

# Work Ethic

## Being an Excellent Employee

Once you have a job, it's a good idea to still think of yourself as the owner of your own company, *Me, Inc.* To keep *Me, Inc.* running, you need to please your customers, improve your skills and build relationships with people at work. In other words, you have to be an excellent employee with a good work ethic.

You develop excellent work habits one day at a time, one behavior at a time. This chapter describes in detail how to achieve excellence and a good work ethic, as well as the benefits you gain from them.

You take the initiative to manage yourself and your area... Think of yourself as running your own business within a business.



William Yeomans  
*7 Survival Skills for a Reengineered World*

**Quote**

## Benefits of Excellence

You experience many benefits when you develop a positive work ethic and excellent work skills:

- **You feel good about yourself.**  
 You have a sense of integrity and honor. You make choices that develop your character in a positive way.
- **You feel more in control.**  
 As Stephen Covey writes in *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, we have "two ways to put ourselves in control of our lives immediately. We can make a promise – and keep it. Or we can set a goal – and work to achieve it." Developing work ethics and excellence afford you many opportunities to do both.

[T]here are great benefits from being identified as a trustworthy, discreet, constructive person by senior members of your organization. You'll be given confidential information often and early enough to put you in control of your job, your work environment, and your career.



Richard Germann  
 Diane Blumenson and Peter Arnold  
*Working and Liking It*

**Quote**

- **You earn respect and trust.**  
 People appreciate your contribution. They know you pull your own weight, which helps them do their own jobs.

- **You advance your career.**  
 Employers and coworkers see you as a valuable member of the team and reward you in many ways, including promotions, wage increases and new job opportunities.

from *Texas*

[An] outstanding employee... would have integrity... the ability to make and meet commitments. I think one of the greatest characteristics is dependability. If someone says they are going to do something, you can be assured that they will do everything they can do to make sure it gets done.



Richard Massou  
 VP Information Services  
 Parkland Health & Hospital System  
 Dallas

**Quote**

# Work Ethic and Work Excellence

Work excellence and excellent work ethics are closely related. An "ethic" is a principle of correct behavior. To have "a good work ethic" means to be honest and hard working. Many employers consider it the most important quality an employee can have. They call it "character" or "integrity."

Excellence, meanwhile, focuses on how well you perform your job, what you produce (your value to your employer) and the qualities it takes to be productive, including your level of skills, knowledge and ability.

You need both excellence and a good work ethic to succeed at work. If you have a great work ethic but are incompetent, employers will not want you. Nor will they want you if you are incredibly productive but steal from them.

Together, a good work ethic and the qualities of excellence make you valuable to any employer. They put you in charge of your career.

Here are the qualities you need for each:

The secret of joy in work is contained in one word—excellence. To know how to do something well is to enjoy it.



Pearl Sydenstricker Buck

Quote

## Work Ethic

### Pride in Work

- Know the value of your contribution.
- Strive to be the best at whatever you do.
- View every job as an opportunity to make *Me, Inc.* better and more successful.

### Attendance

- Be at work on time.
- Don't take days off unless necessary.
- Be responsible when you can't show up.

### Integrity

- Don't lie, cheat or steal.
- Don't cover for those who do.
- Follow company policies and rules.

### Attitude

- Be positive and open to change.
- Take responsibility for your feelings.
- Focus on giving, not getting.

### Maximum Effort

- Leave your personal life at home.
- Avoid too many breaks, calls, emails, etc.
- Volunteer to do more and help others.

I think there are three important areas. First, relevant experience. Do they have the expertise we need to succeed? Second, personal qualities. Do they have integrity? Do they like to have fun? Will they work in a collaborative environment? Are they client focused? And third, do they exhibit the willingness to change and grow?

Joe Eazor, CEO  
Springbow Solutions Inc.

Quote

## Work Excellence

### Productivity

- Work quickly, accurately and efficiently.
- Strive for productivity, not just activity.
- Take the initiative.

### Customer Service

- Treat everyone with respect and courtesy.
- View the customer as vitally important.
- See problems as opportunities to gain customer loyalty.

from a Texan

[An indispensable employee is a] team player, willing to take on new responsibilities and challenges, [with] excellent communication and interpersonal skills, a well-developed sense of customer service to inner and outer customers.

Michael Hernandez, web developer  
Glazer's Wholesale Distributors

Quote

### Communication

- Communicate often with your supervisor, coworkers and other customers.
- Be assertive and respectful.
- Listen more than you speak.

### Followership

- Treat your supervisor with respect.
- Follow directions enthusiastically.
- Make your supervisor look good.

### Be a Good Team Player

- Be discreet; don't gossip or backstab.
- Find the value in everyone's contribution.
- Focus on the common good, not personal advancement.

### Continuous Learning

- Seek opportunities to learn more.
- Be open and willing.
- Ask for help and humbly accept the response.

### Problem Solving

- Follow a proven problem solving process.
- Involve others in problem solving.
- Practice and improve your creativity.

### Organization

- Develop and maintain routines.
- Arrange work space and tools so that you know where everything is all the time.
- Take notes so that you don't have to remember everything.

### Time Management

- Prioritize your tasks.
- Follow a daily to-do list.
- Keep track of appointments and work hours.

### Appearance

- Dress appropriately for your job.
- Use your best manners.
- Remember that your demeanor reflects on your employer.

You must have a strong work ethic combined with the ability to pick up new skills quickly. It is highly important that an employee is flexible in the work environment, whether it is working hours or learning new skills.

Steven Kirkland, technical writer  
Compuware Corp.

Quote

## Pride in Work

A strong work ethic means taking pride in your work, regardless of what job you hold. When you take pride in your work, success flows naturally from that. Your pride depends on two factors: your belief in the value of all work and your belief in the value of yourself.

## Every Job Matters

“It’s only an after-school job. It doesn’t really matter.” “Who cares? It’s just for minimum wage.” Have you heard people talk this way? Have you said such things yourself?

Some people think jobs have to pay a lot or demand advanced skills to be valuable. When they have a job that they consider “beneath” them, they do the minimum or less – not caring about their contribution.

The truth is that all work has value.

Every job, no matter how menial, serves a purpose. Every job connects to every other in a complex, invisible web.

Your actions at work can affect the lives of people you may not even know, as Memo’s story illustrates.

If a man is called to be a streetsweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven played music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great streetsweeper who did his job well.

Martin Luther King, Jr.



**Quote**

## Why Your Job Matters

It’s up to you to decide the value of your job. If you think no job’s important unless it saves lives, for instance, you might consider instead:

- **How you help others.**  
How does your job serve other people? Operating a fast-food cash register, for instance, can be rewarding because you help satisfy someone’s hunger.

- **How you help society.**  
A country functions best when all its people contribute to the greater good. When you earn money and pay taxes, supporting yourself through your labor, you play a vital role in shaping and maintaining the nation’s economy.

- **How you help yourself.**  
Your current employer is really a client of your company, **Me, Inc.**, and may lead you to other clients. Do your best because **Me, Inc.** is important, no matter who its present client is.

from a Texan

Through work come feelings of usefulness, of dignity, of accomplishment, of pride in knowing that one has earned his or her way in the world.

Richard Froeschle  
Director, Career Development Resources  
Texas Workforce Commission, Austin

**Quote**

## Pride in Work Leads to Pride in Self

The best way to value your work is to value yourself. If you think you are a quality person, you will do quality work.

Contrary to popular belief, you don’t gain feelings of self-worth through therapy, self-help groups or magazine articles. Instead, you learn to think positively about yourself by doing positive things. You “act yourself into right thinking.”

If you act “as if” you value yourself, you will act “as if” you value your work, as well. You will work hard and treat your job as if it were important.

Eventually, you’ll see yourself as the hardworking, trustworthy person you’ve become. You’ll find that you have a strong work ethic, pride in your work and pride in yourself.

## A Texan Story

Memo worked in the produce department at a local grocery store while attending junior college. He figured that his job wasn’t important because it wasn’t important to him. But when a competitor’s grocery store closed, he reconsidered.

He began to think of himself as part of a much larger picture. He imagined what would happen if he didn’t do his job.

If his section got dirty and disorganized, customers would avoid it. Eventually, his coworkers would let the appearance of their areas slide, too. Why should they work hard when he didn’t?

Over time, the store would lose business because customers would choose cleaner stores. Finally, the store would close and all the employees would lose their jobs. But the impact wouldn’t stop

there. The businesses that delivered the food and household goods to the store might need to lay off drivers as a result.

The farmers that supplied the store would have to scramble to find someone to purchase their products or be forced to lose a great deal of money—perhaps even their farms.

Memo realized that, though the scenario sounded far-fetched, his behavior had consequences beyond his immediate job. When he considered how influential and important his work was, he began to appreciate its value.

He took more pride in his work and found, as time passed, that he liked his job more as a result.

## Attendance

The heart of a good work ethic is good attendance. That means showing up at work on time, ready to go—day after day, week after week, year after year. There's nothing more to it.

But few people have a perfect attendance record. Illnesses, emergencies and flat tires happen. Since they need you at work, though, everyone feels the effects when you're absent, as the table below reveals. If you *can't* be there, you need to handle it properly. Here's how:

## Absence

Always have an acceptable reason to miss work. A contagious illness is one. If you work when you're sick, you just spread it to others. See the box below for other examples of good (and bad) reasons to be absent.

If you must be absent:

- Call your supervisor as soon as you realize you won't be able to work.
- Make the call yourself. If you have someone else call for you, "you better be unconscious," says Mark, a pizzeria manager in Austin. It just looks irresponsible otherwise.

## Vacations

If you want to take some days off work (a vacation, for instance), you should:

- Ask your boss if you can be absent as soon as possible.
- Explain your reason honestly.
- Give your boss the exact dates.
- Offer to make up the lost time.
- Put your request in writing, using either a company form or a note that your supervisor signs.
- Arrange for a coworker to cover for you BEFORE notifying your supervisor, if applicable. Verify that your coworker confirms it to your boss so that no one holds you responsible if your coworker doesn't show up.

## Late Arrival

Few people mind if you're late every once in a while, but don't make it a habit. When you know you'll be more than 15 minutes late:

- Call in even if you think it will make you even more late.
- Speak with your supervisor, not a coworker.
- Give an estimate of your arrival time, then go straight to work.
- Apologize when you arrive. Say it won't happen again.
- Don't let it happen again.

from a Texan



The most important thing you can do at a job is show up. Show up on time and stay all day. Just be there!

Bryan, realtor, Arlington

Quote

## A Texan Story

Silvia was an outstanding human resources clerk at a large high tech firm in Houston. Unfortunately, she was a night person and her work day began at 8:00 every morning.

She was late on a regular basis. She always made up the time by staying late and she never missed a deadline. Still, it cost her.

One day, her supervisor told her flat out that her tardiness prevented him from promoting her.

Silvia saw that the quality of her work didn't matter if she didn't meet her supervisor's time requirements. Although it was difficult, she eventually changed her lifestyle so that she got to work on time.

## The Effects of Missing Work

When you're absent—or even "just" late—it can affect everyone at the worksite negatively.

### You:

- will not get paid (if you have no leave time).
- may lose your job if it happens often or you handle it improperly.
- might bear the brunt of your coworkers' or boss' anger at you.

### Your supervisor:

- has to rearrange the work schedule.
- may have to cover for you personally.

### Your coworkers:

- have to pick up the slack for you.
- may be called in to work or asked to stay an extra shift to cover for you.

### The company:

- loses productivity.
- faces upset customers who didn't receive the service they should have.

## Reasons to Miss Work

Some reasons for missing work are more acceptable than others. Here are some examples:

### Acceptable Reasons

- My child is ill and I have to care for him/her.
- I am ill with an infection or flu.
- I broke my leg and it's in a cast. (when job requires walking/running)
- I was in a car accident on my way to work.
- It's a religious holiday for me.
- My sister died.

### Unacceptable Reasons

- My car's not running and I don't have a ride.
- I don't feel like it.
- I have to meet with my lawyer.
- My sister asked me to watch her children.
- My girlfriend/boyfriend and I had an argument and I'm too upset to work.
- I need to visit someone in the hospital.
- I need to get new contacts/glasses.
- I have a hangover.

adapted from *Job Savvy* by LaVerne Ludden, Ed.D.

# Integrity

To have integrity is to be sincere and honest. It is the cornerstone of a good work ethic. Without it, your work means nothing. Every day at work presents challenges to it and you have the opportunity to do right—or not.

## It's Part of the Job

When you agree to work for someone, you agree to follow the rules and be honest. It's part of the deal whether anyone says it out loud or not. Employers expect you to:

- Be honest and discreet.
- Follow company policies.
- Follow local, state and federal laws.
- Follow the written code of ethics for your occupation if there is one.
- Speak up when someone else acts improperly.

## Do the Right Thing

To maintain your integrity, you should always do the right thing. That includes avoiding the behaviors listed in the box at right.

You may find people who behave badly at work. They may even ask you to participate. Don't do it.

Sometimes, though, the line is not always clear. If you wonder whether something is ethical or not, answering the questions in the box below can help guide you.

### Guidelines for Ethical Decisions

If you find yourself in an ethical dilemma, you can clarify what to do with just a few questions.

Question to Ask Yourself	What the Answer Means
Is it legal?	If it's against the law, DON'T DO IT. Even if your boss tells you to, the law may hold <i>you</i> responsible.
Would I feel proud about it?	If it makes you feel ashamed, if your conscience tells you it's wrong, DON'T DO IT.
Would I like everyone to know it?	If you would not want your supervisor, coworkers, family, friends, neighbors and associates to know about it, DON'T DO IT.
Would it hurt someone unfairly?	If it unjustly harms a person or an organization, either physically, mentally or financially, DON'T DO IT.
What would happen if I didn't decide?	If not deciding could result in harm, DO SOMETHING positive; don't just wait.

adapted from *Job Savvy* by LaVerne Ludden, Ed.D.

## A Texan Story

Jo Ann worked as a bookkeeper for a small business in Abilene. One day, Jo Ann's supervisor asked her to change the monthly financial report. He didn't want the company's investors to know how badly the firm was doing.

Jo Ann refused. She knew that he was asking her to commit a crime and she could get in trouble. Most of all, she knew it was wrong.

Her supervisor got angry and Jo Ann quit her job that day. She didn't want to work for such a person, anyway.

Afterwards, she wrote a letter to the investors explaining what had happened so that they could protect their interests.

Although it cost her a job, Jo Ann did the right thing. She remained honest and she spoke up about a fraud. Most importantly, she maintained her self-respect.

from a Texan

Be true to yourself. Jobs come and go but you have to live with yourself every day. Don't do anything that may hurt your self-respect.



Carol, paralegal, Odessa

Quote

### Dishonest Behavior

Certain behaviors are commonly viewed as inappropriate and dishonest, such as:

#### Favoring friends or relatives

Allowing friends and family to purchase items or services using your employee discount.

#### Stealing

Outright theft, including:

- Taking supplies, tools, products from work
- Using/selling employer ideas for personal gain
- Pirating software
- Padding expense account

#### Using equipment

Conducting personal business with employer's equipment, including:

- Photocopier
- Corporate credit card
- Work vehicle
- Long distance carrier

#### Cheating on your time

Stealing time from the company, including:

- Doing personal business at work
- Coming in late or leaving early
- Taking long breaks
- Hiding or sleeping
- Playing games or simply not working

#### Abusing drugs and alcohol at work

It decreases productivity and work quality and increases safety risks.

#### Violating confidentiality

Talking to others about your:

- employer (e.g., trade secrets)
- customers (e.g., financial information)
- fellow employees (e.g., personnel history)

#### Tolerating others' bad behavior

Not reporting another's unethical behavior that you witness or learn of from the individual him/herself.

#### Violating company policies

Disregarding policies, even if others do it, too.

adapted from  
*Job Savvy* by  
LaVerne Ludden, Ed.D.

### Helpful Hint

Before you do anything, ask how you'd feel if someone videotaped you and played it on the evening news. Would you want your mother, your supervisor, your children, your friends to see you? If not, DON'T DO IT!

## Attitude

Attitude is more than a state of mind. It's the way you look at life. Employers want friendly people with positive attitudes. Positive attitudes make you easier to work with and they help make the company's customers happy, too. In fact, it's so important that, according to research from the U.S. Department of Labor, 87% of people don't get hired because of their attitude, despite the fact that they're qualified.

### Your Attitude Shows

Do you have a positive attitude? Are you open to change? Interested? Enthusiastic?

If you don't have a positive attitude, get one quick because you can't fake it. You give away your real feelings all the time through verbal and non-verbal cues.

People know when you're insincere. You may say all the right things, you may do the right things, but if your attitude is wrong, that's all that people will remember. As the saying goes, "Your attitude speaks so loudly I can't hear what you are saying."

...if you are consistently negative and defensive... you will not be thought of very kindly by your boss, your co-workers... or your customers... Next time you are talking... listen to the attitude you are projecting to others.

William Yeomans  
7 Survival Skills for a Reengineered World

**Quote**

### Why Be Positive?

Don't have a positive attitude just to make your employer happy. Do it for yourself.

Unless you inherit a great deal of wealth, you have to work for a living. You can be happy or miserable about that—it's up to you. Most people find that being upbeat makes their lives—and jobs—much more pleasurable. After all, the person who's most hurt by your bad attitude is you. You'll be miserable and people will avoid you.

In fact, a negative attitude harms you as much as a positive attitude helps. There is no middle ground. The box below clarifies the differences between the two attitudes and the consequences of each.

from a Texan

People will include you more if you're positive; you're just more pleasant to be around. And a job is always more interesting when you're in the game, not on the sidelines complaining.

Mary, supervisor, Dripping Springs

**Quote**

### How to Be Positive

If you don't usually have a positive attitude, here's how to develop one:

- Look for the humor in the situation.
- Smile.
- Act "as if" you were optimistic.
- Observe and imitate people who are positive.
- Remember to be grateful for all the good things in your life (and for all that *seems* bad but may lead to good).

### A Texan Story

"Attitude problem." These were words Don had heard his whole life. He didn't understand what people meant. He was smart. He worked hard. Sure, he was impatient with stupid people, but who wasn't? This thinking worked for Don in school, but it didn't fly in the workplace.

He had trouble getting jobs he was well-qualified for. He finally asked one prospective employer why he didn't get hired. "It's your attitude," the man replied. "Yes, you have more experience and training than the guy we hired. Yes, you know more. But you come across as arrogant—a know-it-all. We'd rather have to train someone who can get along with others than hire someone with a bad attitude."

Realizing that his attitude was costing him jobs—and affecting his income—Don finally became willing to change his outlook.

What's Your Attitude?		
Your attitude has natural consequences or results. What attitude do you want to project?		
	Positive	Negative
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• takes pride in work and behavior</li> <li>• optimistic</li> <li>• eager to learn, change and grow</li> <li>• customer-focused</li> <li>• happy to help others</li> <li>• energetic and enthusiastic</li> <li>• takes responsibility for success and failures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• does only the minimum</li> <li>• complains and criticizes</li> <li>• resists change</li> <li>• doesn't care about customers</li> <li>• treats others as if they were burdens</li> <li>• procrastinates on tasks</li> <li>• blames others for own problems</li> </ul>
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enhanced relationships</li> <li>• creates fun, creative work environment</li> <li>• increased productivity</li> <li>• many opportunities for advancement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• drives others away</li> <li>• self-induced misery</li> <li>• illnesses and work absences</li> <li>• limited opportunities for advancement</li> </ul>

## Maximum Effort

A good work ethic includes working as hard and fast as you can—in other words, putting forth your best effort. Employers value people who are “hard working” so you’ve got to give it your all.

## Work When at Work

Part of working hard is focusing completely on the task at hand. To do that most effectively:

- **Be physically ready to work.**  
Don’t show up drunk, stoned, sick, exhausted or seriously injured.
- **Leave your home life at home.**  
Sharing your personal problems takes time away from work and can contaminate your work relationships. People might seem sympathetic but you risk losing some of their respect if you reveal too much.
- **Limit socializing at work.**  
Building relationships with coworkers is valuable and ultimately helps your productivity, but know when to get back to work.
- **Put in a full shift.**  
If you are supposed to work eight hours a day, then work eight hours a day. Here’s how:
  - Make up any personal time you take at work.
  - Take breaks only in accordance with company policies
  - Conduct personal business, such as web surfing or phone calls, only during breaks.
  - Talk to your boss if you have some unusual activity in your life that may spill into work time (buying a house, for instance). Try to negotiate an agreement that allows you to make more personal calls at work and make up the time later.

from a Texan

You can’t be afraid to work... If you don’t have the determination to roll up your sleeves and get it done, then chances are you won’t be successful.



**Quote**

Rick Gelling  
software engineer  
Broadband Gateways

## Work Hard

When you work hard, you put forth maximum effort. No one can work full-out every second of every day, but you can:

- **Concentrate on the task at hand.**  
Minimize distractions so that you don’t lose focus. Take short breaks periodically to help maintain your energy level.

Hard work spotlights the character of people: some turn up their sleeves, some turn up their noses, and some don’t turn up at all.



**Quote**

Sam Ewing

- **Don’t cut corners.**  
If your work is sloppy or incomplete, don’t bother doing it. You can get by with “average” in school, but not at work.
- **Don’t give up.**  
If your task is difficult, be determined to complete it to the best of your ability. You get a feeling of accomplishment when you don’t quit and you learn something new.
- **Do your homework.**  
Meet your deadlines. Be prepared for meetings. Follow-through on assignments.
- **Mind your own business.**

Don’t worry about how much other people work. Just do your best every day.

...in the end, hard work is the true, enduring characteristic of successful people.

Marsha Evans

**Quote**

## Big Brother Is Watching

Today, more and more employers keep their employees under surveillance to ensure that they actually work when they’re at work.

**They see you when you’re sleeping...**  
They may monitor your phone calls or email messages. They may hide cameras strategically around the worksite. They may require you complete detailed records of your activities. And if you use a computer for work, they may do even more.

**They know when you’re awake...**  
Since the computer belongs to your employers, they have the right to look into it at any time. If it’s connected to a network, they don’t even have to leave their office to see what files you’re working on—or what games you’re playing.

**They know if you’ve been bad or good...**  
When you web surf, for example, your employer has a record of every site you visit. Be careful how much time you spend on personal activities and where they lead you. Employers can fire you for spending too much time on the web or visiting certain sites.

**So be good for goodness’ sake!**

## A Texan Story

Lamar learned about working hard during his first week on the job as a night-time stocker at a large grocery store.

The new manager showed up at 4 AM and began stocking with Lamar and his coworkers. She soon noticed that one worker, David, was slowly stocking peas, one can at a time.

“Use both hands,” the manager said. “I’ve always done it this way,” David replied. “Well, do it my way from now on,” ordered the manager.

David kept stocking with one hand and the manager immediately fired him, right there on the spot.

Lamar and his other coworkers got the message: No slackers or rebels tolerated. If you were slow or refused to follow a reasonable order, you were history. It was a lesson he never forgot.

# Productivity

An excellent employee produces excellent results – whether it's a satisfied customer or a well-crafted engineering draft design. Putting forth your maximum effort is a start, but if your product's no good, you won't keep your job.

To be truly productive, it helps to do the type of work that suits you. After that, you just have to work smart as well as hard. Here are five steps to show you how:

Being busy does not always mean real work... Seeming to do is not doing.



Thomas Alva Edison

Quote

## 1. Decide What to Do

You are more productive when you do only important tasks. Knowing what *not* to do is a vital skill.

- Question rote activities. Why do you do this task? Have circumstances changed? Does it contribute to the company or is it just tradition?
- Drop useless activities with permission from your supervisor.

## 2. Do It

To be productive, you must work effectively and actually accomplish what you set out to do.

- Plan ahead; it saves time later. Choose the best approach before you throw yourself at a project.
- Be results-oriented. Every activity you do should relate to your goals.
- Ask for help if necessary. Focus on the task, not your ego.

Don't tell me how hard you work. Tell me how much you get done.



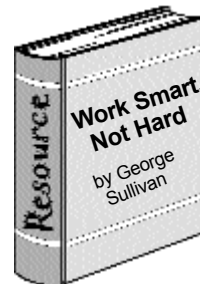
James Ling

Quote

## 3. Do It on Time

High productivity means you complete your work with speed and efficiency.

- Work as quickly as you can while still being accurate.
- Meet your deadlines. Finish early if you can.
- Don't be a perfectionist to the point of paralysis. Do your best, ask your supervisor for approval and then move on.
- Streamline your activities so that you can do more with less effort. Develop routines so that you can complete tasks in the most logical order. Avoid duplication of effort. If you work in an office, automate as many tasks as possible.



The reward for work well done is the opportunity to do more.



Dr. Jonas Salk

Quote

## 4. Do It Well

Accuracy and wise use of energy are critical to being productive. If you rush, you may miss something and end up spending more time fixing a mistake than you saved by hurrying.

- Listen carefully to instructions so that you make fewer mistakes.
- Make your work time count. One hour's worth of well-rested, uninterrupted work may produce better results than five hours of exhausted effort.

## 5. Do More

The more work you attempt to do, the more work you get done. To be highly productive:

- Volunteer for assignments no one else wants to do.
- Take the initiative. If you see something that needs to be done, do it without waiting to be told.

### Ask for What You Need

You can increase your productivity if you have the best tools for the job. If you need certain equipment or support to be more productive, ask for it. Here's how:

**Do some research.** If you need a faster computer, for example, learn what type and speed you need. What do people in other companies who hold your type of position use? How much will it cost?

**Put the request in writing.** Explain how it will benefit the company.

**Meet with your employer.** Make your request in person and in writing.

**Example:** If you were the boss, which request would make *you* buy your employee a new computer?

1. "I want a faster computer. Mine's too slow."
2. "This high-speed computer would enable me to produce the newsletter in four days a month instead of ten. Then I could spend more time on other projects. That extra productivity will help pay for the computer."

### Important Terms

It's easy to confuse hard work with productivity. The following descriptions help clarify the issue.

**hard-working:** you do things  
**productive:** you get things done

**activity:** a state of working, moving, doing  
**accomplishment:** a task well-completed

**busy:** lots of activity  
**productive:** abundant, valuable results

**effective:** doing what needs to be done  
**efficient:** doing it in the best way possible

## Customer Service

To stay competitive, businesses have to provide excellent customer service. Sometimes it's the only factor that distinguishes one company from another.

It attracts new customers and keeps the old. The lack of good customer service is deadly. When businesses lose customers, it's usually because they offered bad or indifferent service.

### Why Bother?

When service stinks, the word spreads even faster than when the service is good. Research from the White House Office of Consumer Affairs shows that:

- Most unhappy customers don't return and they don't tell you why.
- These former customers tell an average of fifteen people about their bad experience.

Through this bad word of mouth, you can lose customers you've never even met! If you turn the bad service around and make the customer happy, however, that person will tell an average of five people about their positive experience.


### Who Is the Customer?

"Everyone you interact with at work is a customer," says Mark Moore of Sulzer CarboMedics. And he's right. In fact, everyone you meet falls into one of the following customer groups:

- **Internal customers**  
Your supervisor, coworkers and others in your employer's company.
- **External customers**  
Those who buy goods or services from your employer. They include the public or other businesses.
- **Potential customers**  
Those you don't yet know. They judge you and your employer by the way you act, whether you're "on duty" or not. And they might be hiring someday.

There is only one boss—the customer. They want good price, good quality, good service—and they can fire any one of us by taking their business somewhere else.

Sam Walton  
founder, WalMart



**Quote**

### What Is Good Customer Service?

In a way, no one needs to define good customer service: you know it when you see it. You definitely know bad customer service when you experience it! The box at bottom left offers examples of each.

At heart, good customer service means giving customers what they want. And just about every customer wants to be treated with:

- Friendliness
- Understanding
- Respect
- Fairness
- Speed
- Caring
- Dignity

Don't you?

To find out the specific desires of customers in your particular field, however, you need to ask them directly. And then deliver it.

**Helpful Hint**

If you find yourself annoyed by customers, remind yourself that without them, you would not have a job.

### Types of Customer Service

You may not always notice good customer service when you receive it, but you definitely notice when the service is bad. Here are some random examples of each:

#### Good Customer Service

- Smiling at customers
- Greeting customers
- Opening doors for customers
- Taking customers to items they want
- Answering the telephone cheerfully
- Promptly returning phone calls
- Doing exactly what customers request
- Responding calmly when customers express their anger
- Acknowledging and apologizing for errors
- Looking as if you care
- Listening politely to customers
- Asking customers if they need help
- Saying "I don't know the answer but I'll find someone who does" and promptly returning with the response
- Running, not walking, to do a price check

#### Bad Customer Service

- Talking with friends or coworkers while customers wait
- Putting customers on hold and ignoring them
- Complaining to customers about coworkers, supervisors or the company
- Not looking up when customers enter
- Letting customers wander around lost or obviously looking for something
- Badmouthing another business
- Saying "it's not my job;" looking indifferent
- Promising something you can't deliver
- Failing to show up for appointments
- Sharing private customer information with friends or family
- Using a tone of voice that suggests that customers are stupid or unreasonable
- Walking casually past registers where customers have formed long lines

adapted from *Job Savvy* by LaVerne Ludden, Ed.D.

## How Do You Give Good Service?

Good customer service begins with a quality product or service—in other words, competence. It ends with clear, constant communication. You must have both competence and good communication to please your customers.

### Competence

It doesn't matter how kindly you treat your customers if you don't deliver what you promise—whether it's friendly sales service at the mall or an article on pollution for your local paper. You have to deliver a good product or service to provide good customer service. Your product or service must be:

- **Tangible**

Your customers must feel satisfied that they received some “thing,” whether it's delicious food, clean clothes or increased peace of mind.

- **High quality**

Your customers must believe that they received something of value, worth what they paid. In the case of your supervisor, your wages are the amount paid.

- **On time**

Your customers must be pleased with how soon they got the product. A beautiful cake doesn't mean much when the birthday's come and gone.

- **As promised**

Your customers want what you said they would get. An attractive sofa delivered on time isn't acceptable if it should be custom-made and it isn't.

- **Reliable / Consistent**

Your customers need to know that they can count on you. Would you trust a restaurant if the food and service are wonderful one day and terrible the next? Of course not.

Your product has to be consistently good so that your coworkers and supervisor can rely on you.

from a Texan

I always try to create a pleasant memory in the mind of the other person.

Norm, software trainer  
Wichita Falls



Quote

### Helpful Hint

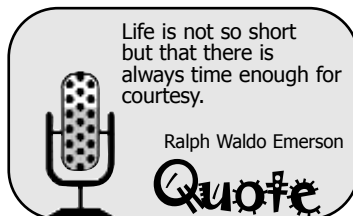
Be a good customer yourself. Treat service people with courtesy. When they provide outstanding service, send them—and their boss—a letter of appreciation.

### Communication

If your product is as good as your competitor's, communication will decide who wins the customers. If you want it to be you, remember the what, when and how of communicating with customers:

#### What

Let your customers know that you care about them and respect their time.



#### How

Show your concern with your:

- **Words**

Use respectful, caring and specific words, as the box below indicates. Always be honest.

- **Body language**

Use your facial expression and body language to show customers that you value them.

- **Actions**

Deliver more than you promise. It's better to surprise than to disappoint.

#### When

Often. Never let customers think you forgot about them. Give updates regularly, even when the status of the situation hasn't changed, just so the customer knows you remember them.

## A Texan Story

Melissa knew quality customer service when she received it. And she received it at a sewing machine shop in Austin.

As soon as she entered, the saleslady, busy with another customer, smiled and said she'd be right with her.

When Melissa requested a bottom-of-the-line model, the woman didn't bat an eye, though she wouldn't get much of a commission from the sale.

Instead, she knowledgeably described the choices and even showed Melissa, a novice, how to sew a few stitches.

She later followed up the visit with a thank you note and a number to call if Melissa had any problems, which she didn't.

For Melissa, this store had it all: both an excellent product and outstanding service—and she still tells people about her experience two years after the fact.

### Be Specific with Customers

When you give customers specific information, you show them that you care. You also help them feel a sense of control over the situation because they know where they stand.

#### Don't Say

- "I'll put a rush on it."
- "It's being processed."
- "I'll call you back."

#### Do Say

- "I'll personally see that it ships today."
- "Deanne Moore, my supervisor, will review it by Monday."
- "I'll call you by 10 AM whether or not the status changes."

adapted from *Communication Briefings*

## Serving Public Customers

Many jobs, especially entry-level positions, require you to serve the public directly. Whatever your job, certain rules apply:

- Greet customers as soon as they arrive.
- Drop what you're doing and offer to help unless you're already helping someone else.
- Take customers to the item they request; don't just point the way.
- Admit when you don't know the answer to a customer's question and then find someone who does. Don't guess and don't just let it go.
- Count back change for customers. And don't thrust both bills and coins into their hands at once.
- Acknowledge customers in line. When someone joins the line, make eye contact and smile. If possible, say you'll be with them shortly.
- Serve in-store customers first. If a customer calls while you're serving someone, explain the situation and ask the caller to hold while you finish.
- Never conduct personal calls in front of customers. If a friend calls while you're serving a customer, say you'll call back and hang up.

### How to Refuse Customers

You can't always give customers what they want. But you can refuse them in a way that leaves them feeling well-treated. The key is to provide specific information.

Here's how to handle a refusal:

1. Listen to what the customer wants.
2. Empathize. Say—sincerely—that you understand and care and want to help.
3. Don't say "no" or argue.
4. Give one reason why you can't do exactly what the customer wants. Be direct and honest.
5. Explain their options. Ask the customer to choose from what you can offer.
6. Repeat steps 1 through 5 as needed.

## Serving Unhappy Customers

Inevitably, you will encounter unhappy or dissatisfied customers. They say they received poor service or a defective product. Whatever their complaint, believe them. Relatively few customers are crooks or chronically troublesome. Most of them have cause to complain, as the box below illustrates.

### Why They Complain

Often, people have a good reason to complain about the service they receive. Businesses cause complaints by:

- Confusing customers with too many choices and not enough information
- Ignoring (or seeming to ignore) customers
- Keeping customers waiting a long time
- Treating customers poorly, including being rude, uncaring, unhelpful or indifferent
- Treating customers as criminals without just cause

When customers complain, don't take it personally or negatively. Instead, see it as a chance to make them happy.

Customers know that mistakes happen. They just want you to fix the problem promptly and respectfully. You can do just that by following the 7 C's in the box at the right.

When you resolve a problem to the customer's satisfaction, you may have a customer for life. Research shows that well over half of the complainers will remain customers. The number goes up to almost 100% when you resolve the situation immediately.

If you will please people, you must please them in their own way; and as you cannot make them what they should be, you must take them as they are.

Lord Chesterfield

Quote

## Serving Angry Customers

At times, you may encounter angry or unreasonable customers. Treat them like any unhappy customer, using the 7 C's in the box below.

If they cross the line and become threatening, however, you need to keep yourself, your other customers and your worksite safe.

Call security and/or the police if a customer:

- threatens or abuses you or others.
- seems intoxicated or "high."
- uses loud or aggressive language.
- displays weapons of any kind.
- appears irrational or mentally disturbed.

Never engage the angry customer in a verbal or physical fight. Instead, hold your temper and get help. You may feel scared or angry, but try to remain cool in front of the customers.

### 7 C's of Positive Problem Resolution

When customers are upset or dissatisfied, you can resolve the problem by being:

- 1. Courteous**  
Listen attentively and respectfully. Put yourself in the customer's shoes.
- 2. Contribute**  
Apologize immediately if you or your employer makes a mistake—even if no one notices, suggests T. Scott Gross in *Positively Outrageous Service*. Make amends and explain how you'll avoid the error in the future. Show that you're sorry.
- 3. Clear**  
Learn exactly what the customer wants. Explain the options if that isn't possible.
- 4. Connected**  
Describe what will happen next, follow through and then contact the customer to confirm that it went well.
- 5. Confidential**  
Use your tone and manner to show that you respect your customers' privacy, especially if the problem is personal.
- 6. Cautious**  
Make sure you and your other customers are physically safe.
- 7. Calm**  
No matter how upset the customer is, don't react in kind. Keep your voice and manner calm and helpful.

adapted from source unknown

## Serving Phone Customers

Americans conduct a great deal of business on the telephone, yet many often find it a frustrating experience.

You can't design your employer's phone system and you can't arrange for every caller to reach the appropriate person the first time. But you can make the call a pleasant experience for the caller if you stick to the goals and guidelines below.

### Answering Calls

Your goal in answering the phone is to greet the caller and identify yourself.

- Clearly state your name and the organization.
- Don't greet callers by their caller ID name. Someone else may be borrowing their phone.
- Do greet the caller by name if someone transfers the call to you. It shows that you know the reason for the call.



### Making Calls

When you call someone, your goal is to conduct your business quickly and efficiently.

- Plan what you'll say. It saves time during that call and prevents you from having to clarify or correct some point later on.
- Take notes during the call. It keeps you on track and serves as a record of the exchange.
- Summarize the call before ending it by repeating what actions need to happen next. It helps you end the call gracefully.

### Returning Calls

The goal of returning a call is to show that you care about the caller.

- Return calls promptly. It's courteous and shows that you are quick and reliable.
- Do your homework first. Review the issue the caller wants to discuss; it saves time during the call.



### Leaving Messages

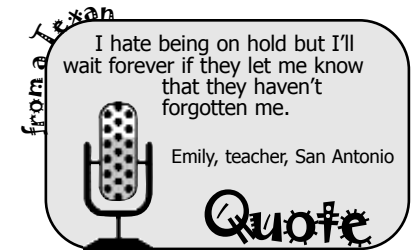
When leaving a message, your goal is to conduct business, not play "phone tag."

- Leave a detailed message to explain why you called. If possible, ask for a specific response (such as an action to take or information to give) that doesn't require the other person to speak directly with you.
- Leave "urgent" messages only in cases of real emergency.

### Taking Messages

Your goal in taking a message is to reassure the caller that the message will be passed along.

- Obtain the caller's information, including telephone number and reason for calling.
- Pass on the message immediately to the employee. Don't wait or you may forget.
- Make your own voice mail greeting clear and brief. If possible, give other numbers where the caller can get help. Don't leave a "thought for the day" or other time wasters.



### Putting Calls on Hold

Your goal is to put callers on hold as briefly and infrequently as possible.

- Explain the reason you need to put the caller on hold.
- Offer the caller a choice to be put on hold or called back later.
- Give your name and direct number in case the line disconnects.
- Check in with the caller every 2-3 minutes. Explain the delay. Again offer to take a message.

### Transferring Calls

When you transfer a caller to another employee, your goal is not to make the caller repeat everything he/she said.

- Tell the caller who can better help, including the employee's name, title and phone number.
- Say "Nancy will join us" instead of "I'm transferring you."
- Explain the situation while the caller is online (or briefly on hold). Give all the relevant information, including account number.

### TRANSFER

The acronym TRANSFER can help you remember how to transfer a call properly:

- T** - Tell the caller exactly who can help.
- R** - Request permission to connect to that person.
- A** - Add the new person to the line.
- N** - Never use the word "transfer."
- S** - Stay on the line and explain the situation.
- F** - Find out if the caller needs anything else.
- E** - Empathize with the caller's problem.
- R** - Remember to thank the caller.


adapted from source unknown

# Communication

Communicating effectively means exchanging information and ideas so that speaker and receiver understand each other clearly. It's a skill that employers value more than ever. To succeed at work, you need to be able to effectively give information (speaking and writing) and receive it (listening and reading).

Your ability to communicate may be the single most powerful tool you have to... make yourself marketable inside and outside your organization.

William Yeomans  
*7 Survival Skills for a Reengineered World*



**Quote**

## Speak Effectively

The basic guidelines for effective speech are the same whether you talk with a coworker or address an audience: keep it short and to the point. If you want to persuade people to do something, explain how it will benefit them to do it. And above all, be honest. Honesty communicates better than anything else.


### Every-day Speaking

Whether you deal with your supervisor, coworkers or other customers, the same rules apply. To speak effectively:

- Be calm and honest. Don't manipulate, whine or cause a scene. Make requests, not demands.
- Speak for yourself. Don't assume that others share your experience or views.
- Be brief and to the point. If you go on and on, people eventually grow impatient and tune you out.
- Be positive and you'll get a positive response in return, recommends Kevin Hogan in *Talk Your Way to the Top*.
- Use appropriate language that your listeners can understand — no jargon or "shorthand."
- Avoid extremes. If you give orders, you push people away. If you never speak up, people forget about you. Try to find a happy medium.
- Address the behavior if you have a problem with someone, not your theories about the behavior (such as "You do that because...").
- Stay aware of your body language.

The more concisely, simply and directly you speak, the more effective you will be.

Jonathan and Susan Clark  
*How to Make the Most of Your Workday*



**Quote**

Look the person you're addressing in the eye. Stand or sit straight.

- Be responsible for making sure that your listener hears and understands you. Ask to be sure.

### Public Speaking

If you get to speak in front of an audience for your job, be grateful. It's a skill employers love and it makes you very marketable. To do well:

- Treat your speech as a conversation, not a lecture.
- Tell stories; don't just give facts.
- Welcome your nervousness. It gives you energy to do your best says James Amps III, author of *Speaking to Excel*.
- Begin with a story, a question or a startling fact to grab the audience's attention.
- Try to involve the audience as much as possible, especially with activities. It keeps them interested.

**Helpful Hint**

When public speaking, do what the experts do:

1. Tell the audience what you're going to say.
2. Say it.
3. Tell them what you said. It works every time.

### Conversation Weakeners

Communication weakeners cause people to take you and your ideas less seriously than they would otherwise.

- Qualifiers**  
A qualifier limits your words. If you offer an opinion but first say "This might sound stupid..." you lessen the impact of your idea.
- Fillers**  
A filler takes the place of a pause. If you pepper your conversation with "you know," "um," "I guess" and "whatever," you come across as uncertain or vague.
- Minimizing**  
When you minimize your contribution, you communicate that you are unworthy. For example, saying "I was lucky," instead of "I worked hard for it."
- Poor Inflection**  
When your statements sound like questions or you speak hesitantly, people will doubt you.
- Inappropriate Language**  
Using slang or swear words makes you sound uneducated, unimaginative and unprofessional.
- Victim Language**  
Suggesting that things happen to you, as if you have no part in making them happen, makes you seem weak—a victim. For example, saying "He makes me so mad!" instead of "I get angry at him." The first statement sounds as if you don't control your own emotions.

## Listen Effectively

"You have two ears and one mouth; use them accordingly," goes the old saying. If you do listen more than you speak, you will go far.

But listening is much more than staying quiet while someone else talks. To listen effectively:

- **Be attentive.**  
Focus entirely on the speaker and forget about yourself.
  - Don't plan what to say next.
  - Don't interrupt.
  - Re-focus when your mind wanders.
- **Show your interest.**  
Indicate that you hear, understand and care.
  - Make eye contact.
  - Lean forward.
  - Make sounds of understanding.
  - Smile and nod when appropriate.
  - Take notes if appropriate.
- **Ask questions.**  
Clarify content (facts) and meaning (what the facts mean to the speaker). For example: "You're saying that [X] happened?" or "Do you mean...?"
- **Reflect back what you hear.**  
You can show that you "get it" by repeating the speaker's own words. For example: "So you felt he was rude to you?" or "You're frustrated by the schedule for this week."  
  
You may be surprised at how grateful people are when they feel truly heard.

### LADDER When You Listen

A great way to remember how to listen effectively is to use the acronym LADDER:

- L** - Look at the person speaking.
- A** - Ask questions.
- D** - Don't interrupt.
- D** - Don't change the subject.
- E** - Empathize with the speaker.
- R** - Respond verbally and non-verbally.

adapted from *Bits and Pieces*

## Write Effectively

If you know how to write clearly and concisely, you will always find work. To write effectively:

- Plan ahead so that you have time to edit and revise.
- Be logical. Start with your main point and go step-by-step from there. Each sentence should be meaningful, not just a space-filler.
- Be brief. Your goal is to share ideas, not use lots of words.
- Be organized. Each main idea should get its own paragraph.
- Think of your readers. Use words and terms they understand.
- Use simple words. "Say "help," not "facilitate" and "use," not "utilize."
- Use action verbs. Say "Submit your forms on Monday," not "Forms are to be submitted on Monday."
- Proofread. If no one else can "proof" for you, wait a while before you do it yourself. You'll catch more errors with fresh eyes.

## Read Effectively

Almost every job requires you to read, whether it's forms, books, web content or directions. To read quickly and accurately, how-to-study.com recommends that you:

- Skim first. Glance over the article to see how (if) it's organized. Read enough to identify the main idea.
- Take notes in the margin if possible. It helps you refer back later.
- Ask yourself about the article as you read it. You focus more if you do.
- Summarize the main points later, as if explaining it all to a stranger. It helps you remember what you read.



## Email

If you're like many people, your business writing consists mainly of email messages. It's a great medium, especially if you work with detailed information. Just remember to keep it strictly professional. Many people have lost their jobs because of inappropriate emails.

To use email effectively, check your in-box daily and follow these guidelines:

### Always

- Plan ahead; it helps you avoid having to clarify or correct your message later.
- Re-read your message before sending it, suggests Eric Arnum, editor of *MessagingOnline*. Would you mind if your boss read the email? If so, re-write it!
- Check spelling! Make it easy for your reader to understand your words.
- Be specific in the subject line; it helps you and your reader find the email later.
- Include your "signature" with company name, phone number and physical address.
- Describe any attachment, explaining exactly what it is, what it does and, if it's large, its size.
- Use plain text, not HTML formatting.

### Never

- Include offensive content, such as racist or sexist remarks, swear words or sexual jokes.
- Forward jokes, cute or touching stories, chain letters, urban legends, "news" stories or "virus alerts."
- Clutter people's in-boxes with messages they don't absolutely need.
- Open an attachment unless you know exactly what it is, even if a friend sent it.

[On the web,] you won't be judged by the color of your skin, eyes, or hair, your weight, your age or your clothing... [but] by the quality of your writing.

Virginia Shea, "netiquette" expert



Quote

- Use cutesy symbols or sayings in your signature.
- Use all caps—it's like shouting at your reader.

## Followership

Knowing how to follow is as important as knowing how to lead. In fact, followership—a term LaVerne Ludden, Ed.D. coins in *Job Savvy*—is the other side of leadership. The better you follow, the more influence you have with your supervisor. That influence gives you power to lead.

It all starts with being a good employee. If your boss trusts you to do your job well without supervision—making his or her life easier—you’re a good follower. When you also take the steps below, you become a great follower.

### Take the Initiative

To be a really great follower, you have to forge a positive relationship with your boss. It’s up to you alone to:

- **Be willing to change.**  
After all, your boss isn’t going to change to accommodate you.
- **Cut your boss some slack.**  
Be understanding when—not if—she or he makes mistakes.
- **Take responsibility.**  
Don’t push your own shortcomings off on your boss. If you have problems with your supervisor, they’re your problems. Deal with them.
- **Be patient and persistent.**  
Building or changing any relationship takes lots of time. When you feel frustrated by your slow progress, remind yourself that you won’t always work for this boss.

from *Job Savvy*

Be sincere. Sucking up won’t get you very far; your boss will see right through it.

Irma, library assistant  
Waco

**Quote**

### Be Supportive

A good follower works with the boss, not against the boss. In *Make Yourself Memorable*, Stephanie and Clayton Sherman suggest that you:

- **Show respect.**  
Honor your supervisor’s position, even if you don’t like him or her.
- **Make your boss look good.**  
Help his or her plans move forward.
- **Anticipate your boss’ needs.**  
Don’t wait to be asked. If you know your boss likes or needs something, have it ready beforehand.
- **Learn from your boss.**  
Your supervisor got that position for a reason; see what you can learn to advance your own career.
- **Show support for your boss.**  
Focus on helping him or her and the company—not yourself. If you have problems, challenge the system; don’t challenge your boss. And never act as though you want your boss’ job.

from *Job Savvy*

Everyone has to take orders from someone. Don’t get an attitude just because your boss tells you what to do. It’s not personal. Chances are, your boss is just following orders, too.

Jaime, bus driver, McAllen

**Quote**

The longer I study effective leaders, the more I am persuaded of the under-appreciated importance of effective followers.

Warren Bennis

**Quote**

### Communicate Well

A good follower communicates in ways that the boss appreciates:

- **Speak openly, directly and regularly.**  
Make suggestions and share ideas with your boss in private. Always be honest; don’t make excuses, be evasive or hide facts.
- **Be brief.**  
Your boss is a busy person so get to the point and then answer questions.
- **Be solution-oriented.**  
Never mention a problem without also suggesting a solution.
- **Keep your boss in the loop.**  
Don’t make changes without permission. To persuade your boss to support your ideas, relate them to ideas your boss has had in the past.
- **Listen closely to directions.**  
Understand assignments, policies and what your boss wants. Follow the steps in the box below when given an assignment.

### Be a Great Follower

Follower skills are as important as leadership skills. Air Force Colonel Phillip Meilinger describes how to be a good follower in these words:

- Don’t blame the boss.
- Don’t fight the boss.
- Take the initiative.
- Take responsibility.
- Tell the truth and don’t quibble.
- Do your homework.
- Be prepared to implement any suggestion you make.
- Keep the boss informed.
- Fix problems as they occur.
- Put in an honest day’s work.

from *Job Savvy* by LaVerne Ludden, Ed.D.

### Getting an Assignment

When your boss gives you an assignment, here’s what you should do:

1. **Say “yes” with enthusiasm.**
2. **Clarify the assignment:**
  - Who is it for? Who is the “audience”?
  - Who (if anyone) should help?
  - What is expected? How should the finished product look?
  - When exactly is it due?
  - Why is it important? How does it fit into the company’s mission?
3. **Ask your boss to prioritize.**  
“I’m working on this right now. Which should I do first?”

adapted from *Job Savvy* by LaVerne Ludden, Ed.D.

## Team Player

Team playing is essential in the work world. Even if your company has no designated teams, everyone who works there is on the same side. And in business, as in sports, team members must cooperate, not compete, with each other for the team to succeed.

Being a team player isn't complicated. You just have to work hard, get along with others and focus on the common goal, not your personal glory. Sure, you can complete a project on your own, but when you work with a team your results usually improve. Here are some guidelines:

### • Participate.

Contribute your energy, time and brain power to the team—even if you don't like some members. Holding yourself apart, resisting or criticizing teammates will not work. Instead, treat everyone like a valued customer.

### • Don't be shy.

Let the group benefit from your thoughts, experience and resources.

### • Encourage others to participate.

Don't dominate the group. Instead, welcome suggestions from your teammates and listen to them with an open mind. Respect their expertise.

### • Communicate.

Express yourself clearly, regularly, honestly and gently:

- Say "our team," not "my team."
- Say "please."
- Say "thank you."
- Say "good job."
- Ask for help.
- Offer to help.

### • Let go of your ego.

Be willing to think more of the team than of yourself. Share credit, embrace others' ideas, focus on team goals and don't be the only one to make decisions. Remember, if your team succeeds, you succeed.

### • Value differences.

See varied opinions, behaviors, values and personalities as assets rather than obstacles. Remember, your customers are diverse; your teammates should be, too.

### • Expect conflicts.

If everyone on the team thought alike, they would reach decisions quickly, but the results would be inferior. Conflicting ideas spark creativity and lead to the best solutions. When disagreements arise, handle them professionally, using the guidelines in the box at left.

If you want to succeed, be as ready to fall in love with someone else's ideas as you are with your own.

Judith Rich  
The Communicator



Quote

## Friendly Disagreements

At some point at work, you will disagree with a teammate's opinion or idea. If you focus on the issue and not the person, you can disagree and still remain friendly. Just:

- Pick your battles wisely. Don't disagree with every idea.
- Don't pretend to agree when you disagree.
- Disagree openly, not behind anyone's back.
- Don't criticize, ridicule or call names.
- State your opinion tactfully: "I see your point; I have a different view." "I'm concerned about this because..."
- Offer alternatives by asking "What if we tried to do it like this?"
- Apologize if you say or do anything wrong.
- Accept more than your share of the blame. It encourages the other person to cooperate more, say Sam Deep and Lyle Sussman, authors of *What to Say to Get What You Want*.
- Be willing to accept the group's decision unless it compromises your integrity.



If all pulled in one direction, the whole world would keel over.

Yiddish proverb

Quote

from a Texan

Our team works well because we respect and look out for each other.

Cindy, marketing rep  
San Angelo



Quote

### • Keep the project on track.

Tell your teammates when you fall behind or get overwhelmed, advises Susan Silver in *Organized to Be the Best*. When a teammate falls

behind, ask how you can help. Don't blame, criticize or say how it "should" be.

### • Keep it light.

People can be strange, so keep your sense of humor.

When you help the

team to maintain its perspective and have fun, you make an important contribution.

### • Be considerate.

A big part of team work is thinking of others. Even the little things matter a lot. The box below lists some ways to be thoughtful.

## The Little Things

Sometimes being a good team player means taking care of the little things.

- **Greet** your coworkers when you or they arrive. Smile. Say "goodbye" when you leave.
- **Clean** up after yourself in the break room. Don't leave food to spoil in the refrigerator. Mop up any spills you make in the fridge; most cleaning crews won't do it for you.
- **Restock** supplies if you use the last of anything—copy paper, printer paper, water from the cooler. Notify the proper person if it's necessary to order more.
- **Replace** items where they belong. Don't just throw things back in the supply closet or leave them laying around.
- **Return** promptly any item you borrow. Take items only if you have prior permission.

adapted from "Tips to Delight Your Co-Workers" by Mary J. Néstor, MJN Consulting

# Continuous Learning


The facts are clear: the more you learn, the more you earn. Today, having just a high school diploma or its equivalent qualifies you for a dead-end, minimum-wage job and not much else. You need further education and training to get ahead.

And here's another fact: what you know must grow. Even a master's degree doesn't mean anything if you don't keep up with all the advances in your field.

from a *Person*

I'm not as concerned with a person's current skill set as with their ability to pick up new skills. The industry changes so fast that we may not even need what they know today a few years from now.

Rob Butler  
Director of Development  
Fidelity Systems



**Quote**

## What Is It?

Continuous learning means that school is just the beginning of your education. Learning is an ongoing, never-ending process to:

- Stay current with technological, legal and knowledge advances in your area of expertise.
- Develop new skills.
- Upgrade existing skills.
- Improve your understanding of your work and how to do it more effectively.


## Benefits of It

If you continue to learn long after you graduate from high school, you will find that you:

- Get hired easily because employers want the skills and knowledge that you have.
- Get promoted quickly because employers don't want to lose you to another company.

Learning is what most adults will do for a living in the 21st Century.

Bob Perelman



**Quote**

- Earn more than even some people with more advanced degrees because your skills are current and valuable to employers.
- Enjoy your work. It's never dull and routine because your quest for knowledge makes it interesting.
- Control your career. The more skills you have, the more options you have. Continuous learning lets you direct your own work life.


## Where to Learn

There are many resources that can help you learn about your field and others. You can:

- Read articles that relate to your job in journals or online.
- Listen to business news about your field and the industry in general.
- Ask your supervisor to send you to job-related workshops.
- Ask for assignments that require you to learn and stretch your skills.
- Observe others.
- Talk with coworkers about work and related subjects.
- Read books on work-related topics.
- Take classes at a community college.
- Ask someone whom you admire to mentor you and teach you what they know.

Curiosity is one of the primary characteristics for long-term success on the job. Why? Because people who are hungry to learn typically know more over a period of time than those who are uninterested.

Carol Carter and Gary June  
*Graduating into the Nineties*



**Quote**


## How to Learn

You've attended school. You know how to learn in a formal setting. But how do you learn on the job when no one "officially" teaches you? In *TGIM: Thank God It's Monday*, Charles Cameron and Suzanne Elusorr suggest that you:

- **Be willing.**  
If you think you always know what's best, you close the door on learning. Instead:
  - Admit when you don't know.
  - Ask for help.
  - Request specific feedback, asking "How can I improve?" instead of "How am I doing?"
- **Listen and observe.**  
You can learn a lot from your supervisor and coworkers without their knowing it. Study how they work and communicate. Look at the results of their behavior. If it works for them, it might work for you.
- **Be child-like.**  
Children are learning machines. To learn like a child:
  - Be curious, asking why and how.
  - Be playful, having fun at work.
  - Be adventurous, exploring new ideas.
  - Be willing to make mistakes.
- **Be determined.**  
The most important part of learning is not giving up when it doesn't come easily. To really learn, you must be patient and refuse to quit.

Some people will not learn anything... because they understand everything too soon.

Alexander Pope



**Quote**

## Problem Solving

Problem solving is one of the critical job skills of this century. With fewer managers and more complex jobs, you're likely going to be asked to solve problems at work. That could mean anything from deciding how to explore Mars faster, better and cheaper to filling an order for 20 pizzas when you're short-staffed.

The following process, outlined in *Job Savvy* by La Verne Ludden, Ed.D., helps you solve any problem. The example situation helps illustrate the process.

### 1. Define the Problem

The more narrowly you define the problem, the more concrete your solutions will be.

Initial problem: Store's sales are down.

Narrow the problem: Determine if sales are down overall or just on some items. If everything sells briskly except the new line of sweaters, the problem isn't the store; it's the sweaters.

### 2. Analyze the Problem

A problem's solution depends on its cause. To determine the cause, analyze the situation by talking with the people involved and by observing it yourself.

Revised problem: Sweater sales are down.

Analysis: Interview salespeople and customers:

- Are the sweaters priced too high?
- Are the salespeople not pushing them?
- Is it too hot in July for heavy sweaters?

Results: It's too hot to sell fall clothes.

### 3. Develop Solutions

Once you know the problem's origin, you can devise solutions. To generate ideas, involve other people, do research and be as creative as you can using the techniques in the box at far right.

Method: Ask salespeople and a random sample of customers how to get people to buy sweaters in the summertime. Write down every answer without judging it.

The maxim, 'Nothing avails but perfection,' may be spelled 'Paralysis.'

Sir Winston Churchill

Quote

### 4. Evaluate Solutions

Carefully review each suggested solution. Contrast and compare those that are logical, simple, cost-effective and timely.

Suggested solutions:

- Change the weather patterns to hasten the onset of winter. [Not possible]
- Have a two-for-one sweater sale. [Possible]

### 5. Select a Solution

Decide on the best solution to implement, using whatever criteria you decide. Remember, it:

- must be affordable.
- will always involve risk.
- can't be "perfect."

Selection: Run a sweater sale ad suggesting that people who buy sweaters in the summer are smart.

### 6. Implement It

To implement the solution, get support from others, starting with your supervisor. Before you begin, decide how to measure success.

Plan: Meet privately with your supervisor. Describe the problem, explain your solution and answer any questions. Agree to measure success by comparing number of sweaters sold before and during the sale.

### 7. Evaluate It

Determine whether the solution worked and why it succeeded or failed by reviewing your measurement criteria. If it worked, you've learned what to do. If it didn't work, you've learned what not to do. Either way, you win.

Results: The sale is a success. Sweater sales go up 35%. Problem solved.

Problems are only opportunities in work clothes.

Henry John Kaiser

Quote

### Creativity

Creativity is not just for artists, musicians and scientists. According to Rudolf Flesch, "Creative thinking may mean simply the realization that there's no particular virtue in doing things the way they always have been done."

In fact, creativity is a very marketable skill that anyone can develop. The more you practice, the better you get.

#### Creative Problem Solving

To find creative solutions to problems:

- Brainstorm possibilities (see below).
- Make up jokes about the problem.
- Get input from others.
- Be enthusiastic.
- Make connections with other areas of life.
- Take time to relax and think of nothing.
- Refuse to listen to "creativity killers" such as:
  - "We've never done it that way."
  - "Let's get real."
  - "Good idea, but it won't work here."

The best way to have a good idea is to have lots of ideas.

Linus Pauling

Quote

#### Brainstorming

Brainstorming requires only three steps but it leads to great creativity.

- 1. Generate.**  
Scribble down as many ideas as you can. No limits! No censoring! No judgments! Quantity counts, not quality.
- 2. Elaborate.**  
Discuss how to implement the ideas. Decide how realistic they are.
- 3. Evaluate.**  
Compare the ideas and select the best, most practical and cost-effective one.

adapted from *Graduating into the Nineties*  
by Carol Carter and Gary June

## Organization

Being organized does not mean being neat, “controlling” or rigid. Nor is being *disorganized* creative, productive or easy-going. Instead, good organization helps you do what you want to do without wasting time. That’s it. The goal isn’t to look good, but to function well. And being organized helps you succeed at work.

### Your Duties

When you organize your work duties, especially common tasks, you increase your productivity and free yourself to work on more creative and challenging assignments. Simply:

- Gather all the supplies you’ll need before you begin a project. It saves time, money and stress.
- Break your routine tasks into parts. Only then can you ask people to help you. Otherwise, it may be too complicated to explain each detail.
- Take notes. When your boss gives you an assignment, jot down the details. When you contact customers, write the names, dates and outcomes. Record everything, perhaps in one notebook. You’ll be glad you did when question arise later!
- Group similar activities. Open all the mail at once, for example, or set aside copying for one trip to the copier. It saves time and thought.
- Automate everything you can. Create templates for “form letters” and design automatic reports.
- Clean your work area before you go home. It makes it easier to get right to work the next day.

#### “Drop Dead”

Organize your work so that if you dropped dead tomorrow, someone could easily figure out what you were doing and pick up where you left off.

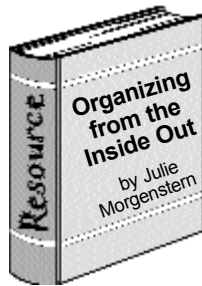
Remember that your work space and many of your tools belong to your employer, not you. You may quit that job or get promoted, but usually the position continues, filled by someone else.

Think of the person who’ll come after you when you label a file or plan a new project. Make it easy for him or her. It’ll make it easy for yourself, as well.


### Your Environment

You may have your own workspace or share with many people. Whatever your circumstance, you can organize your work environment to be more productive.

- Arrange items by frequency of use, keeping often-used items close at hand.
- Use broad categories when filing or arranging items or tools. If you’re too specific, you’re more likely to forget your own system.



- “Clean house” regularly and throw or give away anything you don’t need.
- Use bins and boxes to store items in cabinets and drawers. It makes clean-up a breeze.



A place for everything  
and everything in its place.

Traditional wisdom

**Quote**

### Routine Organizing

Aristotle once said that “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” He was right, and the secret to being organized is to develop and stick to routines.

**Create routines** that suit the way you work. The simpler, the better.

As a copy machine repairer, Tammy’s routine is to always return her tools to her toolbox. She doesn’t have a slot for each one, but she keeps them in certain places inside. This routine works for her: she always quickly finds the tool she needs.

**Follow routines** no matter what. That’s the only way they work. Soon they become habits.

Ephraim often ships sets of educational videos to teachers. He always boxes the sets in a certain order. If he accidentally puts two of the same video in one of the boxes, he sees the problem immediately and soon figures out where he made the mistake. His routine works because he sticks to it. He has never yet shipped an incorrect set of videos.

## A Texan Story

Adam worked as a clerk at the sheriff’s office. He thought he had a problem with being late. He was late for many reasons. He couldn’t find his keys or his back-up set. Or he had to buy a fast-food breakfast because he ran out of milk at home.

Once at work, he continued to be tardy:

- He missed a deadline because he forgot to fax his boss’ conference registration form.
- He was late to a meeting because he had to re-create a file he’d accidentally deleted.
- He wasted time every day looking for a “mislaid” form or sheet.

The list went on and on.

Adam’s problem was not tardiness, however; it was disorganization. And, as his boss pointed out during his review, it affected his job performance.

Slowly but surely, Adam got organized. He created some routines and stuck with them. After a period of adjustment, his productivity soared and his tardiness ended.

Here are some of his new routines:

- He keeps his keys on a hook by the door.
- He shops on the same day every week and no longer runs out of food.
- He keeps a daily “to-do” list of important deadlines and tasks.
- He saves his computer work every two minutes and makes back-up disks every day.
- He developed a very simple, very easy filing system that he can stick with.

## Time Management

To be an excellent employee, you need to manage your time well. If your work is outstanding but you never meet a deadline, for instance, you won't keep your job. To succeed at work, you must schedule your activities so that you complete your work on time and maintain your priorities.

### Priority Setting

Effective time management begins with setting priorities. When you know what is important, you can arrange your time accordingly.

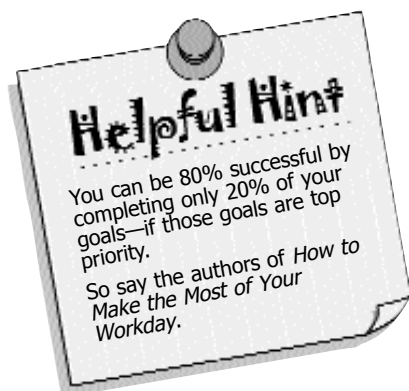
In your personal life, your priorities depend on what you value most. At work, your supervisor sets the priority for each project. Still, you have to decide throughout the day which task to do first.

That may mean, for example, that as a cook you choose to grill hamburgers instead of hotdogs, or as a clerk you return calls rather than file reports.

If you're not sure what to do first, begin with assignments or tasks that are:

- important to your boss.
- important to coworkers or other customers.
- new to you (because they might take longer than you expect).

Once you've done these projects, ask your boss to suggest what you should tackle next.



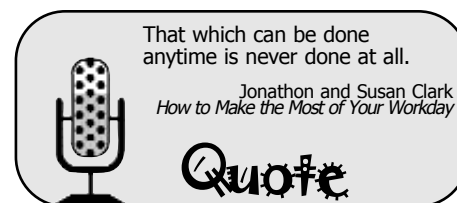
### Tools of the Trade

You don't need a fancy daytimer or Palm Pilot to manage your time at home and at work. A calendar and to-do list will do.

#### Calendar

A calendar helps you remember appointments and deadlines and helps keep you from over-scheduling.

- Use a month-at-a-glance calendar so that you can see what's coming up.
- Write down the time needed to complete a task, not just its starting time. Always overestimate how much time an activity will take.
- Schedule only 50% of your work time because inevitably problems and interruptions will consume the rest.
- Know your "peak time" when your brain power and energy levels are at their highest. Work on your most difficult tasks then. Don't waste it on mundane, repetitive work.



#### Daily Action List

Your daily action list helps you keep track of the individual activities that you need to accomplish that day. It also keeps you from worrying that you forgot something, says Nido Qubein in *Get the Best from Yourself*.

- List specific activities and tasks—not long-term goals. "Plan a meeting" is a goal. "Book the meeting room," "Write the agenda" and "Copy handouts" are tasks.
- Make your list at the end of the day. Planning ahead ties up loose ends and enables you to jump in first thing when you arrive the next day.

#### The "Urgent" Trap

At work, your priorities are clear: do what your boss tells you to do. At home, however, it's not always easy to decide what to do and when to do it.

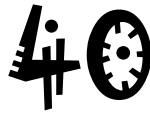
What seems "urgent" may not really be important. If you spend all your time "putting out fires," you can't decide rationally how to spend your time.

Before you make an appointment, commit to a project or run an errand, ask yourself the questions at right.

Your answers will help you manage your time more effectively and put you more in control of your life.

- Is this activity important? Does it help me meet my main priorities?
- How long will this realistically take?
- Is now the best time to do this?
- Could someone else do this for me?
- If I don't do this, what's the worst that could happen?

adapted from *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey



# Appearance

As an employee, you are a walking advertisement for your employer's company. Dress and act accordingly. Set aside your "right" to express who you are. Your employer pays you to express who the company is. Although each company has a certain image to project, certain guidelines apply to almost all.

## Dress

Your choice of dress and facial/body wear is crucial. Deciding to tattoo your face, for example, automatically limits your job options. To dress appropriately, remember that you represent your employer, not your own personality, and follow these four rules:

### 1. Be clean

To avoid offending your customers with poor hygiene:

- Keep your face, body, hair and nails clean and fresh-smelling.
- Wear clean, unstained clothes.
- Use anti-perspirant/deodorant daily.

### 2. Ensure safety and health

Your clothes should meet health and safety guidelines for your job.

- Choose clothes that fit the work to be done, such as an apron if spills are likely or heavy boots if working outdoors.
- Keep your hair away from your face if you handle food.
- Wear any special equipment required (e.g., goggles, hard hat); you can lose your job if you don't.

### 3. Try to fit in

Since you represent your company while at work, try to fit in.

- Keep your look simple and fairly conservative if you work in a traditional business setting. Model yourself after your successful coworkers.
- Dress so that your customers feel comfortable, says William Yeomans in *7 Survival Skills for a Reengineered World*.
- Before you wear anything unusual, ask your supervisor or other coworkers if it's a problem. Some hair styles (e.g., braids or shaved head) might not be acceptable.

### 4. Minimize distractions

Your goal at work is to work, not distract others from the business at hand. For most jobs, NEVER wear:

- suggestive or low-cut clothes.
- elaborate or unusual hair styles.
- unnatural-looking hair color.
- excessively high-heeled shoes.
- heavy perfume or cologne.
- large, eye-catching jewelry.
- visible or unsupportive underwear.
- clothing with holes or messages.
- visible tattoos, ritual scars or piercings other than in the earlobe.

... approximately 40% of all employment rejections are based on personal presentation, which includes dress and grooming.

A. Tariq Shakoore  
www.minorities-jb.com



**Quote**

## Manners

Your manner is as important as your appearance. You can conduct yourself professionally or offensively, but professionally works best. Here are some recommendations from the author of *Job Savvy*:

### Always...

- Hold the door for customers.
- Let customers walk ahead of you unless you're showing the way.
- Act confidently; it encourages customers to trust you.
- Smoke only in designated areas.
- Put cigarette butts and chewed gum in the garbage.
- Keep the volume on your radio or stereo low; no one else should be able to hear your music.
- Ask your supervisor for permission before using headphones.

### Never...

- Swear, call names or yell at work.
- Interrupt a customer.
- Slouch, lean, put your feet up or act as though you're not working.
- Dip or chew tobacco in public.
- Crack gum in front of others.
- Scowl or pout.
- Look bored, snobby or uncaring.
- Pick at your nose, ears, fingers or clothes.

## A Texan Story

Bill learned the importance of hygiene when he lost his sandwich shop job for working barefoot. Even though the customers couldn't see his feet behind the counter, he risked spreading germs.

Bill didn't remember anyone telling him he had to wear shoes, but the experience taught him a lesson. If you work in a place that says "no shirt, no shoes, no service" to customers, you can bet that "no shirt, no shoes, no job" is the rule for employees.

### Helpful Hint

Good manners help you put others at ease and show interest in them, says etiquette instructor Hilda Klinsenberg.  
*Working Woman, Feb. 1999*