zabel LLP

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**Make Your Table a
Nametag Rainbow!**

(Try to ensure that people from diverse NALP
settings are represented.)

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Overview

- Some initial thoughts
- Small group exercises
- Workshopping a definition of professionalism

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Scenarios

- Overall question: How do you advise the person without communicating that they should mask or fundamentally change who they are?
- Jamboard for brainstorming: <https://tinyurl.com/muxxmu29>



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Scenario 1

You are meeting with the partners of a practice group in your law firm to discuss feedback for each associate in the group. You notice that when the discussion turns to individual women attorneys, the idea of "confidence" seems to come up often.

For example, female associates are said to "need to be more self-confident" or "demonstrate more confidence in their abilities" or "speak with more confidence." When discussing the male associates, the word "confidence" almost never comes up. This comment comes from both male and female partners.

What do you think is causing the disparity? How do you raise this with the partners at the meeting? What steps can you take to affirmatively address the cultural issues at play here?

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Scenario 2

In August, you meet with Kyra, a Black 2L woman. Kyra says she enjoyed her 1L summer in BigLaw, made friends with other summers in her cohort, and received an offer to return next summer.

Kyra says that in her midsummer review and exit interview, the feedback praised her work but expressed concern about whether she was a good fit for the firm's culture. An unnamed partner suggested that Kyra would benefit from coaching to soften her edges and tone down her personality.

Kyra asks for guidance from you and wonders if you would talk with the firm's recruiter/associate liaison to gain insight into this feedback.

How do you counsel Kyra? How do you approach your conversation with the firm contact?

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Scenario 3

After a long remote period, your firm has begun a return to the office. The more traditionalist partners seek to resume office life just as it existed before. A situation arises between a partner and a junior associate.

Pre-pandemic, the associate's office attire tended to the business casual standard of dress trousers, dress shirt, and short haircut that was common among male associates. During the pandemic he grew his hair to shoulder length (he sometimes wears it in a ponytail), his clothing has become more colorful and trend-setting, and he has an earring.

The partner has told him he should have a more conservative appearance for client meetings. The partner has asked him to cut his hair, and even made an appointment for the associate at his barber.

How do you mediate this situation so that their working relationship is not impaired? What do you advise the partner? How do you discuss this with the associate?

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Our working definition of professionalism

What is professionalism really about for us?
Using the concepts and values that came up in the hypos, what feels most significant?



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Articles/Resources:

1. "The Ongoing Quest to Teach Professionalism," by Traci Mundy Jenkins, and "What Does a Lawyer Look Like?" by Nikki Harris, February 2022 NALP Bulletin+
2. ["The Bias of Professionalism Standards,"](#) Aysa Gray, Stanford Social Innovation Review
3. ["Perspectives: Attire for Non-Binary Legal Professionals,"](#) Jose Bahamonde-Gonzalez and Melanie Rowen, December 2020 NALP+ Bulletin
4. ["What We Lose When Work Gets Too Casual,"](#) Elizabeth Spiers, The New York Times
5. [NALP Non-Binary Resources](#)