**The Uncommon Professional**

*The only certain measure of success is to render more and better service than is expected of you.*

*Og Mandino*

I went to the dark end of the inventory shelves, pressed my forehead against the wall and indulged myself in a few moments of quiet despair. Was this the way it would be for the rest of my life? Here I was, two years out of school, working at yet another mindless, low-pay, dead-end job. Up to this point, I had avoided the question by just not thinking about it, but now, for some reason, the awful possibility had come crashing down on me. The thought sucked every bit of energy from my body. I clocked out sick, went home to bed, pulled the covers over my head, and tried to forget about tomorrow and all the tomorrows that would follow.

By morning I was a little more composed, but no less depressed. Listlessly, I went back to work and resumed my hopeless drudgery.

There were several new guys on the job that morning, temporary workers even lower on the totem pole than I was. One of them caught my eye. He was older than the others, and wearing a uniform. The company didn’t issue uniforms; in fact, the company didn’t care what you wore as long as you showed up. But this guy was decked out in smartly pressed tan trousers and work shirt, complete with his name, Jim, embroidered on the pocket. I guess he supplied himself with the uniform.

I watched him all that day and the rest of the days he worked with us. He was never late or early. He worked at a steady, unhurried pace. He was friendly to everyone he worked with, but rarely talked while he was working. He took the designated breaks at midmorning and afternoon with everyone else, but unlike many others, he never lingered past the allotted time.

At lunchtime, some of the crew brown-bagged it, although most of us got our meals and drinks from the vending machines. Jim didn’t do either. He ate his lunch from an old-fashioned steel lunch box and drank his coffee from a Thermos bottle-both of them well worn with use. Sometimes people would be a little careless about cleaning up after they ate. Jim’s place at the table was spotless, and, of course, he was always back on the line exactly on time. He wasn’t just odd, he was outstanding – admirable!

He was the kind of worker managers dreamed of. Despite that, the other workers liked him, too. He didn’t try to show anybody up. He did what was asked of him, no more, no less. He didn’t gossip or complain or argue. He just did the job-common labor with more personal dignity than you would believe was possible with this kind of low-level, grunt work.

His attitude and every action proclaimed that he was a professional. Labor might be common; he wasn’t.

When the temporary work was finished, Jim left for another job, but the impression he made on me didn’t. I even thought I had never talked to him; he turned my head completely around. I did the best I could to follow his example.

I didn’t buy a lunch box or a uniform, but I did start setting my own standards. I worked like a businessman fulfilling a contract, just the way Jim had done. To my great surprise, the managers noticed my new productivity and promoted me. A few years later, I promoted myself to a better-paying job with a different company. And so it went. Eventually, many companies and many years later, I started a business of my own.

Whatever success I’ve had has been the result of hard work and good luck, but I think the biggest part of my luck was the lesson I learned from Jim so long ago. Respect doesn’t come from the kind of work you do; it comes from the way you do the work.

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