



POLISHING YOUR PROFESSIONAL PRESENCE

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

FOSTER
Technology
Management MBA

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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 increase your odds of making a favorable first impression? For starters, don't shortchange the "soft skills" simply because we live in an increasingly data-driven world.

While it is essential to develop strong business acumen, analytical capabilities and leadership skills, it is equally important to have effective communication and interpersonal skills. An understanding of business etiquette, including competence in other cultures, is another way to stand out from the crowd.

The Foster School's relationship with business leaders informs what we emphasize in the program. Strong soft skills lead to successful job performance. In the TMMBA Program students develop their soft skills in the classroom, during career workshops, in case competitions and on a global study tour. Students graduate with a polished professional presence that prepares them to successfully develop networking connections, influence colleagues and attract 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 meaningful connection 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.

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. When speaking to a recruiter, target the organization's specific interests and needs. Frame your skills in terms familiar to your audience; don't make them translate your experience.
- **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?
- **Less can be more.** A 30-second elevator pitch should be fewer than 100 words in length. While your speech can be slightly longer or shorter, the goal is to hold your listener's attention. Keep it short and simple (K.I.S.S.)—if they want more, they'll ask.
- **Begin with a strong opening statement that will hook your audience.** Put on your creative hat and pull together some trusted friends to help you. An opening statement is an attention-grabber that will pique someone's interest. It shouldn't be too long, 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. Build in keywords, industry-specific qualifications and job-specific skills; but avoid jargon. Finish your pitch by stating your desired goal or outcome. Once you have developed a working statement, review it out loud to ensure it has a conversational, personal, and friendly tone.
- **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:

As part of the UW Foster TMMBA Program, students create and practice delivering their elevator speech. Each student receives constructive feedback from others in their class, as well as personal coaching on how to improve the content and delivery. A well-done elevator speech can differentiate you from others as you network for your next role.

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

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. By polishing how you say things and the signals you send, you increase the probability for positive interactions.

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, students complete a Success Signals training to explore their communication style and how it is received by their peers. Students also learn to identify the styles and signals of others, creating more effective work relationships both within their study groups and their work environments.

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 (e.g. tech sector) or line of work (e.g. graphic 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:

To set you up for success, TMMBA Career Management incorporates professional attire into a variety of job search and job success workshops throughout the program. It is important to remember to dress for the role you want, not the role you have, as you seek to advance your career.

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

A smiling woman with long blonde hair, wearing a grey blazer over a yellow top, is looking towards the right. In the background, another person with glasses is partially visible, and a person in a blue patterned shirt is standing. The scene appears to be a professional or business environment.

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● Become Savvy on Basic Business Etiquette

Business etiquette includes everything from how to conduct a business meeting to how to make proper introductions. From the ins and outs of a business meal to the intricacies of modern 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:

Business etiquette awareness and practice will distinguish you as a confident, considerate, and polished professional. During the TMMBA Program students have the opportunity to attend a business etiquette workshop that incorporates dining etiquette.

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, let's not forget about your LinkedIn profile. You already know LinkedIn is a powerful networking and career advancement tool, but you may not realize how to optimize your profile. Did you know that users with 'complete' profiles are 40 times more likely to receive opportunities through LinkedIn? A complete profile includes industry and location, current position, two past positions, your education, your skills (minimum of three), a photo, and at least 50 connections.

TIPS YOU CAN USE:

- **Wait! Before you start...** If you're making several changes to your profile, turn off your activity broadcasts so you don't overwhelm your contacts with updates. To do this, click your photo, then Privacy & Settings/Choose whether or not to share your profile edits. Make sure this option is turned off. You can return and check the box when you're happy with your changes and additions.
- **Write an effective headline.** Choose 2-4 succinct, jargon-free phrases or keywords (separated by commas or vertical lines) that convey your personal brand and are well suited to the direction you want to go. It doesn't have to be your current job title, particularly if you are hoping to pivot in your career.
- **Don't be cliché.** The 10 most globally overused profile buzzwords in the past year are: Specialized, Leadership, Passionate, Strategic, Experienced, Focused, Expert, Certified, Creative, and Excellent.
- **Use the right photo.** You don't want the casual shot you use on Facebook representing you on LinkedIn. Get a professional headshot: high-res, clear lighting, with a close crop. Wear professional attire, use a pleasant background and offer a friendly expression. Your photo really personalizes your content and makes you more memorable.
- **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.

LinkedIn is the largest professional online database.

In the UW TMMBA Program:

The TMMBA Career Management team creates and delivers a variety of workshops that help students develop and deliver a professional online presence. A polished LinkedIn profile could mean the difference between the cubicle and the corner office. You will learn the best practices and strategies for creating a LinkedIn presence that attracts and maximizes your exposure to hiring managers.



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.

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2. Gain awareness of communication signals you may send to others.
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About the UW Foster Technology Management MBA Program

The 18-month Technology Management MBA (TMMBA) Program is one of Foster's four 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 with 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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