What Works At Work: Developing Workplace Skills

There are certain skills to do well in any job. You are expected to know them when you start any job. Employers are willing to teach you job-related skills if you show that you already understand and follow the following expected skills:

I BASIC SKILLS
A. Reading
Most employers expect employees to be able to read and understand:
- instructions, memorandums, and other information
- procedure manuals and guidelines

B. Writing
Employers expect employees to be able to write clearly to inform or persuade others. You need to use acceptable writing skills to write:
- letters or memos
- reports or proposals

C. Math
Math is used in almost every job. For example, some jobs require math skills to:
- count change
- plan budgets
- analyze statistics
- calculate nutrient content

D. Computer Skills
Today, most places of work rely on computers. Knowing basic computer operations helps open doors to many career choices.

Assess Your Basic Skills:
- Do you remember what you read?
- Can you summarize the main ideas of an article or book?
- Do you know and use rules for grammar and punctuation?
- Can you perform basic math functions, i.e. addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division with ease?

II THINKING SKILLS
Thinking skills are important on the job. They can help you:

A. Solve Problems
Supervisors often rely on individual employees and teams to help solve problems. The problem-solving process involves the following steps:
1. identify the problem
2. gather information about the problem
3. develop possible solutions
4. choose and carry out the best solution
5. evaluate the results

B. Be Creative
   Many places of work welcome original thinkers who can present new ideas and unique solutions.

C. Use Good Judgment
   This means evaluating facts and beliefs to arrive at sound conclusions.

D. Persuade Others
   Using logic to convince others can help you reach your goals and move forward in the workplace.

Assess Your Thinking Skills:
   ____ When faced with a problem, do you try to think of more than one possible solution?
   ____ Are you open to new ideas?
   ____ Do you weigh the consequences of your actions?
   ____ Can you separate fact from fiction?
   ____ In a discussion, can you present facts and ideas in an organized and convincing way?

III SELF-MANAGEMENT SKILLS
Personal management skills (or the way you conduct yourself) can help you achieve in any field. The personal qualities of successful employees include:

A. Self-motivated or self-starter
   • enthusiastic, good attitude
   • shows initiative - takes on work that needs to be done without being told
   • hard-working

B. Self-confident and Accepts Constructive Criticism
   This means you believe in yourself and your ability to do the job well. Being criticized or redirected at work is similar to being coached, and is part of the learning process. In order to learn, it is important to be a good listener and to be open to new ideas.

C. Responsible
   • being honest - admit mistakes and learn from experience
   • dependable - show up for work as scheduled, arrive on time and ready to work.
     Employers put a lot of emphasis on being on time and getting a full day of work from an employee for a full day’s pay.

D. Able to Adapt to Change
   Things continue to change. Be ready not only to make the best of it, but to look for ways to take advantage of that inevitable change.
E. Manage Time Wisely

This means that you are able to organize your time and finish the most important tasks first. Working at a steady, efficient pace is more productive than carelessly rushing through your tasks. Learn how to manage stress through relaxation and exercise.

F. Leave Personal Life At Home

It is important for you to keep your personal life from interfering with your job performance. Every effort should be made to anticipate personal problems and to find ways of coping with them in advance. If all your planning and good intentions still leave you with a need to attend to urgent personal problems/matters during work hours, bring that to the attention of your employer.

Assess Your Personal Management Skills:

___ Can you accept compliments… and criticisms?
___ Do you keep a positive attitude … even when things are not going well?
___ Do you arrive on time for work, meetings, other scheduled events?
___ Do you accept responsibility for mistakes you make? Do you work to correct and learn from those mistakes?
___ Are you able to balance your personal and work life so that one does not interfere with the other?

IV COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Good communication skills are the key to getting along with co-workers, supervisors and clients. Good communicators are able to:

A. Express themselves effectively
   - think carefully before speaking
   - speak clearly and confidently
   - present one idea at a time, and make sure it is understood
   - focus on being specific to avoid any misunderstanding

B. Use Appropriate Body Language

Nonverbal communication, such as eye contact, facial expressions, and tone of voice, sometimes speaks louder than words.

C. Listen Actively
   - give full attention to the speaker …tune out distractions
   - do not rush or interrupt
   - ask questions if you do not understand or need more information
   - show you understand … one way of doing this is to rephrase the speaker’s main points in your own words, e.g. “What I hear you saying is…."

D. Avoid Habits That Hurt Communication
   - making fun of others
   - lecturing
   - taking others’ problems lightly
• thinking of a response while the other person is talking
• giving orders
• giving too much advice

Assess Your Communication Skills:
___ Do you think carefully about what you want to say?
___ Are you comfortable speaking in front of a group?
___ Do you give your complete attention when another person is speaking?
___ Are you aware of your body language?

V BE A TEAM PLAYER
Being on a team means working with others to reach a common goal, i.e. excellent client service, excellent product, etc. Being a team player means:

A. Understanding Differences
   Team members bring different abilities, experiences, and backgrounds to the team. Being able to recognize this and understand how to work with a variety of people who have different backgrounds and work styles is a valuable skill.

B. Cooperating With Others
   This means helping out when needed. It does not mean: doing just the work you are assigned to do, giving orders, or expecting others to do all the work. It means a give and take relationship.

C. Handling Conflicts
   Team members will not always agree. However, effective teams can work together to solve conflicts.

D. Treating Co-workers With Courtesy & Respect
   Courtesy and respect for co-workers and their opinions are key ingredients in making winning teams.

Assess your team player skills:
___ Do you respect and value the opinions of others?
___ Can you share credit with others for a job well done?
___ Do you offer to help when someone is in a bind even if it is not your responsibility?
___ Can you sit down and resolve conflicts you may have with others?

Assessment score: If majority of your answers to the questions are “Yes”, you understand the unspoken expectations of the workplace and will be an asset in your job.