

**I say** .. Why am I spending my time writing about something that is non-technical? Don't I have better things to do?

**You say** .. Don't you have better things to do than write this boring 'soft stuff'? Is this going to be assessed?

**I am doing this because** ..... if someone had told me about such things 30 years ago then there would have been far less bumps in the road to navigate. These hints are the simple things of your life that will allow you to achieve so much more in your professional careers. They will provide you with the competitive edge.

University presents many opportunities for students to hone their life and academic skills. The outcomes that students are most concerned about usually revolve around "grades" and how to achieve high ones. This is a reasonable expectation; however, students who focus solely on grades are missing several major aspects of their education and professional development.

Let me list the sub-text of your professional lives by means of the themes that I have actively focused on throughout this subject/unit/course.

### **Hint 1: Most of life is attending it**

Attending lectures, on time and every time, should be the highest priority of your life at University. Your expectation for high achievement cannot be met if you do not attend. Just turning up and taking up a seat should be the easiest part of your life. The next part of "attending" is actually being awake, taking notes and participating in active learning over this 50 minute period.

Attending also implies that you must check your class web site and e-mail accounts at least once in every 24 hour period; and as a professional this would imply a 7-day week. Attending also means coming to the tutorials and the practicals.

### **Hint 2: Marks are just one part of the story**

Achieving a mark and a grade is only one aspect of attending a subject/course. (And, in my opinion it is not the major outcome.) What you can learn most in a subject/course is not just content, but you can also learn about (i) how to give (or how not to give) a presentation, (ii) understand the fine points of the subject, (iii) work with your peers, (iv) discover those areas of science and engineering that really interest you, and, maybe, (v) how to pick the brains of your lecturer so that you can improve.

### **Hint 3: E-mail etiquette**

E-mail has become a means of mis-communication. A University instructor should not be sent an e-mail as you would to one of your peers. A University instructor should be treated as you would a potential employer. Thus, unless you are advised otherwise by the individual, be quite

formal in your English expression and tone, use a spell checker and, above all, make sure that you do not ramble.

Students e-mail me for various reasons. The tone of some e-mails is lacking in professionalism. Let me repeat some of these and add my comments.

The message you sent requires that you verify that you are a real live human being and not a spam source.

[This person has turned on a spam filter for this course. The student expects that the instructor will go through a process and verify that he/she is a real person. Imagine if the lecturer had to do this for 100+ students?]

I would like to be placed in group A as i have class committments during other times.

[The above was the complete message, with no salutation or sign-off. It comes complete with typographical errors.]

I dont have Adobe professional, so I cant convert to pdf. I'm sure I could acquire it quite easily (maybe not legally), but if msword 2003 works fine then I'd rather just use that. I'd say that this is an issue with most people, because as students we rarely have to convert things to pdf.

[The obvious comment concerns the poor English expression and punctuation.]

I have no idea how to nor do I have a program with which to write a pdf file. If I do I do not have knowledge of how this works.

[The obvious comment concerns the poor English expression and punctuation. The tone of this e-mail is also quite brusque.]

What does this mean in the prac grouping pdf file? Why am I unknown? Did we have to sign up for pracs for this subject? The Class Signup page does not suggest this.

[This was the complete message. In reality this student had ignored Hint 1 about attending life. The student compounded his non-attendance by asking a redundant question in a quite rude fashion.]

In summary, for Hint #3 I would like to paraphrase the common phrase “You are what you eat”. In your professional life “You are what you write.” Thus, make every communication serve a distinct purpose since every sentence that you write will reflect back onto you.

#### **Hint 4: Two important words for success: “Please”, “Thanks”**

Expressing courtesy and gratitude, as well as smiling and not frowning, can go a long way to making “a connection” to your peers and University Instructors. Thus, you should demonstrate a sincere respect towards all individuals and this will often be reciprocated.

The same hint is valid in your professional life and interactions. Courtesy will go a long way to helping you do your job. It is sometimes quite difficult to be courteous under some environments and work situations; however, my advice is to try very hard so that your own standards of civility are not artificially lowered by others. Remember: People will always throw back at you the swearing and cursing rather than the situation and particular circumstances that created it.

**Hint 5: Create a study group**

The aim is, simply, to elevate the quality of the learning environment. You can each do this by learning off others in your course/subject. Find or form a group of colleagues who you get on with and organize a study group. The group could be from 3 to 5 people. Meet somewhere on campus in a professional setting (that is, not in a social context where you are “having a drink”); have a set agenda such as working through a certain book chapter or problem set; then have a regular meeting time so that you all get together for a few hours. You can use the study group to work through problems together and learn together.

In your professional lives your study group will be an engineering team; thus, the skills that you learn during your formal university life will be quite rewarding throughout your professional careers.

**Hint 6: The shoe is on the other foot**

Just before you voice a complaint or a concern, you should do the following.

1. Test your concern off colleagues, for instance your study group, to make sure that you have not misunderstood the dynamics of the situation. It could be that you have made a simple error in judgment.
2. Phrase your question in a simple, non-confrontational fashion and take note of using Hint #4.
3. Be prepared to offer an appropriate solution if you are asked; that is, come prepared so that you have examined alternatives.
4. Imagine how you would react if “the shoe was on the other foot”; that is if there was a role reversal in this specific situation.

You will find, as I have, that this simple process helps you achieve the resolution of the concern that best suits your needs.

**Hint 7: Enjoy study: “Become infected: Infect others”**

Enjoy study, enjoy your work, and infect others with a positive approach within your professional sphere. You will find that things will happen more quickly and will less inertia.

I know that this sounds corny. However think about it and practice it; then your study and your future job will be so much easier.

**Hint 8: Avoid “the McDonald’s syndrome”**

At McDonald’s “you can have it your way every day”. Within your professional environment, for a large variety of reasons, this may not be possible. There are going to be times where your common sense does not fit in with a corporate culture or a particular manager’s way of doing business. You may never be able to change this; thus, do not spin your wheels by wasting energy and moving nowhere. Instead, use these energies to do your job as best and ethically possible.

Of course there are similar analogies with regard to your university life where you may not be able to get things going your way. My advice would be not to dwell on it, but to get on with the job of learning and understanding.

#### **Hint 9: The half live of an engineer is 4 years**

In other words, after 4-years you will probably be performing more management duties than hard core engineering. Thus, the so-called “soft skills” will become more dominant and be needed immediately after graduation.

You should work on all skills during your university career so that you can jump into action upon graduation as a more rounded professional.

#### **Hint 10: Join a professional society**

A Professional Society can be thought of as an extended study group (see Hint #5). You, or in many instances your company, will pay good money to join a society. The benefits are many. You will (i) gain access to the most current information in your professional field, (ii) you will interact with your peers and managers, (iii) you will network across many fields of engineering, and (iv) you will, potentially, find a new job when you think that it is time to move on.

In short, joining a Professional Society is like an insurance policy for your future.

#### **Hint 11: “You are how you talk”**

Let me explain. First impressions do count. Thus, if you come across as being ill-spoken, rude and full of expletives; then that is how you will be judged for a long time thereafter. Learn and practice good grammar in your spoken English (or French, or German etc.); say what you want to say and then keep quiet; let people finish their discussion without interruptions; and do not mimic the poor behavior of others who may be cursing and swearing. In other words, pay very careful attention to your behavior since that is what people will remember.

As an exercise try to quantify how many ‘uhms’, ‘errs’, ‘basicallys’, ‘you know what I means’ you say in your day-to-day discussions .. and then try to reduce them since then you have more clarity of thought.

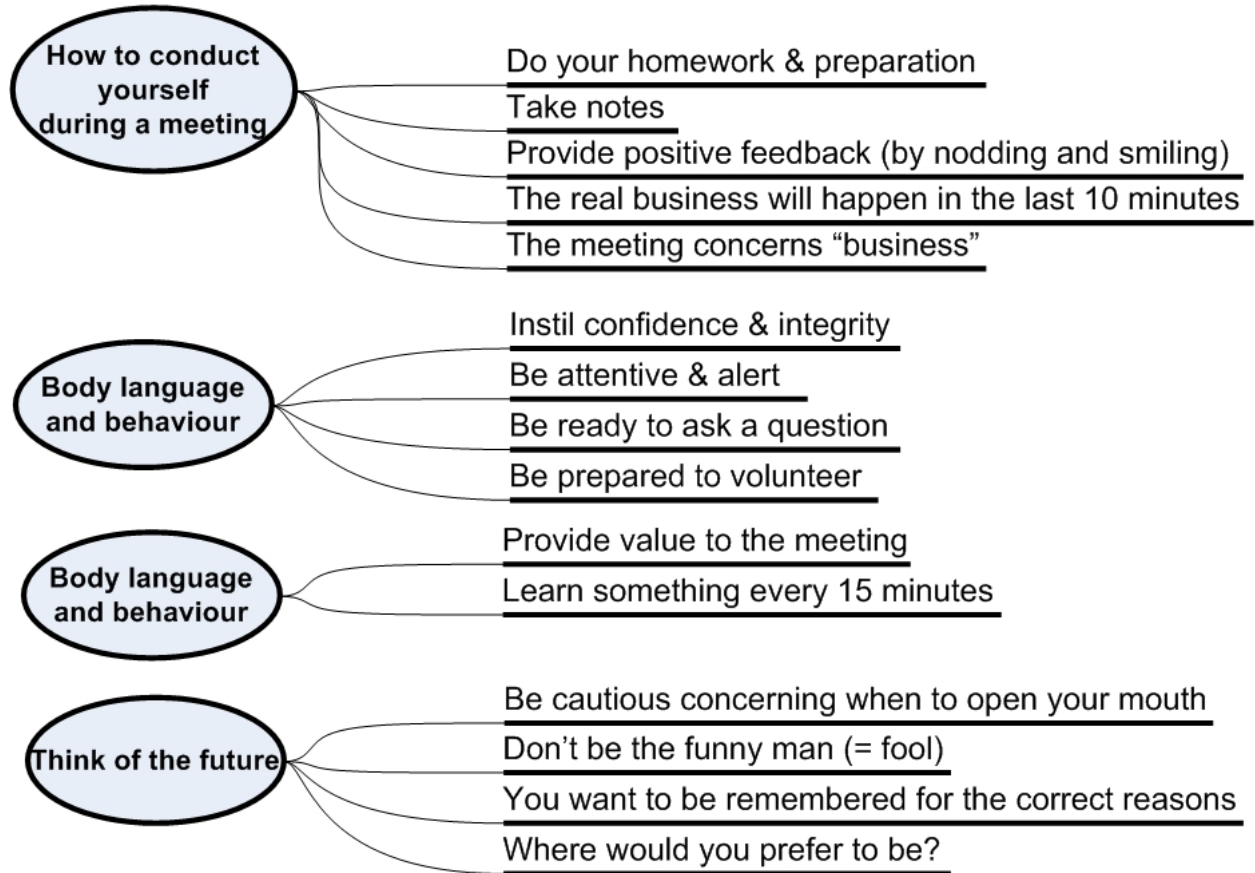
#### **Hint 12: We all have bosses**

It might seem an obvious statement. The point is that it is best to listen and learn rather than get upset because you don’t agree with some action, process or thought. There may be an extra dimension of the discussion that you do not understand.

.....more to come

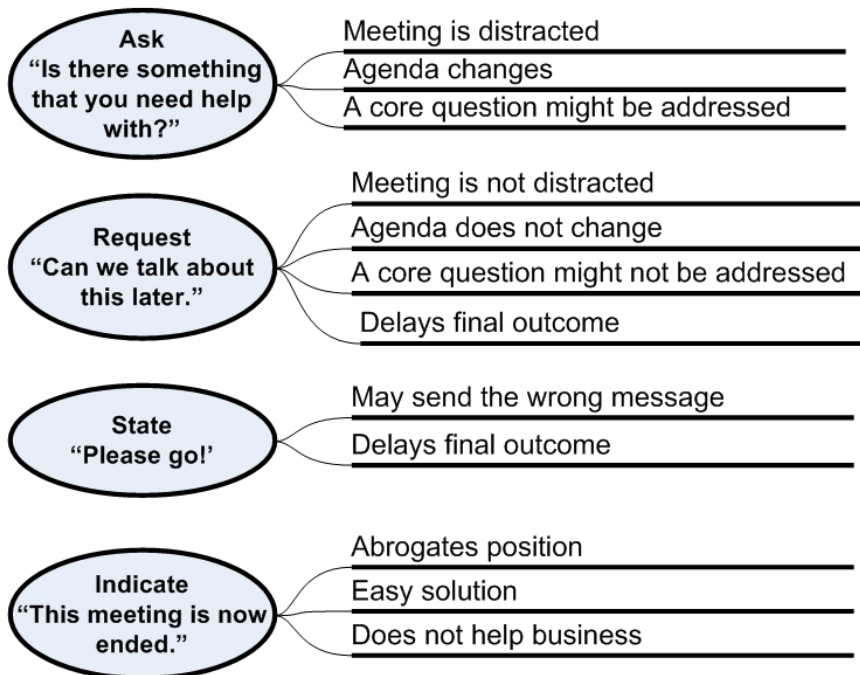
.... **suggestions welcome!**

## Professional Behaviour during Meetings



## Options and Outcomes

Purpose: To have a system and process whereby business can be happen.



Which of these options is most preferable?