

HOW TO GET A GOOD REPUTATION AMONG YOUR CLASSMATES IN BUSINESS SCHOOL: THE REPUTATION YOU CREATE TODAY WILL AFFECT YOU TOMORROW



Summary: Getting a good reputation among your classmates in business school will affect your future reputation and career prospects. Learn how to do this today.

"It is better to keep your mouth shut and let people wonder if you are a fool, than to open your mouth and erase all doubt." – Mark Twain

Unfortunately, following Mark Twain's advice is easier said than done. Every year, thousands of professionals enroll in business schools to earn master's degrees in business administration and while there, forget how important it is to make a good impression. As a second-year M.B.A. student, I've seen classmates who are clueless about the importance of being a cooperative team player, dominate class discussion time and behave badly in after-hours social situations. They overlook the fact that business etiquette is just as important in graduate school as it is in the workplace. M.B.A. programs are great places to make professional connections and uncover lucrative opportunities. However, less-than-stellar campus behavior may haunt graduates in their professional lives.

Why does making the right impression matter? Because in a tight job market, who you know is just as important as what you know. The people you meet in graduate school could very well be the same folks with whom you end up working. Therefore, you want to make sure that your colleagues remember you for your strengths and not for your "problem" moments, like the time you drank too much or hit on someone's fiancée. Here are some tips to help you avoid common faux pas and behave like a savvy professional:

1. **Pay attention to your image.** Business schools are akin to small villages where everyone knows everyone and news spreads fast. Reputations are built and ruined the same way -- open your mouth, and anything you say may be used for or against you. I've seen first- and second-year M.B.A. students butt heads with classmates on a regular basis and develop reputations as difficult people. Make sure that people know you for your strengths and not for your faults. Making the right impression both on and off campus will pay off as you progress in your career. Your former teammates will remember your professionalism when they are putting together management teams for their own companies or come across positions that may be a good fit for your skills.
2. **Watch out for red flags.** You may not know that your behavior is a problem until troubling situations recur. For instance, your first team project may be a disaster. You may find that you can't agree with your team members on anything. The scene may repeat in another project, then another, and soon it might become a theme for all of your team assignments. It is probably time to start examining your behavior. Twice can be a coincidence, but three times could mean the problem just might be you. Ask your team members for feedback about working with you to identify your problem. You may seem too stubborn to others. Being flexible is one way to counter this image and establish a better working relationship with your teammates. This will hone your team-building skills and leadership abilities, two attributes sought by recruiters.
3. **Keep it brief.** While class participation is a great way to share knowledge and can make the difference between an A and B grade, many M.B.A. students know plenty of hyper Joes and Janes who take up most of class time trying to win participation points. If you must share your decades of experience or ask several questions, keep it brief. Recognize that the more you talk, the less other students can share. In the process, you miss some great learning opportunities. Be considerate of your fellow students' time outside of class as well. Being late for team meetings or not doing your share of work shows a lack of professionalism. When in doubt, use a simple rule: Treat others the way you wish to be treated.
4. **Networking after-hours.** A good way to network with your peers is at social events or the local pub. These occasions allow you to connect with people you otherwise might not meet and get to know them on a personal basis. Plus, the person with whom you are talking might even be a potential employer. This possibility often is lost on students who drink too much and then behave badly. You don't need an M.B.A. to know that problem partiers too often allow their personal lives to negatively affect their professional endeavors.

It's unlikely that one bad episode at a bar or in the classroom will render lifelong career damage, but remember that if your classmates don't care for your boorish behavior, your work colleagues likely won't stand for it, either. Business school offers many opportunities to connect with people who can help you advance your career if you make a good impression, so make each interaction count. Business school means business, and it pays to be on your best behavior no matter what the situation.