

21st Century Skills for Workplace Success

The Workplace Readiness Curriculum is based on a 3-1/2 year research study which detailed the views of 500 employers regarding skill needs for entry-level jobs requiring less than a four-year college degree. The curriculum is organized into 13 areas including both soft skills and academic skills.

- Reading Skills
- Math Skills
- Writing Skills
- Speaking and Listening Skills
- Computer Literacy
- Understanding the “Big Picture”
- Reasoning, Problem-Solving and Decision Making
- Work Ethic
- Positive Attitude
- Independence and Initiative
- Self Presentation
- Attendance
- Team Member

The curriculum includes an introduction to each content area, skill lessons, PowerPoint presentations and formative assessment items. The curriculum is based on the same standards as NOCTI’s 21st Century Skills for Workplace Success assessment.



Review the 21st Century Skills for Workplace Success assessment blueprint by visiting:

www.nocti.org

Click on the “Blueprints” icon on the bottom of the page.

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Section 8

Demonstrating a Strong Work Ethic

Introduction

by William S. Jackson, Jr.

An *ethic* is a set of moral principles. The word derives from the Greek *ethos*, which means “the spirit or attitudes of a community, people, or system.” Applying *work ethic* as a modifier, suggests that *work ethic* is an attitude of a person or group toward what constitutes the moral principles governing work.

Throughout most of human history, work had been associated with pain, sacrifice, and drudgery. The Greek word for work is *ponos*, which means “pain.” For the Hebrews as well as for the medieval Christians, the unpleasantness of work was associated with divine punishment for man’s sin. The Protestant ethic maintained that work was a sacrifice that demonstrated moral worthiness, and it stressed the importance of postponed gratification. *Whatever negative connotation work may have held in the past, work ethic today is a cultural norm that places a positive moral value on doing a good job and is based on a belief that work has intrinsic value* (Cherrington, 1980; Quinn, 1983; Yankelovich & Immerwahr, 1984).

Whatever negative connotation work may have held in the past, work ethic today . . . is based on a belief that work has intrinsic value.

Many companies will make a major investment in time and money to help employees become more efficient in their jobs. However, most employers seek to hire employees who *already possess soft skills such as good interpersonal communication, a positive attitude, and a sense of responsibility, among others.* They have certain specific expectations of their employees, as suggested by Robert Clinebell, Fleet Manager for the Virginia Beach City Public Schools: “We want our employees to meet deadlines, be punctual, and work well in a team” (2005). Sandra Prior, Staff Engineer at Jefferson Laboratory in Newport News, VA, suggests that when she interviews a prospective employee, she looks for maturity and excellent listening skills. Additionally, says Katie Young, MSRD, a dietician with Davita Diaysis Inc. in Newport News, VA. “We desire workers with honesty, a willingness to learn new skills, and the ability to get along well with others—in essence, a good work ethic.”

Positive work ethic skills are similarly essential to Wal-Mart executives, who heavily recruit many of their managerial workers from the college-based business organization called Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE). Tom Coughlin, recently retired Wal-Mart vice chairman said, “We saw the unbelievable work ethic of these kids. In retail you need people with high energy levels.”

Companies like Wal-Mart have good reason to select and promote candidates who exhibit a positive work ethic: Research has shown that the employee who possesses a strong work ethic generally passes that same work ethic on to coworkers, who, in turn, pass those same positive skills and attitudes on to the larger community. In other words, socialization in the workplace often shapes work attitude. As a person enters the workplace, the perceptions and reactions of others tend to confirm or contradict the work attitudes shaped in childhood (Braude, 1975).

The occupational culture, especially the influence of an "inner fraternity" of colleagues, has a significant impact on the attitudes toward work and the work ethic that forms part of each person's belief system. Students should understand that this occupational culture can work for them as they strive to become an accepted part of the corporate family. On the other hand, they must also be prepared to deal with situations in which a discrepancy exists between the employer's idea of work ethic and that of an "inner fraternity." Having a good work ethic sometimes means an employee must make hard choices.

School can be a perfect testing ground for students to cultivate a good work ethic. In school, they will soon see that good work habits and attitudes produce rewards—strong friendships, good grades, increased post-graduation options, greater self-confidence. Once they have developed a strong work ethic in school, students are prepared to transfer that ethic to the workplace. There, they will have the advantage over those who seek employment only for monetary reward. They will understand that motivation to work involves trust, caring, meaning, self-knowledge, challenge, personal growth, and dignity (Maccoby, 1988; Walton, 1974).

This unit was designed to address interpersonal skills, initiative, and dependability, which are the underpinnings for acquiring a strong work ethic. The lesson plans are based on research and anecdotal or personal experience. The themes woven into these lessons are portable and seek to address positive work ethic and work attitude as they may apply in a variety of disciplines and career fields.

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What Is Work Ethic?

Worksheet: Work Ethic Words and Phrases

Activity 1

Put the following 45 words into 2 columns, writing the words that reflect a good work ethic in the right column and words that reflect a poor work ethic in the left.

Activity 2

For the word(s) or phrase(s) assigned to you, write one or two sentences explaining why the term relates to a good work ethic or a poor work ethic. Think of school and workplace examples that would support your position.

- | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Dependable | 16. Emotionally stable | 31. Orderly |
| 2. Stubborn | 17. Conscientious | 32. Enthusiastic |
| 3. Following regulations | 18. Depressed | 33. Persistent |
| 4. Independent | 19. Patient | 34. Hostile |
| 5. Ambitious | 20. Punctual | 35. Dedicated |
| 6. Effective | 21. Devious | 36. Devoted |
| 7. Reliable | 22. Selfish | 37. Courteous |
| 8. Tardy | 23. Negligent | 38. Considerate |
| 9. Initiating | 24. Persevering | 39. Careless |
| 10. Perceptive | 25. Likeable | 40. Productive |
| 11. Irresponsible | 26. Apathetic | 41. Well-groomed |
| 12. Efficient | 27. Pleasant | 42. Friendly |
| 13. Adaptable | 28. Cooperative | 43. Loyal |
| 14. Appreciative | 29. Hard working | 44. Resourceful |
| 15. Accurate | 30. Rude | 45. Modest |

What Is Work Ethic?

Work Ethic Vocabulary

- Accurate.** Acting or performing with care and precision
- Adaptable.** The quality of being able to make suitable or to fit for a specific situation
- Apathetic.** Feeling or showing a lack of interest or concern, indifferent
- Appreciative.** Feeling or expressing gratitude
- Conscientious.** Guided by or in accordance with the dictates of conscience; principled
- Considerate.** Thoughtful of other people's feelings
- Cooperative.** Done in cooperation with others, compromising
- Dedicated.** To commit (oneself) to a particular course of thought or action
- Dependable.** Trustworthy, responsible
- Devious.** Not straightforward, shifty, or sly
- Effective.** Producing a strong impression or response
- Efficient.** Acting or producing effectively with a minimum of waste, expense, or unnecessary effort
- Hostile.** Relating to an enemy, antagonistic
- Independent.** Not influenced by others, thinking for oneself
- Initiating.** To set in motion by taking the first step, to begin
- Irresponsible.** Not taking ownership or responsibility
- Loyal.** Faithful to one's duty
- Modest.** Not vain or boastful about one's worth, skills, or deeds
- Negligent.** Characterized by carelessness, lack of concern
- Orderly.** Having a systematic arrangement or procedure
- Patient.** Working steadily without giving up
- Perceptive.** Keen in discernment, marked by understanding
- Persevering.** To persist in or remain constant to a purpose, idea or task in the face of obstacles or discouragement
- Persistent.** Refusing to give up or let go
- Productive.** To bring forth, yield producing much
- Punctual.** Coming or doing something, at the right time
- Reliable.** Capable of being relied upon counted on, dependable
- Resourceful.** Skillful at solving problems or getting out of trouble
- Selfish.** Concerned chiefly with oneself
- Stable.** Without extreme change or fluctuation
- Tardy.** Occurring, arriving or done after the scheduled or expected time, late

What Is Work Ethic?

Instructions for Online Work Ethic Inventory

In this exercise you will take a test on the Web to discover your own work ethic and learn how it compares to the work ethic of others.

1. Begin by going to http://www.coe.uga.edu/cgi-bin/cgiwrap/%7Erhill/new_owei/owei.pl
2. Complete the introductory information boxes for the Occupational Work Ethic Inventory, then click the Submit button to electronically take the OWEI.
3. Copy or print out your scores for use in class discussion.
4. Try to be honest as you answer, and consider carefully how you are now at work or how you expect to be if you do not have a job at this time.
5. Compare your score with the mean score of the control group who took the OWEI.
6. Discuss your results and any questions or comments generated by the OWEI.
7. Are you satisfied with your current work ethic? Are there ways that you could improve your work ethic?

RESPONSIBILITY



Workplace Readiness Skill

RESPONSIBILITY
CHARACTER TRAIT

A responsible worker takes charge of himself or herself and accepts the consequences of his or her actions and words.

Do:

- ...what you're supposed to do.
- ...persevere.
- ...pursue excellence. Do your best in everything you do.
- ...show self-control and self-discipline
- ...think before you act.

Don't:

- ...blame others for your mistakes.
- ...give up easily.
- ...let others down when they're counting on you.

DO YOU OWN YOU?

- If you do, are you dedicated to giving nothing less than your best? Don't look back with regret, wishing you were more educated and finding that you sat on the "bench of life" instead of playing the game of life as hard as you could have.
- Every time you take a test or hand in an assignment, your name is on the top. You're saying "THIS IS THE BEST I HAVE TO OFFER." You may not make straight A's, but you can look yourself in the mirror and feel proud.
- Take responsibility for your success.

HOW CAN DOING CHORES HELP BUILD CHARACTER?

Make a list of all the chores you are responsible for at home.

-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-

How does doing chores make you responsible?

What are you responsible for?

Check the things below that you are responsible for:

- 1. your happiness
- 2. cleanliness
- 3. manners
- 4. organization
- 5. homework
- 6. little brother or sister
- 7. making your breakfast
- 8. doing your chores
- 9. cooking your dinner
- 10. tutoring after school
- 11. volunteering at the community center
- 13. washing your clothes
- 14. your behavior

- How many checks do you have?
- Do you consider yourself a responsible person? Why or why not?
- What does the teacher mean if she tells you, "You are such a responsible student"?

Nine Attitudes and Values of a Responsible Worker

1. Following directions
2. Cooperating with others
3. Being dependable
4. Taking initiative
5. Being eager to learn
6. Being loyal
7. Being honest
8. Being receptive to constructive criticism
9. Being patient; not expecting instant gratification

*"A bad workman always blames his tools."
-Unknown*

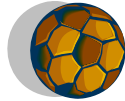
Workplace Discussion Questions

1. Where else do we use the nine attitudes and values in life besides in school?

1. What does it mean to "take initiative"?

3. What is the difference between *criticism* and *constructive criticism*?

Team Player



- Being a team player means you think about your **responsibilities** to others. Just as you rely on them, they rely on you. Neither of you wants to be "let down." Being a team player means being willing to put aside your personal needs for the team's needs.

- Team players are willing to put aside selfish desires because they understand that all players have to do their parts for the team to be a winner. Cooperation exists among team players. Your friends, teachers, and parents count on you—and you count on them.

KEEPING A JOB



Provide a brief example of how each of these qualities could be demonstrated on the job:

- | | |
|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Attendance | 6. Initiative |
| 2. Punctuality | 7. Loyalty |
| 3. Honesty | 8. Eagerness to learn |
| 4. Cooperation | 9. Ability to accept criticism |
| 5. Dependability | 10. Patience |

In your opinion, which two or three of these traits are most important to keeping a job? Why?

How do some of these traits apply to home, school, and personal relationships?
