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## Professionalism in Residential Appraisal

By Bill King

A frequent concern I hear expressed by residential appraisers is the lack of professional regard many feel is extended them by other professions and the public. Appraisers tell me they are frustrated because they are not regarded for their skill and talent. I often find myself asking: "have you been acting like a professional?" What is it that we have been doing or failing to do that inspires such an apparent lack of regard? There are two basic areas that I think we need to look at in order to improve our professional image: appearance and conduct. This article focuses on appearance.

Maintaining a professional appearance has a lot to do with obvious things like dressing appropriately and being well groomed, but it also extends to things like a well thought out business card, business name, and the tools we use in the field. For many of the people whose homes we enter, this will be one of the few times they will have direct contact with a real estate appraisal professional. What message are we sending if we look more like we came to fix a leaking toilet than to value their largest asset? Within my firm we have a dress code that includes things like no blue jeans, shorts, t-shirts or baseball hats when out viewing someone's home. My experience has been that no matter how many different ways I have explained that I am independent of the financial institution that ordered the appraisal, not long after leaving, I am "that guy from the bank". In the eyes of the homeowner, I am an extension of my client and I believe I have a duty to my client to protect their professional standing with their customer.

What does your car say about you? A clean car is also part of the professional appearance. Think about the last time you saw a dirty UPS or FedEx truck. There is a garbage hauling company that requires the driver to carry car wash equipment with them so if they get dirty in the morning, they be clean again for the afternoon pick-ups. I don't think we need to wash our cars every few hours, but certainly maintaining a clean car helps convey a positive impression. Big fancy cars are not required, just clean ones. Some years ago, I pulled up in front of a modest house in my shiny European sedan and realized that my car probably cost more than their home. I was somewhat embarrassed and subsequently sold that car.

In our role as independent, impartial and unbiased third parties to a lending or purchase transaction, I have found it to be important that I not convey my own preferences or inclinations in the way I present myself. I think it is particularly important to keep our cars from becoming billboards for what we think the environment ought to be like, who should be governor or president, or conveying our position on anything that might be controversial. Those who know me know that I am a big baseball fan. In 1995 when Seattle was at risk of losing the Mariners, I worked the phones, lobbied local leaders and generally got involved in the effort to get a new ballpark built and keep the team in town. A lot of people in the campaign got license plates with the team logo on them, and I elected not to get one. During that period, I did an appraisal of a nice home in the country

and the homeowner came out to the car to meet me when I arrived. She went on to tell me in some detail why she opposed the new stadium, and that she was refinancing so she could pay attorney fees needed to fight the stadium effort (her business was relocated because of the stadium). I no longer remember how my appraisal matched up with her needs or expectations, but it is hard for me to imagine how much different that visit might have been if there had been Mariner logos on my license plates. It isn't that we should not have views on issues or that we should not be able to root for the home team, but we should keep it out of our day to day appraisal activities.

Things like our business cards, web sites, and company brochures also make more of a statement than we realize. A professionally designed and printed business card is a small expense but one that is well worth the investment. Lots of colors and cartoon figures add to the cost and subtract from the image. If you have a company logo, by all means include it, but stick figures and anything intended to be cute or funny should be left out. Your business card should have your name, designation, company name, address, phone, web address and e-mail. Much more than that and it gets too cluttered. I also think it is important to keep the card simple so the font can be large enough to read without a magnifying glass.

There are many occasions when an appraiser may need to provide a photograph of him or her self. Many appraisers put their picture on their web site or other marketing materials. Photos are often requested to accompany a news story or press release. Use a professional photograph and dress well for the photo. Don't try to be someone you aren't, but try not to submit something that looks like it came from one of those self serve photo booths at the mall. Remember that the purpose for the photo is to present yourself to colleagues and customers as a skilled and trained professional, not to get you a spot in "The Dating Game".

Professional regard is something we must earn on an ongoing basis. There is no point when we are finished establishing ourselves as professional and become free to lower our standards. Being aware of our image and taking pride in our professional appearance says a lot without saying a word. In the next article, we will take a look at professional conduct.

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