

## Lesson 4 — Workplace Patterns (understanding differences in the workplace)

As we know, people are called individuals because each person is different.

Each person has unique tendencies, traits or styles that make them who they are. This is true in school, in your community and, of course, in the workplace. The more you understand about these differences, the better equipped and prepared you'll be to effectively communicate and work with each individual you meet.

The purpose of this Lesson is to discuss these differences.

Just because people are different from each other and from you, it doesn't mean that they are less capable or "worse" in some way. It just means they see things from a different experience, culture, or perception. And when you learn how to understand some of these differences, you'll begin to recognize that many of these differences make for a richer work team and a broader set of perspectives, which most often leads to better results for an organization when all its individuals work together effectively.

And if you take the effort to understand these differences and navigate them in your career, your professional power will increase.

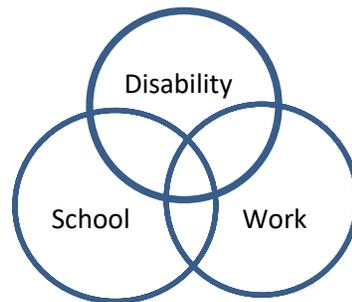
### The differences between worlds (education, disability and work)

As mentioned in this book's "Introduction," if you're entering the workforce for the first time, it's important that you understand and appreciate the differences between the three worlds "education," "disability" and "school."

Here might be your experience with each of these three worlds – disability, education, and work.

- ✓ World of Disability -- Most of your life in this world has been spent learning about and managing your disability skills, rights and needs (self-determination skills, independent living skills, civil rights, educational rights, disability access and accommodation needs, etc.). This world spins around laws like Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), State protections and disability-related programs.
- ✓ World of Education -- Most of your life has been spent in the educational system as a student working within the rules and expectations of teachers and school systems. These include reading, sitting in classes or lectures, turning in assignments, and taking exams. The goals are to earn good grades, get into better programs and earn degrees from high school or college. Being late to class or turning in an assignment late ends in discipline or a lower grade.
- ✓ World of Work -- A new and different world. People are competing for jobs, careers and promotions. The major concerns are around finding a job you like, earning money, getting, and keeping a job. Depending on your job, you may be performing regular tasks, serving customers

(for example, at a store or restaurant), participating in large projects, or managing other employees.



If you're on the verge of a major life transition – for example, from school to work – it's time to shift gears and prepare yourself for the new reality ahead.

In order to begin to understand this transition better, let's examine some of the major differences between and among these three worlds.

Areas of major differences between the worlds of disability and work are:

- Relationships: Most disability-related relationships are most often candid and open about disability issues and concerns. Problems can be shared and discussed in confidence. Concerns and conversations often focus on disability rights, at individual or society-wide levels, and how to fight for them. Being disability sensitive is a given. In the workplace, on the other hand, relationships are professional not as “familiar.” Personal problems and feelings are not usually openly discussed. The subject of disability rights can be a loaded one, as there are disability-related laws and lawsuits or complaints are possible. Disability subjects should become less of your focus and identity in the workplace than elsewhere. Social relationships with bosses, co-workers and customers are most often not a good idea.
- Schedules: Disability schedules are more in tune with disability needs. It's better understood and appreciated that a disability means you might have to take more time to do your tasks including getting out of the front door of your home. In the workplace, people generally don't want to hear about your scheduling problems. For example, in most office jobs, work starts at 9:00 a.m. and lasts for 8 hours (some offices start at 8:00 a.m. and service jobs like grocery clerks or servers might have different hours). No matter the job, you are expected to be on-time and continue working full-speed the entire shift. If your disability means that getting ready in the morning takes a while, you will just need to get up earlier than your coworkers – it might be frustrating, but that's the world of professional work.
- Dress behaviors: The disability related dress code in public is more relaxed, including your personal devices. Your presentation may be dictated by your disability and attendant supports – no real worries, please understand. In the workplace, the office dress code is for everyone, so stock up on professional-looking attire and make sure it's clean. If you need to push an attendant to iron your shirt and tie your tie just right, don't feel guilty. And good appearance includes your personal devices, so try to keep them in good working order (even if a wheelchair

needs repair and you put a little duct tape to hold something in place, make sure the tape is placed well and isn't tearing apart). Looking professional is a pre-requisite to being professional in the office and with people outside of it. Bosses want it. Co-workers need it. And customers won't be attracted to doing business with you unless you have it.

- Success measures: Disability success might be measured by your ability to maintain independence and demand access and equal treatment under the law. If you can't get into a public accommodation, you are expected to speak up forcefully and don't take "no" for an answer. Workplace success, on the other hand, is doing the duties of your job and achieving the successes your boss requires. True success means going *beyond* what is required. In your worker role, more diplomatic skills are expected than aggressive disability advocacy type skills. Success is determined by doing what it takes to be hired, promoted and earn a salary.

Areas of major differences between the worlds of school and work are:

- Relationships: School relationships between and among teachers, family & friends are mostly social and familiar. Often, you can feel free to ask basic and even obvious questions and they will be answered patiently. In some situations, you can show your feelings and talk about personal subjects (especially if they are related to a school lesson). In the workplace, relationships are professional and not "familiar." Personal problems and feelings are not usually openly discussed. You are most often better off privately and quietly researching (on your own) answers to your basic questions before letting others know what you don't know. Again, the Internet can be your friend when you have questions!
- Schedules: School schedules tend to be more forgiving around taking time off when sick. And when you return, all is forgiven and forgotten with a note from your parent. The work you missed should be reviewed, but you might get pass on missed homework assignments. After all, you were sick. Being late can be excused with no real consequences. In the workplace, you earn sick leave after working for weeks or months and can only take that time off when you are really sick (in many jobs, a doctor's note is needed to prove it). If you don't have the sick leave time to cover you absence, you will usually lose your pay even for a doctor-approved sickness, although some jobs let you go into "debt" on sick time. And the work you failed to do may still need to be done, even if you need to really go into over-drive for a few days (if you are salaried, you may also finish it in the evenings or over a weekend). Being late is sometimes even more serious of an issue. After all, you weren't sick, and unless there is an exceptional circumstance (for example, if the bridge you need to travel over is shut down unexpectedly), you can get your pay docked (held back) for the time missed or even suffer in your performance review. This is actually a good reason to follow local news and social media, so if there is an announcement ahead-of-time that the bridge will be shut down, you can know about it, leave earlier and get to work on-time using a different route. If you will miss work or be late for any reason – whether it's being sick or a broken bridge – make sure to call or email your boss as soon as possible to let them know.

- Dress behaviors: school dress codes tend to be more relaxed, including your personal devices. Fitting into fashion trends may be allowed, whether it's torn jeans or leather jackets with metal spikes. After all, even schools understand adolescent behaviors. Dress may be dictated by your disability and attendant supports – no real worries, just tell the teacher if he asks. In the workplace, the office dress code is for everyone. And, good appearance includes your personal devices. Be careful about wearing new fashion trends to work (even if it's "casual Friday"). Dress is usually more conservative than these trends might allow. Remember, looking professional is a pre-requisite to being professional. Bosses want it. Co-workers need it. And customers won't be attracted to dining business with you unless you have it.
- Success measures: School success might be measured by grades. And often, students can negotiate them by asking for extra credit or appealing a grade they don't like. If your grades aren't good, the next test or assignment can pull your grade back up; you might even be able to re-take a course for a better grade if you really want to. Plus, you haven't lost any money. Workplace success is doing the duties of your job and achieving the successes your boss requires. You usually can't re-do a task, and a really bad work product can jeopardize your job. Poor performance might go on a performance review, which can affect your pay and promotions – although following up a bad deliverable with consistently strong performance can even things out.

So, there are significant differences between the worlds of education and disability and the world of work.

But there are also similarities.

Your educational experiences, such as asking good questions, raising your hand to speak, asking permission to leave, being respectful of the person in charge, having done your work (and studied) in advance, and more will readily fit into the world of work. Bring them with you.

And your disability experiences, such as effectively teaching people about your disability and accommodation needs, helping your organization better understand the market importance or potential of the disability community, helping your boss, co-workers and customers better understand the new disability perspective and more will also readily fit into the world of work. Sometimes, your disability knowledge and experiences can be extra assets in the world of work. Bring these with you also.

Mold yourself in these ways so you better fit into the various world-of-work patterns.

Be in the right space of the world-of-work circle.

## Individual differences

It's an obvious point that people are not all alike, as we initially reviewed in the subject of personality in Lesson 1 above (Workplace Presence). Each person we meet is likely to have some thing or things about them which make them different from us. This is a major part of their personality. Sometimes, these

differences are minor, and we can easily accept them. Other times, these individual differences are more dramatic, even to the point of confusing or even scaring us. When that might happen, we are likely to step back from interacting with another person. We may even ignore them or worse.

In these cases, we may see another person's "differences" as an undesirable fault or weakness. We may think of them as "odd" and someone we should avoid. We may make the mistake of thinking we're better than they are because they don't think, act or look like us. If you're a person with a disability, you've probably realized that being "different from the norm" (as we are too-often told we are) doesn't mean you have less worth. In fact, if you have a disability, you may have been on the bad end of this experience, where others treated you as inferior or worse-off. If so, you probably have the maturity and wisdom necessary to see beyond these differences or you may have even learned to value them (which is the point of this section).

So, differences in people can be either a positive or a negative thing, depending on your ability to understand what you see and, in turn, learn how to understand and value these differences.

For example, let's say you're the silent or the quiet type. It's difficult for you to go up to a person you don't know (maybe even one you do know) and start a conversation with them. In fact, when that situation arises, your palms may start to sweat; your heart races; and your favored response is to avoid the difficulty of the situation and simply not say hello. People may have made fun of you for being acting that way. "Oh, they're an introvert," you may have heard others say about you. And you worry that they're telling people you're antisocial, shy, or even a snob or stuck-up because you don't say much. These reactions may have had an impact on your self-esteem. You may feel inadequate (or worse) for this tendency. It's unfortunate, but others' opinions about us can seriously impact how we feel about ourselves.

Well, at the other end of this spectrum of this personality type is the extrovert. That's the person who dominates the conversation. They love to talk. They'll approach anyone and start up a conversation about anything. And some extroverts will say whatever they happen to be thinking, without carefully considering what they are saying. They may also be criticized for being a "loud mouth," never letting others speak, and even for saying "stupid" or inappropriate things.

These two examples give us an insight into idea of individual differences. Neither example is the right way or the wrong way to be. It's just the way some people are wired or built. If you are one or the other, the key is to accept how you're wired and begin to learn that it's normal. So, get liberated and learn how to embrace and use your natural style in a positive manner. If you really want to change how you communicate, you can make that effort, but don't feel negative at all about how you are right now.

As we've mentioned before, there's an interesting test that helps people better understand how they and others are wired with various personal tendencies or types. It's called the "Myers-Briggs Type Indicator" (MBTI) assessment tool or test. This tool or exercise asks you several questions which help you to understand what your individual personality details are and, in turn, gives you a chance to learn about the value of being wired the way you are. The fact is that no matter how you're wired, those

tendencies or preferences give you power and value to perform at work and elsewhere (socially, politically or otherwise). When you better understand these tendencies and related values about both yourself and others, you can begin to understand their values especially when working with others and in teams. You can develop strategies for better partnerships, working relationships and more.

There are four scales or general types of personalities to consider. See which ones might best describe your preferences. The way to understand your MBTI is to choose one letter from each scale and create a 4-letter combination that best describes your personality. So, someone who is an Introvert, Sensing, Thinking, and Perceiving would have a personality type “ISTP,” and so on. You may tell yourself “I’m somewhere between one and the other” – so sometimes a bit introverted and sometimes extroverted – but just choose the “type” or letter that seems closest to your personality. And, REMEMBER, these are different types. None are bad or wrong. All are good and have value. Embrace who you are and respect others who might be different from you.

Here are the four scales.

### Introvert or Extrovert

Introvert (I) -- Quiet people tend to be introverts and it’s hard for them to be talkative with the new people they meet. They can chat with those new people, but it takes extra effort. They often enjoy being alone with their thoughts and they are usually use fewer words to say what they are thinking.

Extrovert (E) – People who love to talk tend to be extroverts. It’s easy for them to meet new people and they like to say what comes to mind. They are outgoing and like to connect with others in business and social scenes.

### Sensing or Intuitive

Sensing (S) -- People who prefer using their sensing skills tend to pay a great deal of attention to reality, particularly to what they can learn from their own senses. They value what they hear or see. They tend to focus on facts and details and enjoy getting hands-on experience.

Intuitive (N) – People who prefer using their intuition skills pay more attention to things like patterns and impressions. They enjoy thinking about possibilities, imagining the future and abstract theories. They tend to follow their instincts.

### Thinking or Feeling

Thinking (T) -- People who prefer thinking over feeling place a greater emphasis on facts and data. They tend to be consistent, logical and impersonal when weighing a decision. They’ll tend to do what the facts demand regardless of what others may want or think.

Feeling (F) -- Those who prefer feeling over thinking are more likely to consider people and emotions when arriving at a conclusion. Even if the data says to do one thing, they may prefer to do the other thing or change their decision somewhat to respond to what others may want.

## Judging or Perceiving

Judging (J) - Those who lean toward judging prefer structure and firm decisions. They tend to be determined and unyielding once they make a decision and start moving toward a goal. When they work, they tend to be well-organized, planning and task-oriented. Judging should not be confused with “judgmental,” so these individuals do not necessarily criticize people and things around them.

Perceiving (P) -- People who lean toward perceiving are more open, flexible and adaptable. They might be more willing to change as things move along. They may be less structured in how they do work, approach tasks as a mix of work and play, and be more stimulated to rush when a deadline is near.

In summary, there are four scales or general types of personalities. Because of how these characteristics can be combined and mixed together, there are a total of 16 “personality types” (for example, ISTJ, ENFP, INTP, etc.). See which characteristics might be like you to find your personality type. And, REMEMBER, these are different types. None are bad or wrong. They are ALL good and have their individual worth in the workplace. Embrace who you are and use your personality to your advantage.

Of course, the above listing is only a broad outline of an individual’s personality tendencies and is not intended to document which of these tendencies you have. This can only be done by actually taking the MBTI, so find a way to take it if you can (more information is at [www.MyersBriggs.org](http://www.MyersBriggs.org)). Still, it helps you to begin to understand how you and others think and tend to make decisions.

No matter what your personality type is, never, ever think it’s wrong to be that way or think of yourself as inadequate. Similarly, never think less of someone else who demonstrates a different or opposite personality tendency. All personality types are interesting and powerful, especially when they’re well understood and utilized to their advantage. And people can often move from one type to the other both intentionally and naturally. For example, somebody who is introverted could take a networking course and learn to become more outgoing, and an extrovert may have a life experience that leads them to spend more time alone.

When I first took the MBTI, along with other classmates, I scored at the high end of the “introvert” scale.

After the class received their individual MBTI result, the instructor formed work teams based on each person’s results. All the extroverts were assembled on the same team and all the introverts on another team. When my team of introverts first gathered, we all laughed smugly at those “loud mouth” extroverts who launched right into the exercise before they even got organized. We laughed because they were all talking at once and weren’t listening to each other. In order for them to be heard, they began shouting louder and louder. It was mayhem! No one in their group was listening. Then our more civilized and feeling superior group started the exercise. As we did, each one of us thoughtfully and carefully took our turn and said what we thought about the problem were given to solve. Each spoke only a few minutes, saying only a few well-chosen words, but what we said was clear and to the point. It took us about 15 minutes out for the 45 we had for this exercise to finish our work. When we were done, we all went painfully silent. No one said another word because we had our “say” and thought we

had finished our task. After a few minutes, one of our introvert group members was listening to the various comments flying around the other team's and said to us with a newfound wisdom, we need some of "these people" on our team – to energize and explore our comments.

When it came time to "report out" our respective group's experience, the extroverts (naturally) reported first. They said that they wished they had some introverts on their team because they could have helped them to consolidate and summarize all their ideas into specific recommendations.

Differences are just that. There is no right or wrong way to be, just strive to be good at the way you are.

Always be proud of your differences, never ashamed of them. Respect the differences in both you and others and the capabilities they represent. Use them to an advantage. The magic about individual differences is to understand their respective strengths and, in turn, to learn the importance of mixing and matching different types to make the best work teams possible.

One last point to keep in mind is that while I scored on the very high end of being an introvert, I can be an extrovert when I need or want to be. You can always perform the opposite tendencies. It just takes extra effort and energy to demonstrate those skills. Plenty of introverts can get up in front of a crowd and give a great presentation when they need to; meanwhile, other "perceiving" people have learned to be more structured in their work when doing large projects. Just because you lean toward one way, it doesn't mean you can't be the other in some settings. You most certainly can when you need or want to.

### Multi-generational workforce (differences between generations)

Just as individuals exhibit different preferences or tendencies, various generations of workers have their preferences and tendencies. People are living and choosing to work longer than in the past, so it's likely that when you report for work, you will meet bosses and co-workers from these various generations. If you understand that each group or generation of workers has had a different life experience, which set their work expectations differently from other generations, you can be more successful as you navigate a multi-generational workplace.

There are five generations of workers currently in the work force. Each one views the workplace slightly differently. They are:

1. Traditional Workers (born before 1945) – 2% of the workforce
2. Baby Boomers (1946-1964) – 31% of the workforce
3. Generation X or Gen X (1965-1980) – 32% of the workforce
4. Millennials or Gen Y (1981-1994) – 34% of the workforce
5. Post-Millennials or Gen Z (1995-present) – 1% of the workforce

As noted, each of these five generations grew up under different conditions and, as a result, set their preferences and expectations around work differently than the other generations. Here are the general

life experiences of each of these five groups and their resulting general preferences and tendencies in the workplace:

- 1) “Traditional Workers” remember the Great Depression, World War II, the Cold War, office machines, slide rules, and assembly lines in industry. These experiences forged their view about the workplace and often expresses itself in an orderly office structure, a tight chain of command, strict office hours, the belief that “you’re lucky to have a job – hang on to it,” strong loyalty to where one works, a belief that respect is earned over time, the sense that you learn by experience, and an understanding that life is not always fair (so “deal with it”).
- 2) “Baby Boomers” grew up under the Cold War (including the Korean and Vietnam Wars), the space race to the moon, Kennedy and Martin Luther King assassinations, the civil rights movement, the “hippie” movement, Watergate, color television, calculators, and multiple landline phones (home, office and pay). These experiences forged their view about the workplace and often expresses itself in their participatory or consensus leadership, collegial and friendly workplace relationships, desire to work face-to-face with people, expecting rewards for hard work, wanting to change the world, seeking challenges to solve, and a dislike of poor work ethic in others. Baby Boomers often have strong feelings that work should happen in the workplace, not at cafés or at home (“remote work”).
- 3) “Gen X” workers grew up under a time when the divorce rate tripled from the prior generation, the Challenger and Chernobyl incidents, the AIDS epidemic, and the arrival of regular use of PCs, video games, the internet and cell phones. These experiences forged their view on the workplace and often expresses itself in independent thinking, using fewer “strict” rules, regular use of technology, a belief that it doesn’t matter when or where they work as long as they get the job done, a desire for a better work and life balance, wanting the latest technology, a desire to have fun in the workplace, and liking bonuses.
- 4) “Gen Y” workers grew up under Columbine, Oklahoma City, 9/11, and other terrorists' threats, HD-TV, I-Pods, texting, and social media. These experiences helped to forge their view on the workplace, which often expresses itself in wanting to work in teams, wanting more information and data before deciding, comfort with multi-tasking, a feeling that work isn’t everything, wanting mentors to help them, wanting respect immediately, wanting the newest technology, and wanting interesting and challenging work.
- 5) “Gen Z” workers grew up with cell phone apps, social media, the “War on Terror,” globalization, online shopping, and an expansion in start-ups and freelance work. Because of these experiences, Gen Z workers are often motivated by social rewards, mentorship and constant feedback. They also want to be doing meaningful tasks and given responsibilities they can achieve. Like the “Gen Y” and “X” workers, they prefer flexible schedules. They prefer face to face communications and work environments but are plenty comfortable interacting over email, texting or social media.

With these subtle differences in mind, realize that if you work for someone from another generation, they might not agree with your workplace expectations or values. That doesn't mean conflict is likely. If you know that different generations are likely to (but not always) have different workplace expectations, be sure to discuss these subjects with your boss or co-workers. By being clear about what they expect, you'll avoid misunderstandings which may impact your job performance.

For example, if you're a Gen Y person working for a Baby Boomer, know that the Baby Boomer feels more secure when they see you at your desk when work is scheduled to start. If they don't see you at your work-station at that time, they are likely to assume you're late, missing and not working as you should be. So, if you have a flexible attitude about working (using flex-time and flex-place), request permission from your boss before you decide to work from home or another remote location.

What will bridge the natural generational divide about workplace values is your appreciation for the other generation's perspective, along with your direct communication about any adjustments that you can do to bridge the divide – or what your colleague can do in return. In many cases, you may want to get an agreement or permission to take actions first (especially if they are different than “normal protocol”). This way, you're more likely to bridge the natural generational divide successfully.

So, be alert for generational differences and careful to navigate them in a professional manner

## Diversity patterns

We live in a world economy.

The whole world is becoming more and more interconnected both in our commerce (business) as well as our communication (especially electronically through the internet).

The days have long since passed when we used to work in cultural isolation, far away from our world neighbors. As a result, you should expect that your current or future workplace will have regular interactions with a very diverse range of racial, ethnic and cultural co-workers and customers from all around the world. As countries and economies become more global, cultural diversity will be greater. Plus, even in your locality, more cultural and racial diversity may be the rule rather than the exception. As a result, wherever you go to work, your company or organization will need its employees to know how to get the most out of this diversity.

If you're a person with a disability, you may have an advantage of understanding differences in people and are used to looking for their humanity rather than seeing their different dress, language, customs and appearance. People with disabilities certainly know the experience of being made to feel unwelcomed; having this experience may help you to have a mindset and sensibility to learn how to best welcome, understand and respond to the full range of diversity in the workplace.

To get you further along in this process and, in turn, become more professional, here are some general tips about working with different ethnicities and cultures. Again, these are just tips. The key is to see the person beyond the label and to find a way to communicate effectively with them so that positive outcomes or results can happen for all involved.

1. **Learn about your culture** – This may seem odd at first. But before you are truly able to open your mind and heart to other cultures, you need to first take stock of your own. By doing so, you'll begin to understand differences in a new light. Let's start by remembering that your culture is just that. It's yours. It's not other people's. And yours is not the best one which everyone in the world should want to copy or join. Your culture is on an equal footing with all other cultures and ethnicities. After all, a culture is just the sum of different experiences, beliefs and practices that are particular to your location, history and opportunities. Change any of these factors and you would probably have a different culture – and life experience along with it. From this perspective, you're in a better position to see and accept cultural differences. And remember: unless you are a Native American (and in many cases, even if you are), your ancestors were from a different culture not that long ago. It was the diversity of all these immigrant groups which came together and fueled the culture that you call yours.
2. **Examine your biases** – The truth is that, based on our limited knowledge and exposure, we have certain preconceived notions about other ethnicities or cultures. Often, these notions are both wrong in a way that makes us think our own experience is better (even when we try to think otherwise). It's an interesting human trait that we lean toward feeling that our identity makes us just a little bit better than everyone else. Of course, it's also a dangerous tendency. Be honest with yourself and think about your biases, then challenge yourself by taking the next steps (starting with step 3 below).
3. **Meet people from other cultures** – Take every opportunity to meet people from cultures you may not know much about or feel uncomfortable with. One easy way to get started is to visit restaurants, fairs, or events associated with these cultures. In addition to getting a great meal or having some fun, you'll be exposing yourself to a new experience which will likely give you the chance to meet people from that culture. Meeting these people will help you to learn more about their customs and traditions. You will get to see them as people, just like you – only different from others in the world, just like you.
4. **Notice the differences** – As you begin to meet people from other groups, notice their communication styles, values and customs. As you learn more about how they greet people (for example, some bow or nod instead of shake hands) and how they communicate (out of respect, some may not look you in the eye, while others make an extra effort to hold eye-contact), your comfort level will grow and your ability to interact effectively will increase. Both feeling comfortable around others and interacting smoothly are great professional skills to have.
5. **Effectively manage diversity** – The final step in developing your diversity-related professional skill is to understand how to utilize your new knowledge in getting better results for yourself and your company. There are gains to be made. Internally, you will be more skillful working with your fellow workers from different ethnicities and cultures. It's always better to have allies and comrades at work than to have strangers or enemies. And you can use your new skills to help the company be more successful by effectively working with diverse groups. Learning how other groups go through life and business will help you

make better decisions by having a broader perspective on how to solve problems and improve performance. The more diversity you seek to embrace (individual styles, genders cultures and ethnicities), the more perspectives and experiences will be available to you. So in the end, your openness may help you more than it helps the others, because you will become a more powerful working professional.

## Gender perspectives

Often – though not always – men and women have different communication and problem-solving styles. These are related to the “gender norms” that have developed and transformed over thousands of years, but which are also being challenged in many areas. Still, it is important to understand some of these widespread communication styles and how they relate to the workplace.

When these differences are better understood, we can better communicate with each other as well as learn the advantages of combining styles on a gender-diverse team. Remember, using one or the other style doesn’t make someone better or worse, it just gives us another way to evaluate a situation. When these slight differences in gender perspectives combine themselves, both genders can perform more effectively.

One of the possible gender differences between women from men can be a heightened sense about what a person really means beyond the actual spoken words. Women often seem to observe “non-verbal cues” – such as tone-of-voice, facial expressions, posture and gestures – as part of the communication. In this way, they might sense a deeper or unspoken message behind just the content of a comment: not just what was said, but also what was unsaid. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to be literal and take words spoken as the full meaning of the communication – then leave it at that.

For example, a man may hear someone tell him, “I’m going to have to cancel our appointment, something has come up, I’m so sorry.” Well, those words seem clear enough. However, the woman hearing the comment may observe, “Did you hear how he said that?” or “Did you notice his body language when he told you that?” Well, the man did see those things but the man may have been singularly focused on the words. Who’s right? The answer is both. What we know is, in this example, both gender perspectives can result in more effective communications.

Another example of conventional differences between genders, which, when combined will make everyone better performers, is around solving problems. Men tend to define problems more quickly by isolating the issues, then dive into fixing the problems. Women, on the other hand, will often define the problem in broader terms and want to discuss or talk about a wider range of possible solutions before taking action. (Again, this is not always the case – but the differences appear more often than not). Together, these slightly different approaches seem to make for a more complementary and complete effort.

Equity between genders in the workplace is important for many reasons, especially for moral and ethical reasons. The value of diverse perspectives and communication styles is yet another example of why we need genders working together.

“Stronger together” might be the shortest way to summarize the value of gender equity and inclusion in the workplace.

## Boss, coworker, and customer relationships

In the work place, there are three key groups of people which must work well together. They are your boss (and their bosses), your coworkers and the outside people your office serves – such as customers, clients, or the general public.

Here are some basic tips on how you can develop a positive working relationship with your boss.

- ✓ Demonstrate loyalty and integrity. Through your actions and deeds, always show your boss that they can count on you to tell them the truth and that they can trust you to support them.
- ✓ Show respect. Even when your boss makes a mistake, be gentle and understanding and never undermine or speak badly about the boss with others.
- ✓ Learn what your boss wants and needs. Your boss might be as many things on their plate and will hand you tasks that need to get done. Communicate with your boss, fully understand what they need you to do, and strive to give it to them on-time.
- ✓ Ask for advice. Your boss’s job is to help you do your job, so help them help you by asking questions, then seeking advice or feedback on how to get your job done right.
- ✓ Don’t waste their time. Respect your boss’s time and be sure to research and properly prepare for your discussions with them.
- ✓ Make your boss look good. Give your boss due credit for what you’ve accomplished (especially when talking with their boss and other management). After all, they hired you and provided guidance through your work, so that’s a good reason to give them credit and a great way to thank them.

If it helps, think about the relationship between you and your boss as one in which the boss is giving you money to perform your job every day. You’re also getting paid to nurture this relationship in a positive way – and if you do that successfully, you can get paid even more in the future.

Relationships with coworkers also demand positive working relationships. Your coworkers are the people you must depend on to get your work done right and on-time. They also want to be successful and get ahead in your organization. As a result, you’ll want to be both admired and careful about how you relate to them.

Certainly, when it comes to the work at-hand, you will be admired when you practice the values of teamwork and mutual support. Some valuable strategies are:

- ✓ Show an interest in them by asking them regularly how they’re doing. If they have a problem, listen to them and ask them how you might be able to help. Then, if you can, help them – even if it’s just to check back with them to see if they’ve made any progress. Of course, you might finish your own work first and check in with your boss before giving a coworker help with theirs.
- ✓ Whenever you can, compliment coworkers about something good that they may have done. Giving compliments encourages people to like you and want to return the favor.

- ✓ Whenever you talk about your coworkers to others, be very careful not to say negative or critical things about them. This shows your professionalism and often sets the stage for others to do likewise about you.
- ✓ Share credit with your co-workers when getting credit. For example, in response to a compliment, you might say, “I could not have done it without the support of our human resource team members.”

However, as we discussed in the Lesson about “office politics,” be careful with your casual or personal communications and relationships with coworkers.

Since your coworkers are, in certain situations, also your competitors, it’s never a good idea to let your guard down and develop a personal relationship with your coworkers because it may expose your non-professional self to office politics or gossip.

Keep your co-worker relationship professional even though you would appear to be equals. Such a strategy can help to prevent negative criticisms which could put a stain on your reputation and block your advancement.

The third key group or workplace public that you must develop some ground rules around is with your company or organization’s customers, clients or the general public.

Most, if not all, organizations have customers. These are the people who benefit from your organization’s products or services. In short, they pay your company for what it does, which your company uses to pay you.

So, in that way, your customers are the ultimate boss. Keeping your customers happy keeps your company or organization afloat, which helps you keep your job.

Here, too, you’ll want to pursue a professional approach or strategy to serving your company’s customers in a proper manner.

Here are some basic tips for interacting with customers.

- ✓ Identify who your customers are, both in a general sense and individually whenever possible. By understanding their background, you can better understand what they want and the best way to “pitch” a sale. If you can connect on an individual level, they may feel more comfortable with you and thus paying for your company’s product or service.
- ✓ Talk with customers and listen to what they are saying about both your work and your company’s work. Analyze these comments as clues for improvements in your own work and as recommendations to your boss for improving the company.
- ✓ Make your customers feel important. Respect them and say “you’re right” and “thank you” whenever you can. Make them feel important to you – because they are.
- ✓ When you can, try to give your customers extra attention, and treat every customer as if they are special. Great service is the secret to better customer relations.

Some organizations teach the motto, “The customer is always right.” Well, while they might not always be right, at least try to make them feel that way.

## Employment opportunities

The last part of this Lesson on “Workplace Patterns” or complexities is about the variations in the job market around opportunities and careers.

Job or career opportunities vary dramatically depending on time and place (current regional economic trends and realities). Not all localities have the same level of employment potential or variety of job opportunities, so where (in a specific location or larger geographic area) you choose to look for work matters.

Job opportunities show themselves in patterns, variations or differences as well.

As you plan your career and seek your first job, you’ll need to understand what’s realistic and possible where you live. Sometimes, the job or career you want for yourself may not be possible in your town or location. In such cases, you may need to identify other localities to move to in order to find the right kind of job opportunities. Of course, you may choose to stay where you are and that’s okay. You may be able to find a job that is “close enough” to your desired career, or which can serve as a “stepping stone” for future career growth. It just may be necessary for you think outside the “box” (or your current living location) to truly expand your employment options and opportunities.

In general, the wider you cast your net for the job or career you want, the greater your potential to find and land that “dream job.”

If you want to be an accountant in a specialty field (such as sports management), your geographic area may have few jobs like that in your community. In that case, be ready to explore other regions or areas where the job and career you want are more generally available. Also, regional economic conditions may dramatically affect your ability to find employment. If you are looking for a high-tech job and you live in an area with a limited number of these types of jobs, it makes your job search that much harder. For example, at the time of this book, there are thousands of high-tech job vacancies open right now in places like Silicon Valley (San Francisco/San Jose area) as well as other tech centers like Boston and Washington, DC, areas, to name a few. So, in this occupational example, you may want to search for job postings in Silicon Valley, Boston and DC, then apply to the ones that fit your skills and goals – and prepare for the possibility that you may move if you land one of those great jobs. The area or part of the country you choose to focus your job search on is a very important factor for you consider.

The wider you cast your net, the more fish you might catch.

In addition, after a few years in your first or entry level job, you’ll probably want a promotion. You’ll want to move up on the career ladder. It’s a natural and important part of your career development. However, be alert. There are ever-changing patterns when considering how to best navigate the promotion and career-ladder landscapes.

Often, it can be harder to get the promotion that you have earned and are ready for at your current job. There are many reasons why this might be the case. One is that management knows you and, in the case that they handed you more responsibility to test your abilities, they may ask to themselves: “why spend more money on you now, when you’ve done higher skilled work at the same pay level?” Or, they may be too busy with the day-to-day work to pay attention to the seemingly extra task of giving you a promotion and raise (which involves rearranging the organization’s structure, doing paperwork, negotiating a new salary, etc.). Or they may worry that giving you a promotion will start others wanting one also, which will cost money and complicate workplace politics. In short, they may just avoid going down this complicated path when it seems like everything is fine (at least, for them).

What should you do?

One way to break the log-jam might be to look for that promotion elsewhere. Yes, apply for other jobs. The fact is that there may not be an actual position for you to be promoted to at your current job – but when you find a job vacancy announcement somewhere else at a higher level, the process is already in motion to find a new worker at that level of responsibility (and pay). So, some of the inertia problems that exist in your current place of employment aren’t present in these other places.

If you are selected for this new job at the higher level you feel you deserve, think about telling your current employer about this possible move away from them to the new position. The fact that you’re looking elsewhere, or that you have a new job offer, is likely to break that “log-jam” and push them to action to try and keep you. If they value your work and skills, they may take steps to keep you on-board – meaning they’ll give you a better offer than the other job will provide.

Of course, you should be careful about this strategy. You should be prepared to move on if your current employer doesn’t give you either a similar or better offer to stay. If that doesn’t happen, at least you’ll know that a promotion where you currently are is not likely and you probably should move on if you want to keep moving up.



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