



Book Report:
Maister's *True Professionalism*

Sometimes a classic deserves a revisit. Such is the case with David H. Maister's *True Professionalism: The Courage to Care About Your People, Your Clients, and Your Career*.

A former professor at the Harvard Business School, Maister has enjoyed a storied career as a consultant to professional service firms. In this book, he challenges readers to answer a central question: "What is true professionalism?"

Some Key Takeaways:

Clients — A central theme of the book is that true professionals are in business because they want to help people — specifically, their clients. Maister's definition of professionalism is "an unqualified dedication to excellence in serving clients."

Business development — Continuing on that thought is Maister's assertion that business development isn't about selling. Rather, it's about helping people you respect and whose problems are meaningful to you.

Enjoyable work — Maister encourages the reader to consider the "radical" idea that work should be enjoyable and, if it is, success will come from doing it well and with sincere caring.

Professionalism — Maister contends that being a professional is not about developing a set of competencies — it's predominantly about having the right attitude. In other words, "a real professional is a technician who cares."

Flawed recruiting — Maister points out that firms don't typically hire "real professionals" because their recruiting process is flawed and they don't screen for it. Real professionalism is about attitudes and even character, Maister holds, advising us to "hire for attitude, train for skills."

The power of principles — Maister holds that the work environment (i.e., how employees are managed and how their coworkers act) often suppresses people's desire to act professionally. He contends that principles (or values) are the most effective management tools a firm can use. "Successful firms are differentiated not by their different goals, clever strategies or special managerial tactics — these are all remarkably similar worldwide. Successful firms are clearly differentiated by a strict adherence to values, i.e., to professionalism."