

Polishing *your* Professional Presence



Powerful insights and skills emphasized in the UW Foster Technology Management MBA Program



Think differently.
Make a difference.
It's the Washington Way

60 seconds or less



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You've probably heard the saying, "you don't get a second chance to make a first impression." It doesn't take a lot of time for that first impression to be formed.

60 seconds or less.

How can you be sure that you will make a favorable impression? The truth is you can't be sure, but there are a few things you can practice to boost your chances of a memorable and positive first impression.

One thing we emphasize to University of Washington Foster Technology Management MBA (TMMBA) students — while it is extremely important to develop strong business acumen, strategic thinking and leadership skills, it is equally important to have effective communication and inter-personal skills, even basic business etiquette, to stand out in today's job market.

These "soft skills" are often sought out by employers in addition to qualifications. Therefore, TMMBA incorporates these skills into the curriculum and student experience so that students polish their professional presence with networking connections, colleagues and employers.

TMMBA suggests these five fundamentals for polishing your professional presence and standing out from the crowd:

- 1. Create (and practice) your elevator speech**
- 2. Gain awareness of communication signals you send to others**
- 3. Dress for success**
- 4. Become savvy on basic business etiquette**
- 5. Enhance your online professional presence using LinkedIn**

1 Create (and Practice) Your Elevator Speech

When attending networking events or talking with people who don't know you, the question, "what do you do?" will come up. This is an excellent opportunity to establish a professional presence with someone that might be able to help you in your career.

Your elevator speech is your value proposition — it conveys who you are, what you are looking for and how you can benefit an organization. If you are looking to make a career change, think of yourself as a product. What benefits do you provide? Why would someone want you over someone else? Your speech must convey this in ideally 30 seconds or less.

Sample of an elevator speech. Notice its brevity and how it flows.

My name is Pat Smith and I am a walking encyclopedia on all things marketing. I differentiate companies by creating and executing marketing communications and campaigns that allow them to sell more products and services to their customers (and make more money). I understand online and social media and how it can positively impact a company's bottom line. I am seeking a position as a Product Marketing Manager and am open to consulting.

TIPS YOU CAN USE:

- **Know your audience.** Before writing your elevator speech, spend time researching your audience. This is especially beneficial if you are targeting a particular industry or company.
- **Know yourself.** Define exactly what you have to offer, what problems you can solve and what benefits you bring. Be honest with yourself. Authenticity is powerful. Spending time on this will go a long way to convincing others of your value. Your key strengths? Adjectives that describe you? What do you want to "sell" to others? What contributions can you make? Why do you want to work for a particular company or industry?

If you are looking to make a career change, think of yourself as a product.

- **Develop an opening statement.** Put on your creative hat or pull some trusted friends together to help you. An opening statement is an attention-grabber that will pique someone's interest. It shouldn't be confusing or so clever that it becomes cheesy.

- **Put it all together.** Now that you have your opening statement you can back that up with the benefits you offer. The example provided is roughly 72 words (fewer than 100 is optimal) or 30 seconds in length. While your speech can be slightly longer or shorter, the goal is to hold their attention. Remember K.I.S.S. or keep it short and simple. If they want more information, they'll ask.

- **Practice, practice, practice.** Practice with your friends or family members so you feel good about your pace and enthusiasm and it sounds natural. Feeling natural and genuine will give you a lot of mileage. Try it out at a networking event or informational meeting. If it didn't feel exactly right just re-evaluate and practice some more.

In the UW TMMBA Program:

At the start of the TMMBA Program, students create and practice their elevator speech. This outline will help get you started, but if you are looking for an excellent resource try *Give Your Elevator Speech A Lift! How to craft your own 30-second commercial* by Lorraine Howell. Lorraine is a lecturer in Professional Communications for the UW Foster TMMBA Program as well as an accomplished and well-respected management consultant.

2. Gain Awareness of Communication Signals You Send to Others

Have you ever felt like you were not effectively communicating with colleagues, direct reports or your management team? Polish your professional presence by assessing and continually being aware of signals you send while communicating. The more you know yourself in these areas the better off you'll be when building existing relationships and forging new professional ties.

While the words you use are important, they play a small part in how your message is interpreted. Consider the short list of communication signals listed below. Can you recall a time when these signals spoke louder than the message you were hearing?

Eye contact

Facial expressions

Grammar

Volume

Tone

Rate of speech

Hygiene

Use of space

Arm gestures

Attire

Your communication style is not what you say, but how you say it. We have already established that first impressions are made very quickly and by polishing how you say things (the signals you send) you will boost the probability that your interactions will be positive.

TIPS YOU CAN USE:

• **Solicit feedback from close friends or colleagues about positive and negative signals you may be sending.** Be prepared for surprises!

And be open. They may have positive things to say, but also a few hard-hitting criticisms you might find hard to swallow. You might be told that you have a contagious laugh that puts everyone at ease, but then also hear that your cologne or perfume is a bit much at times. This feedback will only help you and who better to give it than someone who cares about you and your future.

• **Learn to read nonverbal cues.** Mastering the skill of reading the room and those around you is critical in making a good impression. Nonverbal cues such as someone repeatedly glancing at their watch or continually looking around the room might indicate that you are talking too much or bemoaning a point for too long. It might take a little practice, but when you are committed to this aspect of your professional presence, self-awareness and sensitivity to others will become second nature.

• **Develop an understanding of various communication styles.** Think about the 7-10 colleagues that you work with on a regular basis. Are they all the same in the way they communicate, make decisions or deal with conflict? Chances are that there are a few similarities, a few differences and some or all are very different from you. To have a positive professional presence you need to effectively communicate with various styles and know how your style impacts others.

In the UW TMMBA Program:

As part of the Professional Communications course in the UW Foster TMMBA Program, students complete Success Signals by Rhonda Hilyer of Agreement Dynamics, Inc. Students learn about their communication style and signals as well as the other styles and signals that they interact with in their study groups at work and in networking situations.



3. Dress for Success

Don't judge a book by its cover. Does how you dress matter? When it comes to a professional presence and making a great first impression it can matter a great deal. How you dress can send signals about your self-confidence, expertise, credibility, commitment and more.

Companies in the Pacific Northwest range from very casual (pajamas — yes, pajamas!) to conservative (suit and tie), but on average the Pacific Northwest business culture tends to be relatively casual. Casual dress has its advantages; after all, you only need to invest in one wardrobe and ironing isn't mandatory. However, if you are looking to stand apart from the crowd you may want to resist conformity and evaluate if what you are wearing is sending the professional image you want others (potential employers or managers) to have of you.

TIPS YOU CAN USE:

- **Notice what people are wearing in upper management or in roles that you seek.** Look at those in your company as well as outside your company to get a good gauge as to what the baseline dress looks like.

- **Consider accessories.** Think about things like jewelry, handbags, briefcases, watches, etc. Too much jewelry can be distracting and perhaps detract from the professional image you seek to project. Also, take a look at the condition of your purse or briefcase. Are they tattered or visibly worn?



- **Attend business, industry or professional networking events.** Get out of your immediate work group and experience other professional settings to give you an idea of how to dress to impress others in your industry (i.e., tech sector) or line of work (i.e., design). Take note of the impressions you have and the professional signals that you receive at such events. Do you walk away inspired and motivated? Try on more professional clothes in other settings and see how you feel.

- **Seek free advice.** You can hire a personal stylist or image consultant for a fee or you can visit Macy's or Nordstrom and receive free advice and style consultations. This is especially helpful if you have never invested in professional attire or you are not particularly fond of shopping.

In the UW TMMBA Program:

TMMBA Career Services covers topics such as professional dress do's and don'ts as well as a number of other focused and relevant topics for UW Foster TMMBA students and alumni looking to enhance and advance their careers. These free events are part of the extensive portfolio of offering of the UW Foster TMMBA Career Services.

How you dress can send signals about your self-confidence, expertise, credibility, commitment and more.

4 Become Savvy on Basic Business Etiquette

Business etiquette includes everything from how to conduct a business meeting to how to introduce yourself and those around you to the ins and outs of a business meal to proper business communication. The more knowledge you have of proper business etiquette the more professional you will appear. Again, it is about standing apart from the crowd and making a good first and lasting impression that will give your professional presence a boost.

Ever sat down at a business or networking dinner and wondered what glass to use or which way to pass the bread? If so, you are not alone. Knowing meal etiquette will allow you to enter the situation with confidence and focus on the conversation rather than the stemware.

TIPS YOU CAN USE:

• **Observe “seasoned” and successful professionals around you.** As you seek to polish your professional presence one thing you should consider doing is observing how professionals you deem experienced, wise and well-respected behave. These folks have probably learned a thing or two in their professional lives and mirroring them may provide insights for your future interactions.

• **Start small.** Learning and practicing business etiquette techniques can be fun, but also daunting. Consider incorporating techniques little by little as situations come up. Here are several things you could do today to improve your business etiquette:

- Make eye contact when you shake someone’s hand.
- Be on time to meetings and events (even better — a few minutes early).

- Turn your cell phone off during meetings.
- Wear your name badge on the right side of your body.
- Don’t chew gum or eat in meetings.
- Always introduce the client first.
- Place your purse on the floor by your chair, never on the table.
- Remember that your bread plate is on the left and your drink is on the right.

In the UW TMMBA Program:

Incorporating proper business etiquette into your professional life is something that will leave a good and lasting impression. It provides a little something extra as you seek to distinguish your-self as a confident and well-rounded professional. The UW Foster TMMBA Program recognizes the importance of business etiquette and requires all students to attend an etiquette dinner led by a professional etiquette consultant at the start of the program.

It is about standing apart from the crowd and making a good first and lasting impression.



5 Enhance Your Online Professional Presence Using LinkedIn

Now that you are becoming more acquainted with ways to polish your professional presence in person, it is just as prudent to polish your professional presence online as well. Chances are you have a LinkedIn account and have started a profile. If you don't have a LinkedIn profile started it is worthwhile to do so. Why? It is the largest professional online database.

Recruiters, hiring managers, your colleagues, companies, networking groups, they are all on LinkedIn. Chances are they've already scoped you out. It is a place to find and be found, so be sure your online profile speaks favorably of you and leaves a good first and lasting impression.

TIPS YOU CAN USE:

- **Create a profile with a purpose.** This is a great place to incorporate your elevator speech. What better way to grab someone's attention than to start your profile with your opening statement? You'll also want to be sure that it is visually pleasing and that contains relevant keywords making it easily searchable. Have a complete profile that includes specialties, interests, accomplishments and, if possible, professional recommendations. This is your online resume. In today's tech-savvy world, an online resume is essential.

- **Post interesting content.** You have the opportunity to share insightful content via LinkedIn. What and how often you post will get noticed by many in your network, so be thoughtful about both. Remember to use LinkedIn as your professional online presence and not your social online presence. Know the distinction.

- **Participate in discussions or answer questions.** If (and only if) you have something of value to add to a discussion or you have an answer to questions posted, by all means take the opportunity to get your name and presence out to others. This is a great way to establish your professional expertise with a wider network of professionals.

- **Be mindful of your settings.** Depending on your privacy settings, you could be sharing a lot more than you think with your network. For example, if you are making a lot of changes to your profile you may want to change your profile settings such that updates are not posted to your network. While changes or updates to your profile might be positive overall, a parade of changes might be annoying or send a negative signal to those in your networks, especially if you are working and these changes are made during work hours.



In the UW TMMBA Program:

Susan Buysse, Senior Associate Director of UW Foster TMMBA Career Services creates and delivers free workshops covering LinkedIn and other professional and career communication tools for students and alumni. For more information on the free career services and resources available to students and alumni please visit the TMMBA website at foster.washington.edu/tmmba.

LinkedIn is the largest professional online database.

Start today!

Polishing your professional presence can set you apart from the crowd and put forth the message and signals you want people to receive about you. By investing some time incorporating and practicing the five elements in this guide you can ensure a positive first and lasting impression (in less than 60 seconds). **A great first impression can pay back dividends in your career.**

1. **Create (and practice) your elevator speech.**
2. **Gain awareness of communication signals you may send to others.**
3. **Dress for success.**
4. **Become savvy on basic business etiquette.**
5. **Enhance your professional online presence using LinkedIn.**



foster.washington.edu/tmmba

About the UW Foster Technology Management MBA Program

The 18-month Technology Management MBA (TMMBA) Program is one of Foster's three options for working professionals who want to earn an MBA. Designed for people who are passionate about technology and entrepreneurship, the program offers a comprehensive business management curriculum which an emphasis on innovation and leadership. Modeled on an Executive MBA format, students benefit from a full range of support and services.

Classes take place at the Eastside Executive Center in Kirkland, where TMMBA students learn from UW Foster faculty who are thought leaders in their fields. Earning a Foster MBA from the TMMBA Program, you'll learn alongside talented peers and join an extensive network of high-caliber professionals and innovators from around the world.

TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT MBA

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