

Workshop #2: Workplace Presence (soft skills – marketing yourself)

Workplace presence is your professional “like-ability.” Do people find you interesting, talkative, attentive, funny, warm, nice, thoughtful, well groomed, appropriately dressed, etc.? If they do, they’ll begin to like you more. When this begins to happen, you’re on your way to convincing them that they want to work with you. This workshop will teach you how to show a potential employer your workplace presence or like-ability.

Workshop Topics

1. Dress and Appearance
2. Personality
3. Self-confidence
4. Effective Communications
5. How to Listen
6. Art of Bragging
7. Going over the Top (OTT)

In addition to the discussion notes listed below, more content on each these topics can be found in “Part II: Workplace Presence” of the *Make It Work: Disability & Competitive Employment* book available at <https://wid.org/wid-e3/employment-empowerment/>.

Discussion Notes

Caution...

When you face a professional skill that you think you can’t do, the first strategy is take a deep breath (calm yourself) and consider the merits of trying to get as close as possible to the work place expectation or practice that is being described. For example, when talking about “workplace presence” you will be encouraged to gesture or move your hands and arms in unison with your speaking voice. If you can’t move your hands or arms because of a disability you will worry, “Is all lost with regard to this skill? No, it isn’t -- unless you give up right away. Before you might give up, try the three step strategy below when you feel you cannot do the professional being skill described.

1. Try the skill or practice being described. Who knows, with practice you may be able to even accomplish the skill or maybe get closer to it than you thought possible. If after reasonable attempts or practice it’s just not possible, that’s okay, now you know that you’ve tried and are ready to move-on to the next two steps.
2. The next step is to consider either an accommodation or alternative technique or way to demonstrate the skill being described. Use your imagination. Ask others you trust for ideas on possible adapted techniques or technologies that may help you to achieve the work place skill being discussed. For example, if you’re trying to improve your gesturing skills (the moving your

arms and hands as you talk) and your disability makes it impossible, consider the possibility why of moving your electric wheelchair or even just your eyes or facial expressions in ways that mimic the idea of gesturing.

3. If neither steps #1 or #2 works, the third step or strategy to consider is an artful way of letting others know that you value the skill; however, due to a disability, you can't perform it. This strategy does two important things. First, it tells the other person that you know about the skill (that shows them your understanding about being professional) and, second, it clearly explains to the other person why that skill is not being practiced by you. This makes the situation understandable, expected and normal.

Now, workplace presence skills...

1.) Dress and Appearance

When someone meets another person, for the first time, it takes about 5-10 seconds for the person to formulate their first impression about that new person. Obviously, there's not much you can say about yourself in that short amount of time in order to make a good first impression, so how you look (dressing and grooming) will become the primary basis for their first and often lasting impression. So, let's commit ourselves to looking good on the outside as we develop our inside talents because one without the other is an incomplete package. The first step in this process is to learn more about what is expected by the occupation or organization where you're interested in finding employment. If it's the construction industry, steel toe boots, a hard hat and clean coveralls may be correct. If it's a computer related company, clean business casual may be what is customary and usual. If it's a financial company, a clean suit and tie for men, and clean business dress or suit for women may be the way to go. And, of course, be a clean you (body and breath). Also, consider tattoos, body piercings and the cleanliness of your disability device(s). A great way to learn what the expected dress code might be for the workplace you want to join is to visit the location and see what people are wearing. Sometimes pictures or photographs on the organization's website will offer you clues about how to dress appropriately in their workplace.

2.) Personality

Start with a smile. Smiles are contagious. A smile opens the heart which, in turn, fuels the mind to listen better to the person smiling. As a result, a smile is the best way to begin the process of bringing someone closer to you and, in turn, beginning to like you. And if you can get that feeling starter, right away, you're well on your way to a successful conversation (interview or meeting). Along with having a warm smile on your face, a good first impression gets even better if you can find something nice or humorous to say to the person you're first meeting. So, if you find the right opportunity to deliver a complement or make a humorous observation, go for it. Once you get the other person to laugh, return the humor or just smile at your comment, you'll have their full attention because they have already started liking you. Also, when an employer first meets job applicant, they're anxious to learn what that applicant's personality is like. As a result, it's important to understand what yours might be. To this end, try to better understand what your individual personality type is like. Here some questions to think about as you analyze your individual personality.

- What makes you happy?
- What do you avoid doing?
- What is your perspective on various subjects (life, work, relationships, success, failure, etc.)?
- How do you most like to interact with other people?
- How do you like to express yourself?
- How do you make decisions?

The answers to these and other questions can help you understand your personality type. Once you know more about it, you can express it more freely. And, nobody is better at being you than you. For a more detailed understanding of personality types try to take and/or explain the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) personality test. These tendencies or differences will be discussed more fully in the Workshop #5 (workplace patterns).

3.) Self-confidence

Self-confidence is the foundation of professional development. It's the key to success. Everyone, from time to time, lacks of self-confidence about their ability to master a new skill. What is self-confidence? Self-confidence is a belief or trust in your ability to learn new skills or take-on new challenges. It's a positive attitude or a "can do" spirit. It's a belief in yourself –that you can perform as people expect you to perform. It's an observable value or characteristic about yourself which people tend to notice. It's a core belief in your potential to succeed. Self-confidence is not a false claim about what you have accomplished or can do now. It's not an exaggeration, misrepresentation or lie about your abilities. It's not false bravado. It's a statement about your potential, what you are reasonable sure you can do. And, most importantly, it's wrapped-up in an attractive measure of humility surrounding your self-confidence ("I think I can do that" versus "Oh sure, I can do that!") Practice having self-confidence.

4.) Effective Communications

Only 7% of what a speaker actually says to an audience is remembered by them. Ninety-three percent (93%) of what people remember from their encounter with a speaker are the general impressions of the presentation, not actually what they said. In other words, people "remember" mostly a speaker's workplace presence. They mostly remember how the speaker acted towards them (friendly, likeable, positive, self-confident, authentic, humorous, and effective communication skills) as well as the speaker's visual presence (dress, grooming, gesturing, vocal variation, movements, and body language). Hence, a speaker's words are a small percentage (7%) of the professional communication experience. Commit to becoming an effective communicator by learning and practicing these important and often underappreciated communication skills.

Eye contact

People assumed that where your eyes are focused is where your attention is focused. So, whenever talking to someone or a group of people, always be sure to have eye contact.

Gesturing

This is moving your hands, head, and feet (moving around) in support of, or in unison with what you're saying. If, for example, you're talking about something you're proud of, you can emphasize your pride by using your hands or lean in closer to the person you're talking with to gesture excitement or passion.

Posture and body position

Body posture is a signal promoting attention, interest and respect.

Speaking style or method (telling stories)

We like to hear stories. Stories are more interesting and memorable than facts. Maybe that's true because we like to watch TV shows, movies and read books.

Language

How you use language tells the listener if you're smart, thoughtful, well educated, interesting and (in the end) professional. This doesn't mean you have to talk like a scholar or grammarian. Rather, think about what you're saying in professional settings and try to be more careful about your grammar, syntax and vocabulary. In addition, be sure to avoid current day jargon or popular ways of speaking, for example avoid saying:

- "ah, ah, ah, and ah"
- "like, like, like and like"
- "u know what I'm saying", or "u know what I mean"

Voice or vocal variation

Have you ever listen to someone whose vocal tones are the same (monotone) no matter what they say? Doesn't that put you to sleep? Conversations are far more interesting when the person you're talking with doesn't maintain the same vocal tone or volume through everything they say. Match the emotion, excitement or importance of a point or statement with more volume, energy and expression than what you might use for minor comments or lesser points. Also, be careful to avoid communicating in a professional situation in vocal patterns or fads such as "valley speak." "Valley speak" is a way of expressing or ending all your comments, phrases or sentences on a higher note, for example, "whatEVER." Check your speaking style for such tendencies and work on correcting them for the workplace.

Be conversational

Speak in a conversation manner or to express yourself in a friendly and personal way. This strategy not only helps you to become more relaxed and less nervous, it also encourages a sense of friendliness from the other person, which helps you to make a better impression.

Humor

Humor makes the listener perk-up and become more interested and attentive to what you are saying. A word of caution, know and understand humor's limitations. When in doubt about a joke, don't say it.

Content – be specific

Say clearly and in a few words what you mean. That sounds easy but it's actually quite hard for most people to do. Okay, I'll be more specific. Give the headline first. Don't bury your key point under a mountain of words.

5.) Learn to Listen

Listening well and thoughtfully is another key professional skill which can help you become an effective and accomplished professionally. The skill seems simple enough. Someone says something to you and you listen and remember. Then why do so many people perform this skill poorly? They falter or fail because they never really commit themselves to listening as they should. The fact of the matter is we all have this inner voice which never stops talking to us even when we should be listening to someone else. This inner voice is constantly distracting us. Unless we learn how to exercise some discipline over it, it will never stop distracting us from what we're supposed to be doing, which is listening effectively. Practice listening by repeating silently to yourself what the speaker is saying. This may mean you have less time to prepare your reply which can affect its quality. So consider some tricks to use in order to give yourself more time to prepare your reply while improving your listening skills:

- ask the speaker a question about what they just said;
- ask the speaker to repeat or “say more” about a particular point;
- repeat back to the speaker a short summary of what you heard them say; or,
- simply tell them you need some time to think about your reply and you'll respond as soon as possible.

Good listening skills can also help you better manage conflict. An important first step is to let the angry person “have their say”. Just listen attentively. Don't interrupt. When someone is clearly upset, what they want most of all is for someone representing the company to actually be quiet and listen to what they have to say. Much of their anger is anchored in not being heard, understood or allowed to tell their story.

6.) The Art of Bragging

We've been taught that bragging is wrong. Well, bad bragging is wrong; but, good bragging is right! Job applicants must learn how to become your best advocate regarding your talents. And when doing this, you need to develop a sophisticated or professional style of letting people know what you've done or can do. In one sense this is bragging; however, in the world of work is effective marketing or advertising about your knowledge, skills and abilities. This attribute or skills is form of self-advocacy. It's a key part of both better representing your work skills to others as well as demonstrating an all-important self-confidence.

For more, including a worksheet exercise to practice see Appendix A in the *Make It Work: Disability & Competitive Employment* book available at <https://wid.org/wid-e3/employment-empowerment/>.

7.) Going over the Top

Going “over the top” is an effective warm-up exercise before performing for anything (a sport or job interview). It calms the nerves. It gets the body and mind alert and ready for action which helps to ensure that you hit your mark or start your professional performance as your best and authentic self. By going “over the top” before you begin, you’ll start your performance (interview or presentation) at your peak performance. This is important because your job interviewer is making judgments about you from the moment you enter the interview room. Here’s how to do it.

In the minutes before the interview, go to a quiet place, by yourself (you don’t want to scare anyone because you’re about to go wild) and look at yourself in a mirror and say good things about yourself, like you are number 1; that you’re the right person for this job; and, that you’ve done many great things that you’re proud of and when the employer hears about them they’ll want to hire. Go over the top with praise about who you are and how well you going to do in the interview. The wilder you are the better you will perform from the minute you start. Also, during this exercise go through your check list of the major points that you’ve prepared to talk about (“bragging” preparation). And, remind yourself about the things you need to do to be impressive, like making eye contact, gesturing, posture, speaking style, language usage, vocal variation, humor, and being specific.

During your private “Over the Top” warm-up exercise say loudly and with exaggeration things like:

- ✓ “I’m really excited to be here today!”
- ✓ “I can’t wait to tell you about how great I am!”
- ✓ “I’ve been preparing for this job all my life!”
- ✓ “Let me tell you why!”
- ✓ “I am so qualified for this job!”
- ✓ “I’m going to own that interview room!”
- ✓ “I’m ready, let’s begin the interview – bring it on!”

This is the time to end every sentence with a big fat exclamation point!